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# **THE IDOL OF THE BLIND**

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# THE IDOL OF THE BLIND

*A NOVEL*

BY  
TOM GALLON  
AUTHOR OF  
TATTERLY, A PRINCE OF MISCHANCE,  
DICKY MONTEITH, ETC.

"When pious frauds and holy shifts  
Are dispensations and gifts."

HUDIBRAS

NEW YORK  
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY  
1899

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## CHAPTER I.

### COMETHUP ENTERS LIFE DISASTROUSLY.

"My dear" had looked her last upon a troublesome world. She had taken life sighingly, in little frightened gasps, as it were, with the fear upon her, even from childhood, that unknown horrors lurked for her in each day to which she was awakened. It can scarcely be said that she had clung to life with any tenacity—rather with the instinct of living; and she had fluttered out of it resignedly enough, a little sorry, perhaps, that she had left any one behind to grieve for her. And yet, with the inconsistency which had marked her life, she had died at the very moment when life had actually begun to be worth living for her.

"My dear" was one of those who wait long for the happiness, if any, that is to come to them, and find it a little tasteless when it is at last given to them. She had been the younger child of a stern and unbending man, who bent or broke to his code of rules those who were weak enough to be bent or broken, and thrust sternly aside those whose strength opposed itself to his. He had found in his little daughter one who smilingly and timidly obeyed in everything, and worshipped him without question—up to a certain point. That point was determined by the arrival of David Willis.

It was an old and a very ordinary story; such stories are played out to their bitter end day after day around us. David Willis was poor, and had absolutely no expectations; so far as old Robert Carlaw was concerned he simply did not exist—except as many other people existed, as a part of the world with which he had nothing to do. David, for his part, was as patient and long-suffering as the girl who loved him; and so they solemnly and pitifully plighted their troth, and agreed to wait. Boldness or resource of action was not in either of them; the girl, despite her love for the man, and the sort of humble, patient faithfulness with which she was endowed, would not have risked her father's anger on any account. So, in a poor, half-ridiculous, half-heroic fashion, they parted and waited.

They waited, strange as it may seem, for nearly twenty years; until the man had entered the forties and the woman was nearing them. She was still a pretty woman, soft-eyed and gentle of voice, with a great mine of tenderness hidden away in her which no one had been able to discover. When, on her father's death, she married David Willis, there seemed a prospect that the mine would be discovered, but the time had gone past; life had been so long a flat and stale and unprofitable thing that the old fierce heart-beats at the thought of her lover, the old hunger of love for him, had died away into a mere tremulous wonder as to whether he would be good to her, or whether he might have moments of harshness and sternness, like her father. She had hung too long expectant on hope to believe that the world was going to be very good to her now; she was only a little glad, for her lover's sake, that his time of waiting was ended.

David Willis was a musician and a dreamer; not a very great musician, and certainly a dreamer whose dreams brought him no profit. He had filled the place of organist in one or two minor churches, living simply and contentedly. By the very irony of things, when the woman he loved was able to come to him and put her hands in his, and tell him that there was no further bar to their happiness, he was out of an engagement, and had scarcely a penny in the world. But, with a childlike faith which, even at their years, came near to the sublime, they married first and tried to be worldly afterward. Fortunately for them, her brother was a man of property in a small, old-fashioned town near the coast of Kent; and, having considerable influence in the place, he offered, through the clergyman of the parish, the vacant post of organist in the parish church to David Willis, after first roundly abusing his sister for having married a pauper.

It was a quaint old town, a place of red roofs and winding streets and strange old buildings; a very paradise to the dreamer and the woman who had waited so long for him. Her brother's house stood at the far end of the town, in the newer part of it; but they saw little of him, and had, indeed, no particular desire to do so. They had their own quiet dwelling-place, a little house nestling under the frowning shadows of the church wherein he worked; a strange old place, with low ceilings and black beams, with a garden of roses stretching right along under the gray old church wall. Her life, for a few months at least, was a sweet and shadowed thing; people said afterward—people who had never known her—that they had seen her sitting often in the old church, with her mild eyes looking upward at a great rose window over the porch, while her husband practised for the services on the wheezy old organ; had seen her wandering in her garden among the roses, singing to herself in a subdued voice—the voice of one who has long been forced to be silent, or to subdue any natural mirth that might be in her.

The summer went by, while David Willis played on his organ, and his wife sang among her roses; and with the autumn came a new light in the eyes of the woman—a light as of one who waits and hopes for something. Poor, trembling, wistful creature, what dreams were hers then! What dreams when she sat by her husband's side in the twilight, looking out over the town where the lights were beginning to twinkle one by one like sleepy eyes! What dreams of a little life that was to recompense her for all she had missed, and all she never could find in any other way! Childish hands were to draw all that mine of tenderness out of her, as no other hands could have done; childish words were to wake echoing words in her dull heart, and stir it to life again. She dreamed tremblingly of all she would do; of all she would teach the child; saw it walking by her side among the roses; fluttered into church proudly, braving the eyes of younger women with the mite beside her.

Those were dreams which never came true. She had waited, through dull and spiritless years, for her chance of life; it was written, in that book which no man shall read, that her life in that fuller

sense was to be but a short one. She gave birth to her child—a boy—and knew her fate even before they told her. She sank slowly, drifting out of life with as little effort to retain it as she had shown throughout her days. Almost the last thing she did was to take her husband's hand, as he sat speechless with grief beside her, and put it to her lips, and draw it up against her cheek.

"We waited—a long time—Davie," she whispered. "I wish—I might—have—stayed." She did not speak again; she held his hand in that position until the last breath fluttered out of her lips.

David Willis was utterly incapable of appreciating anything except the magnitude of his loss. He wandered desolately from room to room, picking up things that had belonged to her and putting his lips to them, and weeping, in a hopeless, despairing fashion, like a child. Fortunately for that other child who had been the direct cause of the disaster, there were kindly people about the place who cared for it, and found a nurse for it—a young and healthy woman who had but just lost a child of her own, and who was installed in the house of David Willis at once. From that big house in the newer part of the town came Mr. Robert Carlaw, the brother of the dead woman, hushing his loud and blustering voice a little as he crossed the threshold of the place of mourning.

He had an air with him, this Robert Carlaw; a sense of saying, when he entered a room, that it was something poorer and meaner than before he came; a magnificent air of proprietorship in every one he honoured by a nod or a handshake; the very town through which he walked became, not a sweet and beautiful old place which seemed to have been dropped clean out of the middle ages, but an awkward, badly built little place in which Robert Carlaw was good enough to live. The swing of him was so fine that the skirts of his coat brushed the houses as he went down the street; other passengers humbly took the roadway.

He was very kind and sympathetic with David Willis, with the kindness and sympathy of a patron to a dependent who has suffered a loss; he had scarcely seen his sister since she was a child, and knew absolutely nothing of her. He seated himself in an armchair—the chair which had been hers—opposite to where David Willis sat with his head bowed in his hands; he coughed, with a little shade of annoyance in the cough, as of one who is not receiving proper attention. David Willis looked up without speaking.

"Bad business, this," said Mr. Carlaw, with a jerk of the head which was meant to convey that he referred to what was lying upstairs. "A man feels these things; I know *I* did. Cut me up dreadfully."

"Yes," said David, in a low voice.

"She was never strong, you know," went on the brother; "not like the others, I mean. And then she married late, which tries a woman, I'm told."

"Yes," replied the other again in the same tone.

"She was just the sort that would give in without making what I call a kick for it. Hadn't half enough of the devil in her. Not a bit like her brother in that respect. Why, I assure you, they've positively *tried* to kill me, half a dozen times; given me over for dead. But they didn't know Bob Carlaw; he's always proved one too many for 'em. There's a lot of life in Bob."

David Willis got up slowly. "Would you like to see her?" he asked.

"No, no; I don't think so. It wouldn't—wouldn't do any good, and the sight of any one dead always upsets me. No, I don't think I'll see her; I only—only called in case I could do anything. A man needs sympathy at such a time." He got up and took his hat, and swung toward the door. Turning there, he said abruptly, "What about the kid?"

"The——" said David, looking at him blankly.

"The child; is it alive?"

"Yes," replied David; "doing well, they tell me."

"Ah—that's bad—for you, I mean." He paused a moment, coughed uncomfortably, and stuck his hat sideways on his head; then remembered himself, and took it off and frowned at it. Finally he got out of the door awkwardly, and swung himself out through the garden of the roses and went up the street, trying hard not to whistle.

It was on the day of the funeral that David Willis first seemed to grasp the idea of his responsibility in regard to his infant son. He had had no thought of that before; had listened to the sympathizing remarks of the few friends he had with indifference, and had scarcely appeared to realize that there was a new element in his life at all. He grasped things slowly at all times, and required time to digest them; he had room for nothing else in his mind then but the thought of his loss. The day that saw her committed to the earth in the old churchyard within sight of the garden where she had walked was a day which passed for him like a troubled dream; he had a vague remembrance that people were very kind to him, and helped him, and told him what to do and where to stand. It was while he stood beside the grave that some words from the burial service broke upon his ears as though nothing had been said before; he saw in them something new and fresh and hopeful.

"Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up and——"

He lost all that followed; with those final words came a new thought into his mind. The woman he had loved, for whom he had waited and hungered so patiently, was to sleep her last sleep in that quiet place, to sleep as calmly and as gently as she had lived. But there was something more than

this, something to comfort him. God had, after all, been very merciful; so, in his simple mind, he told himself. The poor, frail woman was gone; in her place had come a little child. The words were true; he applied them at once to the baby. "He cometh up—like a flower." Surely that was true; his eyes brightened as he thought of it; the bitterness fell away from his heart; he almost longed to leave her sleeping there and to get back to the child. He scarcely seemed to have seen the child yet—to know what it was like.

As he crossed the churchyard to his house the thing was forced more clearly and strongly upon him; he saw, with the fine instinct of love, that this was what she would have wished, that the child must grow up to think well of her, and to take her place. A man of rare singleness of life and purpose, he had been capable only of single emotions; and those emotions must, of necessity, be great. His dogged patience in waiting for one woman through all the best years of his life had had in it much of heroism; that was ended, and he turned now to something else to fill his days. The child should do it; the child had been sent for that very purpose. Over and over again the words came back to him, "He cometh up—like a flower." That was very beautiful; it seemed strange that he had not thought of that before. He dreamed a dream, even as the woman had done, of all that the child was to be to him.

He went into the room where the scrap of humanity lay sleeping against the strange woman's breast; the woman glanced up at him almost resentfully as he bent over the child; just such another child had lain warm against her, and this one filled the void in her heart a little. She was a humble creature, of no subtle emotions whatever; her sense of motherhood, so recently awakened, was the strongest feeling in her.

The man touched the baby's cheek with a hesitating forefinger, and then turned away and walked out of the room. He saw quite clearly how the child would grow up, knowing only him, desiring no one else to fill its world. Before another hour had passed, the solitary man had mapped out the seat the child should take in the house and in church; had wandered in fancy over the fields through which the child should accompany him. There was no disloyalty to the dead woman in all this; the child had sprung out of the woman, in every sense, and took her place quite naturally in the deep heart of the man.

That evening David Willis received an unexpected visitor. The visitor came slowly and timidly, and yet with a certain forced air of defiance upon him, up the garden path, and knocked at the door of the little house. The one servant the house boasted, and who did not sleep there, had gone to her own home at the other end of the town; David Willis opened the door, and stared out into the twilight at the visitor.

The caller was a little man—very alert and very upright, with a tightly buttoned frock coat, and an old-fashioned silk hat with a curly brim. He carried something in one hand behind him. David Willis remembered to have seen him once or twice in the streets, walking very erect, and swinging a cane with a tassel attached to it; and always in church on Sundays, where he occupied a little odd pew in one corner, and gave the responses in a very loud and sonorous voice not at all fitting to his stature. David held the door in one hand, and looked out wonderingly at the little man.

"My name is Garraway-Kyle—Captain Garraway-Kyle—late of her Majesty's service. You are in trouble, sir, your wife"—he stopped abruptly and coughed and frowned, and tugged at one end of his white mustache with his disengaged hand—"your wife, sir, was good enough to admire my flowers; used to stop sometimes to look at them. I thought perhaps—" His sunburned face took on a deeper tinge, and he brought his hand from behind him and showed a carefully arranged bunch of flowers.

David Willis came out into the little path, and closed the door behind him; his voice was rather unsteady when he spoke. "Thank you, sir," he said. "Would you like me to go with you and point out the—the grave?"

"I know it. I was there this afternoon," replied the captain, shortly. "But I should like you to come with me." So the two men went in silence out of the garden, and by the little gate into the churchyard, David Willis having no hat, and the captain carrying his in his hand.

At the grave the captain knelt stiffly, as though it were an effort for him to do so, and put the flowers at the head of the new mound. He remained for nearly half a minute kneeling, and then drew himself up and faced the other. "She was a sweet and gentle woman, sir; I have seen her often; I have ventured to peep over the wall when she was in her own garden. She was very fond of flowers."

"Yes," replied David, "very."

"I wished sometimes that I might have offered her some of mine, the finest garden in the town, sir. But, of course, I did not know her. I am sorry to have had to give them to her like this."

"You are very good," said David, softly.

Captain Garraway-Kyle turned away and looked up for a moment at the sombre church which rose above them. "You had not been married long, I think, Mr. Willis?"

"Not quite a year," replied David.

"Ah! The child lives, I think?"

"Yes."

They walked back together to the gate which led to the cottage; and there the captain held out

his hand. "Thank you," he said, stiffly; and then, "I am very sorry. By the way—boy or girl?"

"Oh, it's a boy," replied David.

The captain had gone a few paces down the street when he turned on his heel and came back again. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Willis, but what will you call him?"

It was almost an idle question, prompted in the captain's mind for want of something better to say; but it set the old train of thought running in David Willis's mind as it had run all that afternoon. The words he had heard at the grave-side seemed to sound in his ears again; the sudden thought struck him to give the boy some name that should keep in memory his mother, and the purpose for which he came into the world, and all that he meant to his father. He faced about, and looked at his visitor with a new light in his eyes. "I shall call him 'Comethup,'" he said, slowly.

"I beg your pardon——" The captain looked a little startled.

"'Comethup,'" said David again, half to himself. "Yes, that's the name."

"Oh, I see; family name, I presume?" said the other.

"Yes," replied David Willis, "a family name. Good-night." And he went inside, and sat down in the darkness to think about it.

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## CHAPTER II.

### AND MAKES DISCOVERIES.

David Willis stuck to his determination, so suddenly made on that night of the captain's visit, and the child was duly baptized under the name of Comethup Willis. Simple David Willis chuckled to himself a little over his ingenuity; he grew to like the quaintness of the name, and it was a constant reminder—if such were necessary—of the tragedy which belonged to the boy's birth. He always spoke the name rapidly when addressing the child or when referring to it to any one else, slurring the cumbrous name that he might hide the secret of it; only to himself did he ever speak it slowly with the added words, "as a flower." It was a never-ceasing source of joy to him to think how cleverly the name had been conceived; he dwelt upon it lovingly, with the pride of the inventor; and it became on his tongue a caress whenever it was uttered.

Apart from the mere name, the child filled his life and his thoughts to a greater extent than he had ever even dared to hope. He grew rapidly, and shook off the childish ailments which came with his years with greater ease than most children; he had about him, even as a little fellow, the grave, shy tenderness of his mother. Captain Garraway-Kyle murmured once, as he held him at arms'-length and looked critically at him, that he had his mother's eyes.

It was a strange life for the child, alone with a dreamy man in that old house under the shadow of the church; if he could have written down his impressions of life and those about him at that time, they would have made curious reading. He remembered when it was possible for him, by a great effort, to get both hands up to the door knob, and to twist it round and stagger backward, pulling the door with him; understood fully what a steep and treacherous affair the stone step was which led down to the garden; and what a proud and wonderful day it was when he summoned courage to step straight down upon it, instead of manipulating the descent with one small bare knee on the stone and the foot of the other leg feeling for the earth below. He knew his mother's garden by heart, and all the wondrous corners of it, where strange things hid which no one saw but himself. He learned early that the roses which grew there, and nodded in a friendly fashion to him as he passed, only grew there for a small boyish nose to be poked up at them to get their scent, and were not to be pulled except on rare occasions, when his father went round the garden with a basket, and gathered the choicest, and tied them into a rude kind of wreath. Comethup knew then that a great expedition was on foot; that they would go out of the gate at the farthest end of the garden, and that he would stumble—holding fast by his father's hand—through a place where the grass was very soft and very green, and where some of it was raised in long hillocks higher than the rest; a place where large flat stones with curious marks upon them, and little babies' heads with wings cut on some, cropped up out of the earth. On one of these hillocks the little homely wreath would be laid, and his father would kneel and seem to whisper something behind his hand. He knew that his mother slept there, and that she would never wake up again, and never walk with him, as his father walked, in the garden of the roses. Child though he was, he always felt a little sadness as he stumbled back over the hillocks to the garden gate, because the mother he had never seen lay, an inscrutable mystery, out of his sight under the grass.

There was one never-to-be-forgotten day when he first learned of something outside his own small world. It was Sunday, and the heavy old bells were swinging, and his father had gone out through the sunlight with books under his arm to the church. It struck suddenly upon the child that this day was different from all the rest; that the little maid-servant had a cleaner face and a whiter apron, and that his own tiny suit was one which was laid by in a tall old press all the rest of the week. Most of our impressions, whatever age we may be, come to us through the sense of smell, and Comethup's impression of the day came to him through the scent of the clothes. They bore the same scent as the big best bedroom upstairs—a room in which no one ever slept and



into which he had peeped one day when the door was open; just such a scent as that which hung about it had been wafted out to his nostrils then. He began to see that there must be something "best" about this day also, as there was about everything connected with it.

When David Willis came back from church, the child had got his questions ready, and knew exactly what answers he required, as a child always unerringly does. He asked why all the shops along the other side of the street were closed, and why the bells rang on that day, and why the people sang in the big church which loomed above them. And then he heard for the first time of that other world into which we try so hard to peer; of that dread Presence—dread to a child—beyond the skies that shuts in our vision. He was puzzled to understand how his mother could be right above him, watching to see if he were a good boy or a bad; and why, in that case, those flowers were put upon that grass-covered bed of hers out in the churchyard. He pondered the matter deeply, and was much disconcerted to think that the God of whom every one seemed so much afraid was all round him and could see everything he did.

He went one day into the church with his father—an experience indeed! It was quite empty, save for themselves, and the first thought that occurred to him was to wonder where the roof was; and why his voice rumbled and rattled and sprang at him from far above when he incautiously spoke in his usual shrill treble. The phrase which his father used—"the house of God"—awed him; he understood why the roof was so much higher than that of their own house. A lovely pattern of many colours on the stone pavement at his feet arrested his attention. He followed the shafts of light upward to the great rose window high up in the wall over the porch. His heart went a little quicker, and he gripped his father's hand with his baby fingers. That surely must be the eye of God looking down at him.

He went home tremblingly to think the matter over; saw in the childish wonder of discovery something that no one had found before; screwed his courage to make further inquiries of his father concerning this dread Being. It was a terror to him to learn that the Being was everywhere, not alone in the great place where people went in their best clothes to worship him. He crept up to his tiny bedroom under the roof that night, and hurriedly closed the door and drew the curtains, and lay in bed quakingly triumphant at the thought that he had shut It out, only to wake up with a start in a little while at the remembrance that It must have been in the room before his precautions were taken. He climbed out of bed, and pattered across to the window; pulled back the curtains, and pushed open the casement. All the benign influence of a summer starlight night was about him; the lights were twinkling sleepily and safely down in the town; and he could hear calm, slow country voices in the street beyond the garden. Life—great and wonderful to his childish mind, although bounded by so narrow a horizon—seemed beautiful and good and secure; he smiled, and dropped his sleepy head on his arms on the window ledge, and slept there calmly till the morning came.

The world is always a place of giants to us when we are very little; therein lies the tragedy and the terror of it. We are always told that childhood is such a happy time; we cry always how gladly we would return to it. But we know well that we would not return to it with the ignorance with which we left it; that we should go back to its delights and its irresponsibilities with the magician's wand of Experience in our hands to make it a fairyland. To a lonely child the world in which he lives is a place of terrors, with no one who understands his needs to explain to him all he craves so desperately to know.

Comethup was left pretty much to his own devices in those early days. David Willis liked to have the boy near him, liked to see him moving about the house. But, in his dreamy fashion, he took but scant notice of the child as a child; he painted to himself glowing pictures of what the boy would be when he had grown older and was ripe for companionship; for the present, he waited a little impatiently for that time to come. So it happened that Comethup explored his world alone.

The seasons seemed always to come suddenly. He would wake up, bright and alert, on a glorious morning of sunshine, with an endless prospect of sunny days before him; fires were things of the past, and the garden was no more a sealed place, wherein he must not run for fear of splashing his little white legs with mud. In just the same way there seemed no intermediate time between the summer, with its glorious abundance of roses and its long, hot afternoons, and the time when the roses were gone, and he was curled up like a little comfortable animal on the hearthrug before the parlour fire. That was the time, too, for going to bed in the dark, when the dreadful hour crept inexorably on; when he must leave the warmth and brightness of the lower room and climb with reluctant feet into a colder atmosphere, where grim shadows lurked on the landing, and the pale moon grinned in at him through an uncurtained window, like a queer face all on one side.

The church grew, quite naturally, from its mystic qualities, to be his chief delight. Everything about it was wonderful, from the long flight of stone steps which led up to the organ-loft where his father played, to the great brown wooden bird, with its beak open, and with outstretched wings, which stood on a carved pillar before the altar. Its seats were a never-failing source of delight to the shy child—places in which one could hide, secure from every one, and look up at the great roof, and at the sunlight slanting in through the windows. But perhaps it was best of all to sit up in the organ-loft, as he sometimes did with his father; to draw a huge hassock close up against the old-fashioned wooden partition, and sit there and look down, unseen and unsuspected, at the people below. Comethup always stood up at the proper places on those occasions, and sat down when the people rustled into their seats; he tried, too, to murmur something which sounded a little like the responses which rumbled up from below.

His world widened out a little as the placid years flowed on. The garden of the roses no longer

bounded his horizon; the gate ceased to be a barrier which must not be passed. The spirit of adventure was strong in Comethup one summer afternoon, when his father was sleeping peacefully on the hard horsehair sofa in the parlour, and the little maid who waited upon them was busied in the kitchen. The garden had been all explored; on such a day as this, when the air was heavy and still, the very scent of the roses hung heavily. Poor Comethup was a little tired of roses—a little tired even of that wonderful garden, every corner of which, every stick and stone, he knew by heart. And then, just as he clung to the iron railings of the gate, and looked out disconsolately into the quiet street, there came a playmate.

It was a dog; a mere boisterous, happy-go-lucky, tumbling, joyous puppy of a few months; a thing of comical crinkled mouth and serious eyes, a delightful romping rascal that loved the world and hailed every creature friend. It stopped opposite the gate where Comethup stood, and backed itself upon its ridiculous little haunches and inch of tail, and barked deliriously; then dashed off a foot or two in excited chase of something which didn't exist; and then, suddenly remembering Comethup, returned madly to the assault, thrusting its little black nose under the gate in a frantic endeavour to bite Comethup's little white socks.

It was irresistible. Comethup cautiously pulled open the gate, trembling at his daring as he did so, and went down on the gravel on his knees, clapping his hands, and doing all in his power to induce the puppy to come to him.

But that wary animal knew better than that. He backed away, moving his stump of tail convulsively, and, as Comethup followed on hands and knees, backed away farther still out of reach. Finally the puppy scrambled off sideways, going through the most extraordinary gyrations and looking back at the child with one ear cocked up, and then dashing off again sideways, tripping himself up occasionally in his haste. Comethup got to his feet and set off down the pavement after the puppy, leaving the garden gate wide open.

The sternness of the chase awoke in Comethup's blood; he determined to have that puppy at all costs—to feel the soft, warm, live, struggling thing in his arms. Twice he was certain he had it; had dropped all over it, so to speak, in a frantic endeavour to clasp it. But the thing slid from under his arms and impudently snapped at his very nose, and was off again. At last, however, he ran it to earth in a corner, where it promptly rolled over on its back, with its four legs in the air, and surrendered.

By that time Comethup had lost his way; but that fact was of the smallest possible moment. He was in a glorious city he had not seen before; a place of curious old houses bending their upper windows toward each other as though to whisper; of long, quaint gardens thick with Old-World flowers—stocks and hollyhocks, and others beloved of our grandmothers; with another church, not so magnificent or so large as the one he knew, but older and quainter, with a great brass dial up on one wall from which a brass finger projected to show the shadow of the afternoon sun. The puppy was struggling in his arms, jerking itself frantically upward to lick his round, baby face, and to softly bite his chin. That of course was disconcerting; but Comethup managed to take in a great deal with his eyes nevertheless.

He managed, among other things, to take in the figure of an upright old gentleman with a heavy gray mustache, who was clipping and trimming with a pair of scissors in one of the gardens. Comethup had just stopped, out of the politest curiosity, to watch him, when the old gentleman swung round and marched toward the gate, and cried violently, pointing a finger at the child, "What the devil are you doing with my dog, boy?"

Poor Comethup had never been spoken to in that fashion before; he began to see in the old gentleman retributive justice sweeping down upon him for having left his father's garden—above all, for having left the gate open, an unpardonable thing. He would have liked to drop the puppy, but remembered in time that he might hurt it; so he lowered it gently to the ground, where it at once commenced tugging at his shoestrings. With as much dignity as he could command under the circumstances, Comethup tremblingly began to explain that he had found it.

Before he had finished a half-dozen words, however, the little old gentleman, with an exclamation, had pulled the gate open, and had come out upon the pavement. Comethup began to tremble very much indeed, but the old gentleman took him—not unkindly—by the chin, and turned his face up so that he might look at it. Comethup must have looked very appealing indeed, for the old gentleman suddenly smiled, and exclaimed, "Why, it's little Comethup!"

"Yes," said Comethup humbly.

The captain, without a word, picked up the puppy with one hand and offered the other to the child. They went up the garden path together, into a quaint little room, where everything was very bright and very straight and very orderly; very poor, too, if Comethup had but known. There the old gentleman lifted him into a chair, and rang the bell. Then he turned round, in his abrupt fashion, and held out the struggling puppy with one hand toward Comethup. "You like this dog?" he asked.

Comethup faintly admitted that he did.

The old gentleman thrust it into his arms. "Take it," he said. "Be good to it, and feed it well."

Comethup tried to thank him, but at that moment the puppy had taken him at a mean disadvantage, and was dancing about frantically in his arms, and dabbing a tongue much too large for it against his face, so that speech was difficult. And just then a man came in, taller than the old gentleman, and much more erect; and put the back of his hand quite suddenly up to his forehead, and held it there for a moment, and then brought the hand down smartly with a smack

against the side of his leg.

Comethup became vastly interested in a moment; he almost dropped the puppy in his excitement. He knew that only one class of people did that kind of thing; the little maid at home, whose sweetheart was a soldier from Canterbury, had told him all about it. He began to speculate on what wonderful house this could be, where this sort of thing went on quite as a matter of course, and no one seemed to think anything of it. In a vague way he wondered if he could persuade his father to let the little maid move her hand and arm like that whenever she came into the parlour at home; it would be something to look forward to—something to ring the bell for.

The old gentleman ordered tea, and the man who had stood stiffly by the doorway went through the same wonderful performance again and disappeared. Comethup's curiosity swept away every other consideration.

"Sir," he said, in an awed voice, "he's a soldier."

"He *was*," returned the old gentleman, shortly. Then stooping near to the boy, with both hands resting on the table, he asked, with a curious tenderness in his voice, "Where did you get those eyes, boy?"

Comethup did not remember the other occasion on which Captain Garraway-Kyle had said that he had the eyes of his dead mother; he did not even know that this old gentleman was Captain Garraway-Kyle. He looked up innocently, and smiled, and said he didn't know.

"You got 'em from your mother, boy," said the captain, almost in a whisper, still looking at him earnestly.

"My mother's in heaven," said Comethup.

"True, boy, true," said the old gentleman, patting him gently on the shoulder and turning away. "That's very true. Your mother was a saint."

Comethup had not the least idea what a saint was, but he knew it must be something very good, because the old gentleman looked so serious. The arrival of tea put an end to further conversation, and Comethup looked out eagerly for the man to go through his performance, which he did, to the child's great delight, as he was leaving the room.

The abrupt old captain was as gentle as a woman with the child; busied himself to mix milk and water for him, and to spread jam on bread. It was only toward the end of the meal that Comethup suddenly remembered the chief adventure of the afternoon; that he had left the safe line which bounded his daily life, and was with strangers in an altogether different world. Even the possession of the puppy could not wholly console him; his lips began to quiver, and it was with some difficulty that he made the captain understand. The captain assured him, with much earnestness, that he knew the garden where the roses were, and that he knew Comethup's father, and the little maid, and the church, and everything. Comethup was comforted, and the strange spectacle was presented to the town, about half an hour later, of Captain Garraway-Kyle, as closely buttoned as ever, and with his hat a little more fiercely tilted than usual, holding Comethup by the hand, on the way to David Willis's house; Comethup, for his part, clutching the puppy with difficulty but with determination.

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE GHOST OF A LITTLE CHILD.

That was but the first of many walks and talks with Captain Garraway-Kyle. Comethup grew to look upon him as something very fine and very splendid; learned from him, too, a very fine and very splendid morality, which his dreamy father, for all the beauty of his character, could scarcely have taught him. In those early days everything had, of necessity, to pass the strong test of the captain's frown or approving nod; each action was court-martialled, as it were, and approved or utterly rejected, as the case might be. There was no dividing line with the captain; he had lived by stern rules all his life, and a thing was either perfectly right or it was perfectly wrong. Comethup's friendship with the captain was probably the best thing that ever happened for him; he grew up, under the old man's guidance, a pure and sweet and wholesome little fellow, with a soul as clear as crystal.

From the captain's standpoint, also, the friendship was a good thing. The old man bore himself as erectly as he had ever done; only to Comethup he relaxed somewhat the hard and unbending set of laws which hitherto had governed his days. The stern old face broke up into something of tenderness at the sight of the child; he prepared, out of his scanty means, little treats and relishes for the boy's entertainment. David Willis he never quite understood; saw in him something out of the normal—a creature sent into the world, he sincerely trusted, for some good purpose; only the captain had not been able to make up his mind what that purpose was. The captain liked him, even pitied him a little, as he had pitied him on the first night of their meeting; but the man was beyond his range of vision. When, in church sometimes, he heard the organ pealing out above him, he would glance round at the child (for Comethup came in time to occupy a seat in the captain's pew), and a little curious look of anxiety would gather on his brow and settle there—anxiety as to what the boy would do in the years that were coming to him, and how his father would help to equip him for the world. But, for the most part, the captain was willing to

let the happy present time go on, grateful that, in the last of his years, this little child should have come to sweeten them.

Great excursions were planned in those early days of Comethup's life. It was a wonderful thing to see Comethup do what no other living creature in the town dared do so boldly—open the gate of the captain's garden, and march straight up the trim little path which led to the front door of the house. He had been taught, when an expedition was afoot, to be punctual to the minute; and he always found the captain coming out of the cottage as he reached it, glancing generally at his watch with a quick nod of approval. Then would the captain, with hat a-tilt and cane swinging, and with pride in his heart, sally forth with Comethup to make new discoveries on a prearranged plan. For the old town, which had once been a mere resting-place for the captain's declining years, took on a new aspect, when viewed through the eyes of this child.

It was an old town—a beautiful old town; the captain read up a complete history of it, and proved—to Comethup's entire satisfaction as well as to his own—that something extraordinary had happened in nearly every house it contained. It had been a town of great deeds; had once touched the sea, and had helped to defend that part of the coast line during some of the country's stormiest times. The sea had long since retreated, and left the little place lying high and dry, to sleep in peace, and dream about its deeds.

It had been a walled town, too; indeed, the old wall still remained, only that, in the very place and beauty of less stirring times, the wall had become a mere grass-grown bank, with flowers and shrubs growing all about it. But here the captain was in his element; he could point out how the town would be attacked from this direction, or how an invading force would come from there; would draw sketches in the gravel with the point of his cane to illustrate exactly how *he* would have defended it, had he been alive in those times, and how he would have made it absolutely impregnable. Comethup, gazing at him with delighted eyes, came to believe that he was absolutely the greatest general and master of the art of war that had ever existed, instead of a poor little half-pay captain whose name had never been heard of.

There was a quiet and sleepy little river, too, which ran just outside the town under a stone bridge; and the captain used to lean over the parapet of the bridge, on sunny afternoons, while Comethup sat on the stonework beside him, and they used to fish for the bright, gleaming, darting little creatures in the river below. They very rarely caught anything: it was a great event when they did; but the captain used to explain exactly how various kinds of fishing could be accomplished with the minimum of ease and the maximum of success. The captain always seemed to know how to tell one the best way of doing a variety of clever things, but he never seemed to have accomplished very much in a practical sense; Comethup used to think sadly, in after years, that if the captain had only been able to do half the things he could tell other people how to do, he might have been a general at the very least, with his breast ablaze of medals and orders. But Comethup loved him devotedly, just as he was, and would not have had him changed for the wide world.

A great wide expanse of sandy, marshy land lay between the little town and the sea, and this was their playground. It was a wonderful place—a place they seemed never to be able fully to explore. The captain never quite lost his dignity; but away from the town and under the influence of Comethup he relaxed considerably. It is always possible that he comforted himself with the reflection that, whatever species of amusement they sought, it was of an educational character, and would assist the boy's future. But the Captain Garraway-Kyle who marched out of the little town, holding the child by the hand and swinging his cane, was a very different person indeed from the light-hearted old gentleman who imperilled the knees of his tight trousers in stooping over sand forts and anxiously superintending the erection of fortifications. The puppy—grown a little older and wiser and more staid now—usually accompanied them on these expeditions, and was not always to be trusted when a delicate matter of building was on hand, having a propensity for playing the enemy and levelling earthworks and forts and everything else in one indiscriminate heap. So pleasant days went by, each filled full to the last sleepy hour with new experiences for Comethup; and the captain seemed to grow younger as Comethup inevitably grew older.

It has been said that Comethup often occupied a seat in the captain's pew in church; it became quite a regular thing for him to do so after a time. The child had drawn two lonely men together, and, although the captain did not understand David Willis, while David, for his part, stood a little in awe of the captain's brusqueness, the two men often met, and it became quite an ordinary thing for them to sit chatting in David Willis's modest parlour long after Comethup was tucked up in his little bed at the top of the house. They were both inordinately fond of the child; probably the captain excelled in that particular. They never had very much to say to each other, and when they spoke at all it was generally about that one subject of their thoughts. The captain would recount some bright speech of the boy's that he had caught during the day, and David Willis would nod in sympathy and smile. Then the captain, after a puff or two at his pipe, would exclaim half sternly: "Fine boy, fine boy, Willis. Make a man of him some day." And on Sunday mornings the captain would come marching down the street, and his eyes would gleam a little at sight of a tiny figure drawn up erect at the salute inside the open gateway of David Willis's garden. The captain would return the salute, to Comethup's intense delight, and the two would go gravely round the corner and through the churchyard into the church.

Sitting beside the captain, Comethup would have leisure, in the dim light of the place, to examine the old man's hands as they were folded calmly over his prayer-book on his lap. The child often wondered how they could ever have held a sword, and how many people the captain, in his days of war, had killed; the hands were so soft and white, and their touch on his own small fingers or

on his shoulder had always been so light and gentle, that it seemed impossible that they could have been made for any stronger deeds. Comethup was always more desperately fond of the captain on Sundays than on any other days; partly because the captain, in his best black coat, and with his hat off, looked so very small and old and gray and lonely in the big pew, and partly because Comethup was so passionately grateful to him—perfect old gentleman that he was—for his kindly patronage of so very small and insignificant a person as himself. He was quite proud to be seen walking with the captain out of church, and holding his hand; he reflected with pardonable vanity more than once that there were very few people in the world, at least as far as he knew it, who were privileged to go to church every Sunday with so great a warrior.

The pew behind that in which the captain and Comethup sat was usually unoccupied; but on one particular Sunday a little commotion was caused in the quiet old church by the entry of two people into it. They came late, after the service had commenced, and they made some noise in getting into their seats. Comethup saw heads turned, and people whisper among themselves. He would greatly have liked to look round, as others were doing; he was consumed with curiosity. But the captain was looking straight in front of him, and even frowning a little, and Comethup had to do the same.

Comethup came to the conclusion, before the service was ended, that the newcomers behind them, whoever they might be, had not been taught how to behave properly in church. One of them, who seemed to be a man, gave the responses in a very loud key, and sometimes very carelessly quite in the wrong places; he breathed very heavily—Comethup was almost persuaded, but that it seemed so terrible, that he snored—during the sermon; and some one else in the pew moved about a great deal, and dropped books, and kicked and shuffled with his feet. The captain grew more and more stern and frowning as the service went on, so that Comethup was quite afraid at last to look at him.

As they were passing out of church, the people from the pew behind walked in front—a very tall and portly gentleman, whose coat tails seemed to swing very much as he walked, and a boy a year or two older than Comethup. In the porch the gentleman swung on his hat, almost before he had passed through the door, with a flourish; glancing behind him as he went out, he caught sight of the captain, and nodded and spoke: "Aha! captain, delightful day; had no idea you belonged to the good folk. Who's our young friend?" He indicated Comethup, who was watching him with something of admiration.

The captain did not seem well pleased; he clipped his words very short, in a fashion he had when angry, as he replied, "Don't you know?"

"Of course not; how should I?"

"Then let me present you," said the captain, keeping fast hold of Comethup's hand, and making an ironically elaborate business of the introduction. "Master Comethup Willis—Mr. Robert Carlaw.—Comethup," he added, his tone changing as he addressed the child, "this is your Uncle Bob."

The portly gentleman seemed surprised, but passed the thing off easily. "Most extraordinary," he exclaimed, "though why the devil Willis ever called the unfortunate creature by that outlandish name passes my comprehension.—How do you do, nephew? I suppose I ought to have remembered your existence long since; but I'm such a careless rascal that I leave undone those things which I ought to have done—if you're a good churchman you'll know the rest, without my troubling to repeat it. Here's your cousin Brian; if you're half as much trouble to your poor old dad as he is to me, I pity that worthy fellow."

The captain was obviously anxious to get away, but Comethup had been looking at the boy to whom he was now introduced, and had, in a childish, worshipping fashion, been quite fascinated by him. He was rather taller than Comethup, and very well dressed, and was, moreover, an extremely handsome boy. He had a rather high forehead for a child, and very thick, curling brown hair brushed loosely back from it. His eyes were keen and bold and dark, and gave Comethup the odd impression of being able to see a great deal more than the eyes of other people. He held himself very upright, with his legs rather apart, and his hands thrust in his pockets; and he swaggered a little as he walked, like his father. He put out his hand to Comethup, and smiled so beautifully with a smile which made his face glow and change, that Comethup was quite glad to think that he was his cousin; he almost felt that he loved him from that moment.

David Willis came at that moment from the church, with his books under his arm; he gazed in an absent-minded fashion at the little group, and obviously did not quite know what to make of it all. Uncle Bob came blusteringly to the rescue; shook David heartily by the hand and walked off with him, with a hand clapped confidentially upon his shoulder and his head bent down sideways from his greater height to talk to him. The boy Brian walked along on the other side of his father, glancing back over his shoulder now and then with an engaging smile at Comethup, who followed behind with the captain. The captain was ill at ease and in a bad temper; he puffed out his chest as he walked and breathed heavily under his mustache, and made savage little cuts at the air with his cane, as though it had been a sword.

At the gate leading to the garden Mr. Robert Carlaw parted jovially, shaking David heartily by the hand again, and patting Comethup on the top of his best Sunday cap. In the captain he apparently scented an enemy; they bowed to each other stiffly, and the frown did not leave the captain's face.

"He must come and see us," said Mr. Carlaw, with a jerk of the head toward Comethup. "They'll

be company for each other; besides, they're cousins. You're such quiet folks; I declare I'd forgotten your existence—absolutely forgotten it." He went swinging away down the street, with the boy swinging beside him, a curious, almost pathetic imitation of the father.

It had become the captain's habit to dine with David Willis every Sunday—quite a simple, homely dinner of a joint and vegetables and a pudding to follow. The captain walked into the cottage now, sat himself stiffly down in a chair near the window, and drew Comethup against his knee and put his arm about him. David Willis was wandering about the room, softly humming to himself a fragment of the voluntary he had played that morning, while the servant-maid laid the table. It was a hot and breathless summer morning; the window of the little parlour was wide open, and Comethup could hear people passing and repassing in the street beyond the garden; could hear the murmur of their talk. There was a high, old-fashioned mahogany bureau on the other side of the room, with curved brass handles to the drawers, and with three leather-bound books, growing gradually smaller in size upward, like a pyramid, on the top of it. Comethup had never seen either the books or the bureau opened; it was curious, therefore, to see his father, with a smile on his face, stroll across there presently and lift the topmost book and open it. "You didn't know our friend Carlaw was something of a poet, did you?" he asked, addressing the captain.

Disgust sprang suddenly into the captain's eyes, and into the lines about his mouth. "A poet? Yes, I could have believed even *that* of him." The captain chuckled a little grimly at his own humour.

David Willis laughed, and brought the book over toward the window, turning the leaves slowly and looking into it. "Yes," he said, "he wrote these when he was quite a young man; they were published by subscription. He was a mere youth at the time, and he gave this copy to his sister, my wife. It's very queer reading, very mad reading some of it. He's a queer fellow, and a mad fellow." David Willis laughed good-humouredly and closed the book and carried it back to the bureau.

"Yes, he's mad enough," said the captain shortly. "I know the sort of man—met dozens of his kidney. They flash through the world, spreading their feathers in the sun and making such a flutter that no one sees what shame and misery they leave in their track; or, if any one does see it, it's all excused with the phrase, 'Oh, he couldn't help it—he was such a good fellow.' Bah!" The captain was quite indignant, and the arm that held Comethup shook a little.

"You're a little hard on our friend," said David, easily. "He's really rather a clever sort of fellow; there are lots of things he does quite well, only not quite well enough to make anything of them. He paints a little, writes a little, plays and sings remarkably well. But he never gives his mind to anything. I remember he said to me once: 'It's not my fault; they shouldn't have given me such a name. Think of it! Bob! What can a fellow do with such a name as that, except go to the devil with it? And I've tried consistently to go to the devil with it.' And I really believe he has."

"Yes, I dare say he has," replied the captain, a little wearily. "And there you have the whole man in a nutshell."

Comethup was destined very soon to see more of that fascinating boy, and of his father. But a few days had gone by when the shadow of Robert Carlaw loomed large in the open doorway of the cottage, and he came in, followed by Brian. He seemed to take up an immense amount of room, and to block out the light a great deal, in whatever part of the room he stood. It was immediately after breakfast—David Willis always breakfasted late, a habit he had acquired when living in town—and David was smoking a pipe before setting about those small duties which occupied his day. David Willis had on a very shabby coat and slippers on his feet; Robert Carlaw's coat was of the finest, his boots shone magnificently, and he smoked a cigar. He announced airily that he had come to carry off his little friend with the extraordinary name; the name, he declared, was too much to pronounce in such weather as that, but he didn't love him any the less on account of it, and meant to carry him off, for the day at least. So Comethup was duly made ready and went away with a fluttering heart on the other side of Uncle Bob, peeping round his portly person, as he trotted along, to catch a glimpse of that fascinating boy who walked on the farther side of him.

It had been a whim on the part of Mr. Robert Carlaw; he had suddenly made up his mind that he ought to see the child—had suddenly remembered that it was the child of his dead sister, and, in a fashion quite characteristic of him, he had dashed off, hot with the purpose, at the very moment the thought occurred to him.

He even devised schemes as he went along between them for their entertainment. They would do this, they would do that; they would have tea in the garden, or a pony chaise should be hired, and he would take them for a drive. A hundred alluring schemes were in his mind; he seemed to enter joyously and childishly into their world, and to understand exactly what would suit them best. But, by the time he reached his own house with them, the keenness of the business was done, the edge of it had worn off. He rambled with them, in a perfunctory fashion, round the garden, but he was obviously tiring. Quite suddenly, on an excuse, he left them and shut himself up in a room he called his workroom, and they saw no more of him.

Brian did not seem in the least surprised; his lip curled a little disdainfully when Comethup politely inquired whether his father was unwell. Comethup had a curious impression that this boy, although he obviously admired his father very much, and even imitated him, yet saw through him in some way and knew him to be not quite so nice as other people imagined. There was a careless, curt fashion of dismissing his father's name which Comethup could not have employed in the case of *his* father for the world, and which made him a little afraid of his cousin in consequence.

The house must have been a very beautiful one at some time; it was filled even now with many beautiful articles of furniture, articles such as Comethup had never seen, and many of which he did not know the use of. But everything was in hopeless confusion and disorder; valuable articles broken and thrust aside, and something equally valuable put in its place to serve its purpose. Books lay about in every room of the house—some of them flung, with wide-open leaves, by impatient hands into corners; fine engravings were stood in their frames against the wall, because no one had ever troubled to hang them up; many of them had their glasses broken, and most of them were smothered in dust, or torn, or otherwise maltreated. Some stood in rolls in the corners of the rooms. It seemed, in every way, the house of a man who meant many things—even meant to live beautifully; but of a man who had never, in anything, got far beyond the mere fluttering resolutions.

But it was nevertheless a house of delights to the child—a place of never-ending wonder. Only, in the midst of their exploration, Comethup suddenly remembered that he had that afternoon made an appointment with Captain Garraway-Kyle, and that that appointment must be kept. There was a sort of tremor at his heart when he remembered how the captain would be standing, just within the door of his cottage, with his watch on his palm, waiting for him at the hour named. He informed Brian that he must really go.

The boy looked at him in astonishment; a shade of annoyance crossed his face. "Oh, put him off!" he said.

Comethup shook his head very decidedly; he was troubled, like the gentle little creature he was, at the thought that he would have to show any discourtesy to his cousin; but it was quite imperative that he should meet the captain, and the thing had to be managed somehow. "No, I couldn't possibly do that. The captain and I are very great friends."

Brian looked at the sober young face for a moment, and then burst into a roar of laughter. "But he's so old!" he said, when he had recovered his gravity.

Comethup shook his head again, and smiled. "Not when you know him," he replied. "Sometimes he seems almost as young as I am, only ever so much wiser."

The other boy stared at him curiously. "Why, how old are you?" he asked.

"Seven next week," replied Comethup.

"And I'm nine." Giving the other time to digest his superiority, he presently added: "Must you really go and see this old chap? You can easily explain afterward."

Comethup did not waver, but he decided to effect a compromise. "Why don't you come too?" he said. "He would be very glad to see you."

Brian looked a little ruefully round the untidy room in which they stood, and decided rapidly that it would be better to do that than to remain in the house alone. "Yes, I'll come," he said, and darted out into the hall for his cap.

Comethup ventured a suggestion. "Won't you—won't you ask your father?"

Brian laughed, and tossed Comethup's cap to him. "Not I," he cried. "Dad never knows where I am. All I have to do is to keep out of the way when I'm not wanted, and be right at his elbow when he thinks he'd like to see me. Come along."

"We'll have to run," said Comethup. "We're late."

They arrived breathless at the captain's cottage, and found the captain, as Comethup had expected, standing with his watch in his hand. He raised his eyebrows at the sight of a second visitor, and Comethup breathlessly explained the situation and tried to make a polite little speech, apologizing for having introduced a visitor without an invitation. But the captain interrupted him by saying stiffly that his cousin was very welcome, and the three set out for the usual walk together.

Somehow or other that afternoon the expedition was not quite a success. In the first place, Comethup and the captain were not quite at their ease; had, in fact, a ridiculous feeling of being on their best behaviour before a stranger. Then, too, the old innocent games—the building of forts, and the pleasant little make-believe world they had created—were things they did not care to venture upon before this boy, whose scornful laughter seemed to come so easily. They sat on a wooden seat on the top of the grass-grown wall of the town, and found themselves talking nicely, as Comethup would have put it, and being very stiff and unnatural and dull in consequence. The captain did not talk about his battles; was quite reserved, in fact, and difficult to lure into any expression of opinion. Comethup, proud of his old friend and of his old friend's achievements, tried to draw him on to descriptions of happenings with which he himself was beautifully familiar, but which he felt would be interesting to Brian, and give that young gentleman a finer idea of the captain. But the captain was not to be drawn; seemed, indeed, purposely to forget things which had rattled glibly off his tongue but yesterday.

They saw Comethup safely to the gate of his father's garden, and the captain gravely shook hands with him; knowing his mood, Comethup was positively afraid to salute, and, indeed, the stern eye of the captain forbade it. Brian's road home lay for some distance in the same direction as the old man's, and Comethup stood at the gate for some moments, watching them going on together. But the captain walked on one side of the pavement and Brian swung along on the other, as far apart as possible, and they did not appear to have anything to say to each other.

After that, Brian Carlaw entered somewhat largely into Comethup's existence, to the exclusion,

at times, of the captain. Comethup meant no disloyalty to his first friend, and went to bed many a night troubled at the thought that there was a breach growing between them; but Brian, child though he was, had a fine air of appropriating Comethup and planning excursions with him, and arranging boyish expeditions from which the younger child found it difficult to escape. He would dash in, in the morning, with his eyes sparkling and his gay laugh waking up the house, and drag Comethup off, waving aside every remonstrance, and refusing to wait an instant for anything. He had a splendid, reckless fashion, so Comethup thought, of scorning mere ordinary doors and paths, such as were used by mere ordinary boys, and of leaping and rushing across flower-beds or turf, and climbing in at a window, in a most unexpected and daring way. One never knew quite where to have him, or what to expect of him; one never knew quite in what mood he would appear. And each mood was something different from the last, and, whether grave or gay, wholly captivating. If he came with some childish tale of tribulation on his lips, it was a tribulation apparently so great and so real that all one's heart went out to him and one could not do enough to show how deep was one's sympathy; at least that was what Comethup felt. If he dashed in, with laughter on his lips and devilry in his eyes, the thing was so infectious, so maddening, that even grave little Comethup was bitten by it and felt the devil leaping in his veins as well, and was ready for anything.

When it happened that the captain and Comethup met at all, they met, curiously enough, although neither confessed it to the other, by stealth. Brian monopolized the younger boy so much that there were no more arranged meetings, unless the one met the other by accident a day before, and was able to suggest that a meeting should be held. On most occasions, if Brian had not appeared by a certain hour, Comethup would steal off to the captain's cottage. Never a word would be said, but each fully and completely understood the situation; and the captain welcomed Comethup, and Comethup received the welcome, with as much grave courtesy as though they had been in the habit of meeting daily, and there were no outside circumstances in their simple lives to separate them. It was clearly understood on either hand that Brian was elsewhere, or had failed to keep some engagement he had made; and the captain very happily, and Comethup very happily too, but feeling a little bit like a traitor to both sides, would start off, hand in hand, to enjoy one of the old days.

Yet, even on those occasions, so great was the influence of the other boy upon them that they would keep a wary eye open—still without a word to each other—for his possible appearance on the scene. The building of the forts was not the splendid, sole-absorbing thing it used to be, because they did it stealthily. Some one else had entered into their paradise, and had turned the fruit of it a little sour. Comethup tried hard, on those occasions, to be very, very good to the captain; and the captain, for his part, tried hard to appear as though there could be nothing different between them, and as though these stolen days were just as nice and just as spontaneous as the former days had been. But things were different, somehow; their world went differently, and was not the world they had known before. Comethup found his mind wandering, even during the recital of a thrilling battle episode, to that boy with the splendid eyes and the charming manner, and found himself wondering what the boy was doing, and if he carried little Comethup in his mind.

The expeditions with Brian were not of the innocent and sober character which marked those with Captain Garraway-Kyle; Brian was the leader, and was ready at all times for something new; the very soul of the boy seemed to cry out for that; a new discovery, fascinating to-day, was old and tiresome to-morrow; the day was a hopeless and fretful one that saw nothing new or fantastic accomplished. His enterprise knew no bounds, and fear, in the ordinary mortal sense, was not in him. The captain's expeditions had been wonderful, and each had furnished a new delight for Comethup; but they paled into insignificance beside the inventions of Brian.

David Willis was a man of many dreamy occupations, a man who never hurried, and whose life may be said to have been filled with odds and ends of employment. So it happened that Comethup came and went as he would, and his father saw but little of him; he knew that the child was happy, and he heard his voice frequently about the house. But beyond that he cared nothing; he was simply content to know that the child was there, and that all was well with him. Thus Comethup had plenty of scope for his adventures, and plenty of time for any expedition that might present itself.

There was an old and half-ruined house which stood on the extreme outskirts of the town and was surrounded by an old, dark, neglected wilderness of a garden. The two children had peeped in through the rusty iron gates occasionally, with their small faces pressed close between the bars, and had speculated upon what the garden contained and who lived in the house. Brian stoutly asserted that the house was empty, and then that it was haunted; he had probably heard his father or the servants say that. It remained, and had remained for some time, the one possible place which they had not explored; Brian would not have confessed it for the world, but he had a deadly fear of it, probably the only fear he knew concerning anything at that time. It frightened him, even while it fascinated him; he would choose that way to walk, even when it meant that to pass the house they would have to go a long way out of the direction they had arranged.

At last one day he came in, with his eyes curiously bright, and announced his intention of exploring the place. They would get in somehow, he said—through a window if necessary. Comethup was doubtful, but Brian's stronger will conquered, as usual, and they set off. Near the place, however, the elder boy hesitated, and drew back a little.

"I don't think we'll go," he said. "There won't be any fun in it." And he began to walk away.

Comethup felt relieved; he had not liked the expedition from the first. He said nothing, but set



out to follow Brian.

But Brian chafed under a sense of degradation all day. He watched Comethup sharply, to be sure that the younger boy was not actually laughing at him; saw scorn in his eyes, when there was no scorn in Comethup's heart. They had parted for their midday meal, and had been out again in the afternoon, still under that sense of constraint, and Comethup was diligently studying the pictures in an old book alone in the parlour of his father's house, when Brian came leaping across the flower-beds and cried to him from outside the window:

"Come along; don't wait for anything. I'm going to that house."

Comethup knew perfectly well which house was meant, but he affected ignorance, and said weakly, "Which house?"

"Oh, you know; the haunted one; the one we didn't go to to-day. Come along."

Comethup closed the book, but kept a finger between the leaves. "It's very late," he urged, "and it'll soon be getting dark."

Brian stood with his hands on the window sill, impatiently kicking at the house wall. "You're afraid," he said, looking up at Comethup.

Comethup shook his head, but his drawn brows showed anxiety. "No, I'm not afraid," he said, slowly. "But I'd rather wait until to-morrow, if you want to see the house."

"No one ever goes to a house that's haunted in the daytime," said Brian. "I'm going now."

"It's nicer in the daytime," urged Comethup, getting one leg down from the window seat and dangling it irresolutely. "But I'll come if you like."

"Come along then," cried the other. "You're so slow; you can't make up your mind quickly, as I do."

Comethup knew that the reproach was justified, and felt humbled accordingly. He was not altogether so happy in this adventure as he had been in all those which had preceded it. In the first place, he had to steal out of the house into the mysterious summer evening, being careful that no one saw him. His father was in church practising; he could hear the slow droning of the organ, like the hum of a gigantic tired insect going to sleep with the rest of the world. Comethup wished that he had gone into the church with his father, and sat there, out of the way of temptation such as this.

The evening was warm and heavy, and a hundred sweet odours came from the gardens which fringed the road. Brian talked valiantly and loudly as they went along of how foolish it was to be afraid of anything, just because it happened to be dark, and of a hundred other matters tending to keep up his ebbing courage. Comethup was silent, doggedly determined to go through with the business, now that he had embarked upon it, and with a plaintive hope in his heart that it might not be so dreadful, after all.

Curiously enough, that part of the outskirts of the town in which the house lay seemed always to be darker and more sombre-looking than any other. All the houses about there were very old, with high walls and tall, rustling old trees; with paths in their gardens which seemed always full of dead leaves and weeds at all times of the year. And that particular house was the most sombre and dismal-looking of them all. It had originally been a very fine house; there were the remains of carvings on the stone pillars which supported the gates. But everything was in decay; one of the great gates hung merely by one hinge, and swayed perilously when it was touched; the other stood permanently ajar.

Their young hearts were beating very heavily when they reached the gates. A wind had risen, and was coming from the distant sea across the flat marshland; it stirred the trees and bent their long limbs, so that they seemed to point down at the two small, trembling figures, and to ask who they were, and to plot and whisper against them. Comethup and Brian gripped hands tightly as they slipped through the aperture between the gates. The wind seemed specially to haunt that place; it sent a dusty, whirling eddy of last year's leaves charging at them and fluttering about them as they went hesitatingly up the long drive. Brian stopped halfway to the house and pushed his cap back on his clustering hair with well-assumed carelessness, and said: "There's nothing to be seen; I don't think we'll go any farther. Besides, we ought to be home."

Comethup kept steadily on up the drive. "I'm going up to the house," he said.

There was nothing left for Brian but to follow him, which he did, keeping a wary eye behind him. They gained confidence as they went on, and even raised their voices a little above the whisper in which they had spoken previously. They ploughed their way through the neglected grounds where the paths were scarcely to be distinguished for the mass of tangled weeds which overgrew them, and came up to the house. Not a light showed anywhere; the windows were all shuttered, and the doors apparently fastened.

"I don't believe any one lives here," said Brian, sinking his voice again to a whisper. "But I don't think we'll go in to-night; we've seen a good deal, haven't we?"

Comethup evidently thought that he had done sufficient to clear him from that accusation of cowardice; but, for the keeping up of appearances, he spoke with apparent reluctance: "Oh, if you like; perhaps we had better go home."

The house behind them, standing up gray and stark and sombre in the twilight, was a far more terrible thing than it had been when they faced it. By common consent they hurried a little as

they trotted along among the dead leaves. The wind, too, was at their back now, and flung fluttering things about their legs and against their ears; they were afraid to look round, and yet afraid to go on without glancing behind them. Halfway down the drive, too, they heard a rustling among the trees, a louder rustling than that caused by the wind. Brian stopped still, and Comethup wondered why his heart kept jumping up into his throat and nearly choking him. Then, from among the shadows of the trees, came a little figure all in white—a figure smaller even than Comethup, but very terrible coming in that fashion, and in that hour and in that place. At any other time they might have said it was a little child, a girl; but now their nerves were too unstrung for practical things. There could be no mistake about its identity. With a sort of simultaneous gasp they set off at headlong speed down the drive, straight for the gate.

And the figure came running after them, crying something piteously to them. But that was worse than anything else; they almost tumbled over each other in their eagerness to get out through the gates; in fact, they never stopped running till they were far down the road, and breathless. Then Brian leaned against a wall and surveyed Comethup with horror-struck eyes. "It was the ghost!" he said; "and it ran after us!"

"Yes," said Comethup, slowly, and a little doubtfully, "it was the ghost."

"And it was pretty big, too," said Brian, fanning himself with his cap. "They don't look so large in the dark."

Comethup lay awake a long time that night in his little room under the roof. He was not frightened; he was quite calm as he looked out through the uncurtained window at the blinking stars. He seemed to set everything else aside, and to hear only the piteous, pleading voice crying to him in the garden; he was quite sorry now that he had run away; and very, very sorry, in his childish mind, for the ghost.

"It was a very little ghost," he murmured to himself as he fell asleep.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CAPTAIN PLAYS THE KNIGHT-ERRANT.

Comethup saw nothing of Brian for two days after that, and, although he seized the opportunity of making amends to the captain, he said nothing of the adventure to that gentleman. Indeed, Comethup had been haunted by the ghost he had seen, in quite a different sense from that which might have been expected, and the captain seemed altogether unequal to the occasion. He could think of nothing else; was, indeed, so desperately sorry for that lonely little ghost that it lost the terrors it might otherwise have had for him, and melted his heart with pity for its dreadful fate. He lay awake at night, thinking of it in that garden of shadows and decay, wandering alone among the trees, and always with that appealing cry upon its lips. He tried, in a subtle fashion, to put leading questions to the captain, in an endeavour to discover something of the condition of ghosts in general, and little ones in particular; but the captain, being of an eminently practical turn of mind, dismissed the subject curtly enough. So Comethup was thrown on his own resources.

On the evening of the second day, after he had left the captain at the gate, and had saluted him in the fashion they always adopted when Brian was not present, Comethup felt that he could stand this state of uncertainty no longer. He remembered that the captain had once told him that a brave man never shrinks from anything that will help his fellows—a wise and beautiful thing, which Comethup had not forgotten; and surely a ghost, and such a little one, was one of his fellows. Comethup was not quite certain what a ghost was, or what position in the scheme of things it really occupied; but, with that dogged determination which lay behind all the gentleness of his character, he determined, in his simple way, that he could not sleep in his warm and sweet-smelling bed another night while the ghost wandered crying about that desolate garden. With a horrible fear tugging at his heart, and yet with a childish courage urging him on which was greater and stronger than the fear, he took his cap and stole out of the house, and ran as fast as his legs would carry him to the house he had visited with Brian.

It was terrible work getting through that gate; and in the long drive where the shadows were it was more terrible still. But he went on slowly, with his hands spread out as if to feel his way, and with his eyes, very bright and very wide open, peering into the darkness. He coughed, and hummed a tune, but dared not look behind him; the desperate business had been begun, and Comethup Willis, trembling in every limb, had yet fully made up his mind to see the ghost before he passed again out of the gate, if it were to be seen.

He saw it at last, much nearer the house than it had been before. It came toward him, more and more slowly as the distance between them lessened. Comethup backed away a little; but it suddenly stretched out hands to him, and came forward at a run, so that there was no chance of escape. And then the horror of the thing, the tense fear that had been knocking at his heart, fell away from him in a moment. For he touched warm hands of flesh, and saw that it was a child of about his own age, looking wonderingly at him. Poor Comethup almost laughed with the sudden relief, and they remained for a moment after their hands had dropped away from each other's, looking into each other's faces shyly, as children do at a first meeting.

"I'm so glad!" said Comethup at last. "I thought you were a ghost. Where do you come from?"

The child stretched out an arm, and pointed to the house. "There," she said, "with father." She spoke in a whisper—the whisper of a person long subdued, and used to the sound only of her own voice. She was very pretty, with big, dark eyes, and a very white skin; but there was an elfish, frightened manner about her that had nothing of childhood in it.

"But the house is all shut up," urged Comethup. "Why doesn't your father open the shutters?"

"All those rooms are empty," said the child; "they frighten you to go in them, because you make such a noise, and the eyes in the shutters stare at you. We live right round the other side."

"But it's such a dreadful place," said Comethup, compassionately, looking from the bright, eager face of the child to the desolate garden. "Aren't you very lonely?"

The child nodded and looked about her, and drew instinctively a little nearer to the boy.

"Doesn't any one come to see you?" asked Comethup.

"Only Mrs. Blissett, in the morning. Mrs. Blissett makes the beds, and gives me my breakfast and my dinner; then she comes again when it's dark, and puts me to bed. And she grumbles all the time, and keeps on asking what the Lord made brats for. That's me, you know," she added, innocently.

Comethup looked properly sympathetic, and asked, "What is your name?"

"Linda. I think it's a longer name than that, but father calls me 'Linda. What is your name?"

Comethup got it out trippingly; it was always a difficult matter, in those early years, to get the uncouth thing off his tongue. The girl looked puzzled, and begged him to repeat it; he did so, with a flush upon his face. He was already beginning to understand, by the surprise with which the name was always received, that there was something remarkable and even ridiculous about it. But this girl apparently liked it; laughed softly and turned it over on her tongue, and said "Comethup," with a little break in the middle of it; "yes, it's a pretty name."

Comethup was gratified, and had a sudden wish that he had paid her the same compliment. They stood awkwardly and shyly looking at each other, until the slow, heavy steps of some one trudging through the dead leaves bestirred them to a recollection of time and place.

"That's Mrs. Blissett," said the child with a sigh, "and I shall have to go to bed. Come back here where she won't see you. Can't you hear her coming, and grumbling to herself all the way?" The question ended with a little ripple of laughter, and Comethup, glancing at the child, saw all her white teeth showing in a smile, and her eyes dancing with it. She drew him back among the shadows of the trees while the heavy-footed, murmuring Mrs. Blissett pounded solemnly along toward the house. They stood quite still, until the footsteps had died away, and then, to Comethup's great surprise and consternation, this small girl-child caught him by his jacket, kissed him swiftly, and cried in a breath: "Good-night, Comethup; come and see me to-morrow," and sped away from him through the trees.

Comethup stood, in a dazed condition, looking after her for some moments, and softly rubbing his cheek with one hand where her lips had touched him; and then, with very mixed emotions, set off for home. But though the garden was the same, and though the wind whispered through the trees, and the dead leaves drove at him, it had no further terrors for him; had, indeed, become a place of wonder and delight, as everything else seemed to become in his small world. His father, his little room at home, his mother's sleeping place among the green mounds in the churchyard, the captain and the building of the forts, Brian and his reckless expeditions—all these were things of delight to the boy. And now, in the midst of them, had sprung up a new wonder, growing beautifully in the midst of the terrors which had seemed to be about her. He went home with a fast-beating heart, full of his new discovery, and anxious to unbosom himself regarding it to some one of sympathy.

He was never quite sure of his father; he loved him very dearly, and thought his soft voice and the quiet, caressing words he used better than all the music he played in the church. But his father had a dreamy way of looking over him, or right through him, when some question of moment was being discussed; of losing himself suddenly in the maze of his thoughts, and wandering off somewhere where Comethup could not follow him. So that Comethup often hesitated about giving a confidence to him, because he feared, in his sensitive little soul, that his father might not follow it out—whatever it might be—patiently to the end, as it should be followed; might forget what the all-important subject was before the tale had half been told. He hesitated now, and was obliged to confess, sitting up in bed in the moonlight, with his hands clasped round his linen-covered knees, that his father might not understand, and might—worst thought of all—look dreamily at him, and stroke his hair, and say, with a maddening smile: "Yes, yes, my boy. Of course; just so," and begin to hum an air from some of his beloved music and straightway forget all else. It was quite certain that it was impossible for him to tell his father.

Brian, perhaps, had a right to know; Brian had been in the garden with him, and still believed that the garden held a ghost. But Comethup shrank more strongly still from the idea of telling his cousin; shook his head very decidedly in the moonlight when he thought of it. It may have been purely a matter of instinct, probably was; but in his childish mind that garden, with its dim shadows and its quaint little figure whose kiss still seemed hot upon his cheek, was a fairyland into which he jealously desired to go alone, and in which Brian, in the imagination, seemed an uncouth figure.

The list of possible sympathizers was narrowing down; there remained only the captain; and

slowly there grew in Comethup's mind the idea that the captain was, after all, the right person. The boy acted over to himself a little interview, in which he seemed to know, with exactitude, what the captain would say and what the captain would do; was sure of him, so to speak, from the outset. For, in Comethup's mind, the captain might be abrupt and might be severe; but his rules of conduct were such that, if followed, a small boy would sleep soundly in his bed at night, and would not fear the darkness. So he decided to tell the captain, and, comforted with the thought, fell asleep.

The opportunity occurred the very next day. Comethup went to tea with the captain, firmly resolved to unbosom himself about the whole matter. But he let the precious moments slip by, and talked of everything else under the sun, and tried to appear interested in all that the captain said, while his mind was leaping back to that desolate garden and to the little figure wandering alone in it. He remembered, too, with a sudden hot sensation of shame, that the child had cried, "Come again to-morrow!" and here was to-morrow. Yet he sat there, saying never a word of what filled his mind, until the moment arrived when it was necessary for him to return home. For the captain was punctual in all things, and Comethup arrived at the house at an exact hour, and left it at another equally rigidly defined.

Comethup got as far as the doorstep before he made up his mind to say anything; and then, as he brought his hand down from the salute, he said hurriedly, "I—I wanted to speak to you—about something—sir."

The captain looked down at the small figure gravely. "Important?" he asked.

Comethup felt his courage oozing. "Not—not very," he replied.

"Keep it till to-morrow," said the captain, nodding at him. "No time now, you know. Good-bye."

Comethup saluted again, and went miserably away. He returned home, and sat for a long time at the window, thinking about the child. He had not promised that he would go again to see her; but it had seemed like a promise, and he could not bear the thought that she might be waiting there, with her great, dark, eager eyes straining toward the gate, looking for him. It was the first time that any real or definite sorrow had touched his life—the first time that any living thing had seemed dependent on him for happiness. With the captain it was different; it was impossible for Comethup's mind to grasp the idea that he was all-important in the captain's bare existence; that the captain watched for him, day after day, and felt his old heart jump a little as the boy swung up the garden path, as he might have felt it jump, in years gone by, at the coming of a woman. Comethup did not understand that; he saw only in the captain's kindness and patronage of himself a very great and sweet graciousness, a something that the captain went out of his way to do, because he was very kind and very great. Comethup adored the captain, but he did not know that the captain would have willingly consented to be pierced through and through with his own old sword hanging over the dim little looking-glass in his cottage parlour, if he could thereby have served Comethup.

The hunger at Comethup's heart grew stronger as the evening wore on. A wind had sprung up, bringing with it some gusts of rain, and flinging little splashes on to Comethup's face as he sat with his chin in his hands at the open window. At last, heedless of wind or rain, he caught up his cap, and set off at a run for the captain's house.

The captain was pacing up and down the little parlour, turning abruptly on his heel when he reached the edge of the hearthrug, and again when he almost breasted the old oak bureau at the other side of the room. Seeing the boy standing panting and white-faced in the doorway with his cap in his hand, the captain stopped dead, and faced him. Comethup was trembling so much that he even forgot to salute.

"Oh, sir!" he burst out, almost on the verge of tears. "The little girl—I thought she was a ghost—in the garden—and it's raining—and I promised to go and see her—and I haven't been—and Mrs. Blissett says she's a brat, and—oh, sir—what am I to do?" And poor Comethup burst into tears and hid his face in the lining of his cap.

It may naturally be supposed that the captain was startled. The first idea he grasped, however, was that the boy was in distress, and that was sufficient to stir him to action; he put his arm tenderly round Comethup's shoulders, stooping a little and trying to draw the cap away from his face, and led him over to a chair. There, seating himself, he drew the boy against his knee, saying nothing, but gripping him tightly with his arm, so that the very presence of that comforting, encircling thing should make itself felt without the necessity for words. In a few moments Comethup was calmer, and could give an intelligent account of what he wanted.

The captain questioned him closely, and Comethup knew whether or not he was pleased, at each point of the recital, by the tightening or loosening of the arm about him. When he had finished, and had expressed his determination to go to the house and see the child, the arm held him very closely indeed.

For some moments the captain sat perfectly still; then he got up, walked across to the window, and looked out. Darkness had already fallen, and the wind and rain were making havoc among the captain's roses. It was characteristic of the captain that he took the whole matter from the boy's standpoint; never appeared to consider for an instant that he might be interfering in some one else's business. He saw only, as Comethup had done, the child alone in the garden, haunted by fears of the echoing, half-empty house, and of Mrs. Blissett. Finally, with a grunt, he turned sharply away from the window, walked across the room to a long cupboard, and pulled open its double doors with a jerk; then he pulled out from it a long, old-fashioned military cloak, very

rusty and faded, and swung it round his shoulders with a single movement of his arm. "We'll go and find her, boy," he said, and Comethup followed him obediently from the room.

The captain took down his hat from the peg in the hall and rammed it on his head a little more tightly than usual, and opened the cottage door. A drifting spray of rain drove in at them, and the captain threw out a fold of his cloak, like a huge wing, and drew it round the boy. Then they passed out of the cottage together.

Comethup had only a dim remembrance afterward of that walk; of passing people in the streets, and seeing only their feet and ankles; of hearing everything muffled and blurred through the heavy cloak; of catching glimpses of a storm-twisted sky through certain tiny moth-holes and thinnesses of the cloak as it touched his face. Presently the captain threw back an edge of it, and Comethup saw that they were standing before the iron gates.

"Go first," said the captain, in a low voice, "and call to her. Don't frighten her if she is there."

So Comethup stepped softly into the garden, treading cautiously over the wet leaves, and feeling the heavy rain drops from the branches above him tumbling on his hair and shoulders. He called "'Linda! 'Linda!" as he went.

Out of the darkness near the house came the little figure at last, as he had hoped; not joyfully, or with laughter on its lips, but bedraggled, and wet, and trembling, and piteous. She ran to him and caught him eagerly, whispering his name brokenly between her sobs, and hiding her tear-stained face against his childish shoulder. She did not see the captain, who stood with his arms folded beneath his military cloak, looking down at them.

"'Linda, dear," said the boy, "you are all wet. Don't shake so; nothing can hurt you. And here's my friend the captain; he's a soldier, you know, and fights people." This last as a reassurance to the child that she had powerful friends indeed.

The girl looked up at the captain, looked at him for a long moment in silence. Comethup, turning about, saw that the captain had thrown back his cloak and had dropped on one knee, and was holding out his long, thin old arms toward the child; the cloak fell all about him like a tent. She scarcely seemed to hesitate a moment, but went within the shelter of the tent, and was drawn close there, with the captain's head bent above her. Comethup was so surprised that he did not even think how the captain would be spoiling the knee of his trousers in the wet grass.

"Little maid, little maid," said the captain, "what brings you out here in this dreadful place alone? Is there no one to care for you, poor baby?"

"I came out to see—Comethup," said the child, getting over the name with difficulty, "and Mrs. Blissett saw me and said I should stop here in the dark, and banged the door and went in. I 'spects she's forgotten me."

The captain murmured something concerning Mrs. Blissett behind his heavy mustache, and suddenly gathered the child up in his arms and rose to his feet. And when he spoke, although his voice was very gentle, it was very determined.

"Where's your father, baby?"

"He's writing, and talking to himself," replied the child.

"I'll talk to him," said the captain. "Which way do I go—round here?"

The child told him the way, and he marched steadily through the wet leaves and the long grass, with Comethup following him, until he came to a door. Still holding the child in his arms, he began vigorously to kick at the door, flinging his foot at it at regular intervals like musket-shots. A sharp and querulous voice replied suddenly from the other side:

"Stay where ye be, ye brat! I bean't goin' to 'ave ye runnin' in and out just as ye likes. And stop a-kickin' that door."

"Open the door!" cried the captain, in a very loud voice.

There was a shuffling of feet on the other side, and the door was pulled open. A candle had been set down on some bare, uncarpeted stairs near at hand, and was flaring in the wind; a heavy, surprised-looking country-woman stood in the doorway, looking out at the little group.

"Are you Mrs. Blissett?" asked the captain, rapping out the words fiercely.

"Yes, sir, I be," said the woman, hurriedly bending herself at the knees, in a sort of staggering courtesy.

"Then what the devil do you mean by putting this baby out in the rain?" exclaimed the captain. "Stand aside, and let me in. Where's your master!"

The woman was at first too startled to reply; she backed against the wall, and waved one hand feebly toward the stairs. The captain nodded at the candle, and the woman, with her eyes blinking nervously, groped for it, picked it up, and backed away with it.

"Go first," said the captain, "and tell your master that a gentleman wishes to see him.—Comethup, follow me."

The woman hesitated for a moment, and then went before them heavily up the stairs with the candle. The door leading into the garden remained open, and Comethup felt the wet wind blowing about his legs as he followed the captain, who marched steadily close behind the woman. The child had stolen an arm up round the captain's neck, under his cloak; and he was holding her against his breast with one arm, while his tall old silk hat, dripping with rain, swung in his

disengaged hand.

At the top of the first flight of stairs the woman stopped at a door and bent her head as though listening, and then rapped with her knuckles. After a moment or two, receiving no answer, she turned the handle and went hesitatingly in, the captain following her closely, and Comethup hard on the heels of the captain.

The room in which they found themselves was so very dark that for a moment those unused to it would not have noticed that it had any light in it at all, or any occupant. But, far away in one corner of it, Comethup saw a little round gleam of light, which reminded him of the gleam of lanterns he had seen men carry on country roads on winter nights, and, close beside the gleam, watching them intently and frowningly, a face. Even before the lips parted, and the harsh voice spoke, Comethup had that face indelibly impressed upon his mind, to haunt him long afterward, in its curious detached circle of light, while he lay in his bed under his father's roof.

It was a stern, strong, forbidding face—a face of hard lines and straight firmnesses, without a single tender curve or hollow about it, to proclaim that there was any softness in the man to whom it belonged. The patch of light showed a great, high forehead, from which the hair had long been pushed back and pushed off by impatient hands; beneath this, straight black eyebrows almost meeting, and, under them, eyes as cold and piercing as steel in moonlight. The man, as he sat, was literally hemmed in by books; as the light of the candle carried by Mrs. Blissett penetrated farther through the shadows, Comethup saw that there were piles of books all about his feet, and about the legs of the desk at which he sat; the desk itself was loaded with them, and staggering heaps of them leaned against the wall and perched perilously on chairs and other articles of furniture. In the silence which followed their entry, while the man looked at them from beside his little shaded reading-lamp, Comethup could distinctly hear the heavy, agitated breathing of Mrs. Blissett.

"Well, what's this, what's this? What has happened? What do you all want? Can't you speak? Is the house on fire?" All these questions were rapidly jerked out in harsh, impatient tones, with a little querulous note at the end of each, like the fretful tones of a child.

Mrs. Blissett was eagerly commencing a voluble reply which should excuse her own delinquencies, when the captain stepped forward, with the child still easily resting on his arm, bent his head stiffly and spoke.

"Sir, I ask your pardon for intruding at such an hour, but I am a blunt man, trained all my life to prompt action. I found this mite—this baby—wandering in the grounds outside this house, drenched to the skin, and crying as it hurts a man to hear a child cry. I understood that she lived here, and had been shut out in the rain by this woman" (the captain indicated the trembling Mrs. Blissett with a jerk of his head). "So I brought her in." The captain stepped forward a little, and uncovered the face of the child; she was sleeping peacefully, with her head against his breast.

The man did not reply; he got up abruptly from his desk, kicking over some of the piles of books about his feet as he moved, and began striding up and down that end of the room, with something of the appearance of a hunted animal, turning his face furtively toward them as he turned in his walk, yet keeping always at the greatest possible distance away. As he came to the desk once or twice, and fumbled nervously among the papers and books upon it, Comethup was able to see that his dress was very unkempt and shabby, and stained as a man might stain it who read during hurriedly snatched meals, and was careless how he ate. He spoke at last, in the same querulous voice; he spoke like a man labouring under the lash of some secret trouble, and yet desirous of putting himself right with the world. These people might have been sternly arrayed against him, so strongly and petulantly did he offer his excuses.

"I don't know you, sir; I have no desire to know you. There is an old adage which says something about fools stepping in where angels fear to tread. What if the child was in the rain? What if every living creature that bears the brand of her sex wandered homeless and outcast to-night? Would the world be the poorer? Would any single thing that affects its progress, or its virtue, or its beauty, if you will have it so, be changed or stand still? This woman"—he fiercely indicated Mrs. Blissett—"was given a certain duty, and, like all of her class, having received payment for it, she neglects to perform it. Don't you know enough of the world yet, or where have you been living all your days, that you don't know that?" Then, with a certain sudden jealousy, he made a movement toward the captain, and asked, "What do you want with the child? How does she concern you?"

The captain's arm tightened a little round the sleeping child. "I do you the justice to suppose, sir, that, in spite of what you have said, even you would not leave a baby out of doors on such a night as this," he said.

"Well, well, who said I should? But there are more important things in the world than children; I have work to do here, and have no time to give to the guardianship of babies."

"She is your child?" said the captain. "I have already heard how the mite wanders round this place at night, lonely and neglected. Is there no one to care for her?"

The man laughed, in a curious, hard fashion, and looked straight at the captain. "No, no one," he said. "Really, sir, you take a great deal upon yourself. You trespass on my property, and you interfere with my domestic affairs. Is there anything else about which you would care to make an inquiry?"

The sarcastic note was lost on the captain; he answered bluntly and simply, as was his habit:

"I am an old and a very lonely man, sir, and, although I was brought up to the profession of a

soldier, I have thought sometimes that I am not altogether fitted for it. I have some tenderness of heart still left in me, and I could not have slept in my bed to-night with the knowledge that this child was neglected and unhappy. I have no desire to interfere in any business which does not concern me; but it must occur to you that it is a strange life for a child to be——”

“Well, the fault of that is not mine,” said the man, swinging about suddenly and facing the captain. “She—she has no mother, and I am occupied with—with other things. You—you should not trouble; what can *I* do?” He spoke like a fretful child, walked to his desk, and began turning over the leaves of a book.

The captain was puzzled; saw no prospect, with such a creature as this, of making him understand the responsibilities of a parent. He turned to Mrs. Blissett and put the child in her arms, and said with some sternness: “Take her away, and warm and dry her, and put her to bed. And be tender with her.”

Mrs. Blissett vanished hurriedly with ejaculations of “My precious! The dear lamb!” and the like, and the captain faced the father once more. That gentleman, now that the chief object of the disturbance was gone, seemed only anxious to be rid of his visitor; he seated himself at his desk, and appeared to be busied with his books.

“Perhaps,” said the captain stiffly, “after this intrusion I ought to give you my name. I am Captain Garraway-Kyle, at present living in this town, and I beg you to believe that my intrusion here to-night was with the best possible motives. I assure you——”

“Yes, yes, I quite understand,” exclaimed the petulant voice of the other. “And my name is Vernier—Doctor Vernier; you may have heard of me.”

“No,” replied the captain, “I regret that I have not.”

“Ah! Good-night!” Dr. Vernier’s head was down among his books, so that, by the glow of the lamp, they could only see the top of it. But the captain had not finished yet.

“I am sorry for the little child, and for her loneliness,” he said, “and if I might be permitted——”

The hard face glanced up for a moment and the brows were drawn together in a straight dark line. “Thank you; I desire no one to assist me in the management of my house. Once more—good-night.”

The captain bowed stiffly, turned on his heel, and walked out of the room, followed by Comethup, whose presence the doctor had not even appeared to notice. They found their way out of the dark house, and through the garden into the road. There the captain stood upright for a moment, thinking deeply, and then looked down at Comethup. “Comethup,” he said, “we won’t be put off like this, eh?”

“No,” said Comethup.

“We must go and see her again, and—and look after her, eh?”

“I think so,” said Comethup.

They solemnly shook hands on that decision, the captain bending a little to perform the operation, and then walked away homeward.

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## CHAPTER V.

### TELLS OF AN ERRING WOMAN.

While the captain and Comethup were trudging steadily homeward through the rain, the man in the dull upstairs room sat within his circle of light, trying to fix his mind upon the work before him. He held his broad forehead between his palms, and set his lips, and bent his eyes steadily upon the printed page, tapping out a little impatient measure with his foot, in anger with himself that he could not concentrate his attention. Finally, he got up impatiently, kicking the books out of his path, and began to stride up and down that end of the room, having something again of the appearance of a hunted, animal trotting to and fro within the measure of its cage.

“Am I such a brute?” he asked at last; “are there no days behind these—far away in the background—when things were better and fairer, and when I dreamed a dream, as other men have dreamed, of something greater even than books? It was all lies, lies, lies! The man who hugs a woman to his breast can only hold her safely if he pays the price, and knits her to him with chains of gold, forged tightly. His fleshly arms are never strong enough; she will slip out of them; all the tales of woman’s constancy and woman’s virtue have no word of truth in them; the women were virtuous because their lack of virtue was never discovered.”

He began to pace up and down again, locking his hands behind him, and alternately clasping them behind his head.

“Why should I care?” he began again, restlessly. “There is a fate in all these things, and if the fate means that this child shall grow up, and live, and cheat another man, why, then the fate must do its work, and nothing that I can say will change it. I have had it in my mind sometimes to pray—if any prayers could avail—that the child might die; that’s one of the mysteries of this strange creation of ours, that so fair and sweet a thing should grow up, to foul men’s ways, and spoil their

work. I wonder if I—”

He was interrupted by the abrupt entry of Mrs. Blissett. That worthy woman appeared altogether demoralized, shaken to her prosaic depths; she came in panting, with one hand pressed to her ample bosom. The man stopped in his walk and turned savagely upon her, although without speaking.

“Please, sir, there’s a lady, sir, as do be come to see ye; and she—”

Dr. Vernier, with an angry exclamation, took a stride toward her, but stopped suddenly. There was a shadow behind the woman—the shadow of some one else, creeping into the room with a hand against the wall as though groping blindly. The man had seen it, and stood, like one turned to stone, watching it. Mrs. Blissett, following the direction of his eyes, turned swiftly, and backed away from it. The figure, still with a hand against the wall, came slowly along the side of the room, with her eyes fixed only on him. He seemed to recover himself at last with a start, drew a deep breath, and waved Mrs. Blissett from the room with an impatient arm. “You need not stay—you need not stay. I will see the lady.”

Mrs. Blissett evidently had a vague idea that this was a night when anything might happen; she had performed her small duties about the place for many months, and had never seen a living creature come to the house, and on this night the place had already been twice invaded. She backed out of the room with a sigh of resignation and closed the door.

The stranger had put an arm across her eyes, as though to shield herself from the doctor’s gaze, and was leaning against the wall; she seemed, from the shaking of her slight body, to be weeping. There was silence between them for some moments—a silence which the man broke; his voice sounded strained and unnatural.

“Where have you come from?”

“A long way—a very long way,” replied the woman without uncovering her face.

“Why have you come back here?” His voice was dull and level and hard, and his face might have been cut out of stone, for any changing expression it wore. “You chose your own path; why have you abandoned it?”

She was weeping so bitterly that for a time she could not answer his question. At last she turned her face fully to him, a young and rather pretty face, but haggard and wild with weeping and with sorrow; he looked at it unmoved.

“I have been seeking for you a long time,” she said at last, in a voice scarcely above a whisper. “There has been a hunger here”—she struck herself relentlessly on the breast—“greater than I could bear. I could not sleep; I have even prayed to die. I want to see—to see the child!”

The man raised his arm fiercely, as though to ward off her approach, and took a step backward. “No!” he cried, almost in a shout.

“I ask nothing else,” she pleaded. “If anything could have held me true to the old life—if anything could have bent me to your will, and starved the soul out of me, it would have been the child. I tell you something has gone out of me here”—she struck herself again—“and I shall die if I can not hold her in my arms again. You are a man; you do not understand. You can find it in your heart to laugh at me, because I was able to leave her; but she is flesh of my flesh, and I can not tear her from me. Let me see her; let me know that she is well; let me see her smile into my eyes again; let me kiss her! Man, hear the rain and the wind; I have come through them these many weary miles, and I will go through them again. Let me see her, if only for a few minutes, and I swear to you, by the God that gave her to me, that I will go away, and trouble you no more! Only let me ease my hunger.” She was down on her knees at his feet, stretching out her hands to clasp them; he backed away to avoid her.

“You did not think of all this before,” he said, slowly. “Where is the man?”

“Dead!” she said, in a low voice.

“Ah! I thought so; I should scarcely have seen you here again had he been alive. And what do you think is to become of you now?” He asked the question with the bitter savagery of one who sees something that has wronged him in the dust at his feet, helpless, and is gladdened by the sight.

“I do not care,” she said. “It does not matter; can’t you understand that nothing matters? But my child, my baby; that has been the bitter thing through all. Do you think that I would plead to you as I do now for anything else? Do you think that I would kneel at your feet in any other cause?”

The man began to pace up and down the room again, grasping his strong, square chin by one hand, and bending his brows in thought. The woman drew herself slowly to her feet and watched him intently. After a moment the man faced about, leaned his back against the wall, folded his arms, and looked down at her.

“Hysterics, or appeals, or tears are useless in a matter of this kind,” he said; “let us look at it clearly and dispassionately, as though it lay outside ourselves. You have no right here; your part in my life and in the child’s is played out and done with—do you understand that? You cut yourself off from it all long ago; I have set myself to forget your very name, and I do not suppose that the child can remember you. From the standpoint of justice and morality, you have simply ceased to exist; you’re outside the pale—a lost, abandoned woman. Do you understand *that?*”

The woman did not answer; she stood rocking herself to and fro, like a creature in pain, with her hands pressed tightly to her eyes.



"When I married you," the man went on, "I gave you everything that a woman could desire—money, culture, a home. No thinking woman wants more than that. You chose to tell me that the life you led was dull and spiritless; that I was always with my books; that my friends did not interest you, and that you found their conversation tedious. I think once—it's an old forgotten thing, and I'm not quite sure about it—but I think once you told me that you had hoped for something else; I believe you said some foolish schoolgirl nonsense about love. Well, I gave you all I had to offer, and I fail to see how any reasonable woman could ask for more."

"No, you never would understand that," she murmured behind her hands.

"Then you made the acquaintance of this other man, a ne'er-do-weel, a child laughing in the sunshine, with no purpose in his life and no character in his face. But," he went on, sneeringly, "he was the pretty, empty-headed fool you wanted; he could quote rhymes to you, and fill your ears with things that had no substance in them—things such as every man has whispered to the woman he craves since the world first began. Well, you believed him; you caught at the shadow, and lost the substance. Now he's dead, you think you can come back here, as though nothing had happened."

"I do not; I only want to see my baby. Give me but an hour with her; let me assure myself that she is well; let me see her only in her sleep if you will. I must see her; this hunger at my heart will drive me mad."

"It has not driven you mad before," he said, with a laugh.

"No, I tried to forget; *he* made me forget. Oh, don't you understand that a woman may be righteous even in her sin; that she may cling to a man sinfully sometimes, just because she has promised? It is too late in the day now for us to blame each other, or for me to attempt to justify myself. Only believe that I have left all that old unhappiness behind. John, you will let me see her?"

"How did you find out where I was?" asked the man, after a pause.

"I went to the old home and found that you had left. I made fruitless inquiries for a long time, and at last, quite by accident, happened upon some one who had seen you in this town. I came here yesterday and got a quiet lodging, and set about to look for you. Indeed"—as the man made an impatient gesture—"indeed, I have not come to trouble you again; I will go away, and you shall not see me any more."

The man appeared to be thinking deeply. After a long pause, during which she looked at him appealingly, with her hands tightly clasped, he spoke, going first to the door, and assuring himself that it was shut.

"When I left the home you dishonoured and abandoned," he began, "I dismissed the servants and brought the child with me, and came here secretly. I had some pride, more perhaps than you imagined, and I did not want the stupid story bandied about on every one's lips. I determined to set aside that mistake and begin over again. So I chose this old house, in a town where no one knew me; I got a woman to come in, day by day, to do what little work there was to be done, and to look after the child. It's a dreary place," he said, looking round the darkened room with a sigh, "but the child has to suffer, I suppose, for the sins of the mother; that's an inevitable law. It's an inevitable law also that punishment follows sin—not in the next world only, if there be one, but here. I should be wanting in something, failing to carry out what I have so often preached and written, if I did not recognise that punishment must follow your sin, and that you—poor frail mortal that you are—have inevitably and unconsciously rushed upon your own punishment. It shall be a fine and a bitter one, I promise you. Listen to me."

She looked up at him tremblingly, striving to read in his inscrutable face the meaning of his words.

"You shall not only see the child for an hour; you shall live here, in the same house with it, as long as you like." Then, as she would have cried out, he put up one hand to stop her, and laughed, and went on mercilessly: "But on one condition. I have told you that no one here knows anything of my story; they believe, I think, that the mother of the child is dead. Let them still think so. The condition I impose is that you shall remain in this house, under the name by which I first knew you; that you shall occupy the position of housekeeper; that you shall see the child, and attend to her wants in every way, and at any time you like. I have discovered to-night that she has been somewhat neglected by the person I paid to look after her; you will have a deeper interest in her than that, and may be trusted, I think, to look after her well." He laughed again, then suddenly stepped across to her and took her fiercely by the arms and looked into her eyes. "But understand this: She is to know nothing of the relationship that exists between you; she will know you only as a paid dependent. The instant that, from any endearment you give her, or any word you let slip, she learns that you are her mother, you leave this place, and see her no more! Do you understand that?"

She shrank away from him and covered her face with her hands. "Oh, I can not, I can not!" she cried.

He pointed to the door. "Go as you came; you have no right here; I have been a fool to permit you to stay even so long as this. Go at once, or I will have you turned from the doors!"

"No, no, stop!" she cried. "If there is no other way, I accept your condition."

"Good. But you must clearly understand that you have absolutely no interest in the child's life; she goes or comes as I bid or as I permit; you have no voice in anything which concerns her. But

you may see her, provided always that you respect that condition, and that she does not learn of the relationship between you. The instant I discover that she even guesses what it is, you leave this house, and you never return. Is that clear?"

"Yes, yes, I accept. Indeed, if there is no other way—and I know I deserve not even so much as this—if there is no other way, then I am grateful."

"You have need to be. For the future you take your old name, and we will prefix something respectable to it, for propriety's sake and for the child's. You will be known as Mrs. Dawson, and there is no necessity for you to tell anything concerning yourself that you do not care to have known."

"I understand; I understand perfectly. May I—may I see the child—now?"

"She is asleep, I suspect," replied the man, coldly.

"Indeed—indeed I will not wake her," cried the eager woman.

"Very well. You will find her room at the top of the house, the door on the left." Then, as she was moving rapidly across the room, he called to her. "You will find a spare bed in that room; it was used by the woman Blissett, who attends on her, when 'Linda was very ill some time since. You may sleep there to-night; I will have another room prepared for you to-morrow."

She reached the door, and then turned to look back at him, with some words of thanks on her lips. But he was at his desk, with his head buried among his books and papers; and she stole quietly out and closed the door. Then, with a light and rapid step she flew up the stairs, calling softly as she went, in a whisper, "'Linda, 'Linda, my baby!"

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE CAPTAIN IN STRANGE COMPANY.

For the first time in his remarkably short existence Comethup Willis began to lead a double life. He had already done so, to a very small extent, in regard to his meetings with Brian and with the captain; but now he began systematically to divide his life into two parts. His reason for this was purely an instinctive one, and he would have been puzzled, under any circumstances, to explain even to himself why he saw in his childish mind that such a course of action was necessary. But, although he admired and almost worshipped his cousin Brian, as a being superior in every way to his very humble self and of more brilliant parts, he yet felt that, in a delicate matter like that on which he had embarked with the captain, Brian must be set aside.

It caused him many heart-pangs to arrive at this conclusion, but to his childish understanding it was the only thing possible; having once made up his mind, he kept stiffly to it. He had entered into a compact of the emotional order with the captain, and he consoled himself for any disloyalty to Brian with the thought that he was only concerned with the captain in the matter, and that the secret was not really his own.

This species of deception, while it added a new element of excitement to his life, made him also frantically desirous of falling in with every plot and plan arranged or invented by his cousin on the few occasions on which they met. Those occasions were few indeed, for the captain had shown, in some curious, curt fashion, that he did not like the boy Brian; and Brian, for his part, was laughingly contemptuous of the captain. So that poor Comethup, in order to keep all his friends, and in the deep desire he had not to wound the feelings of any of them, had a very difficult task to perform. A child of blunter character or perception would have got through with the matter very easily, and would not have troubled about it at all; but Comethup took everything, even in those days, in deadly earnest, and lay awake many nights in the dark, sore at heart with the thought that some light word of his to the captain, or some half-promise broken to Brian, might have given either of them pain. Comethup had that strange and—for the possessor—terrible quality of being able to feel, with the utmost acuteness, any pain borne by those with whom he came in contact; the quality of feeling it so instantly that it was often more real in its intensity to him than to them.

It is possible that the captain understood the desire in Comethup's mind that Brian should not be included in their compact to befriend 'Linda; indeed, it was a matter so completely between Comethup and the captain that probably neither of them would have thought of including any one else in their confidence. Moreover, the matter, begun in secret and at night, had, in all appropriateness, to be carried on in the same fashion. Even the captain was not too old, and Comethup certainly not too young, to have a mutually romantic feeling that that was the proper course to adopt. They talked it over together in all seriousness.

"You see, Comethup," said the captain, "we were not received with that—that cordiality which could lead us, with any delicacy, to approach Dr. Vernier again. I'm not quite sure that we wish to do so; but, in any case, it will be wiser to leave him out of the question."

Comethup nodded, feeling that that argument was unanswerable.

"The question then resolves itself into this," said the captain, sitting stiffly upright, with a hand on each knee, and looking down at Comethup, who was imitating his attitude as far as possible, on a stool before him, "how are we to save fair ladies who are wandering about in dreary woods,

and getting wet, unless we do it by force of arms, and bid defiance to the enemy?" The captain had, in his many conversations with the boy, got the true poetic, romantic ring; it was a never-ceasing delight to Comethup that his wonderful friend was able to bring that glamour into the commonest circumstance of life.

"We might go and walk round the house, and—and hide among the trees until she comes out," said Comethup.

The captain shook his head. "Scarcely dignified, I'm afraid, Comethup," he said. "Of course," he added with a fine air of carelessness, "we might happen to stroll past the place, and we might just look in at the gates, and——"

Comethup understood perfectly, and nodded with much vigour. So complete indeed was the understanding between them that, when the captain, on parting with him, said with much ceremony, "You might call for me about seven o'clock, Comethup, if you are not better employed," the boy felt his heart leap, and was eager for the expedition.

But the captain was a man of bluntness, and totally unused to lurking ways. They reached the gates in the semi-darkness, and looked in up the dreary avenue, and then walked slowly on side by side. The captain even waved his stick skyward, and predicted airily that it would be a fine day on the morrow. Comethup agreed with him, with more eagerness than befitted the occasion, even going out of his way to recall impressions of yesterday's weather as compared with the present. Then, about a hundred yards from the gate, the captain swung on his heel, and they strolled back again. Still no sound about the deserted place, and no little figure in the garden. The captain came from pretence to reality at a bound, and faced sternly upon Comethup.

"Boy, this isn't right, and I'm not right to be teaching you to hide and skulk here. I'm going up to the house."

"I think perhaps it would be better," admitted Comethup slowly.

They marched with much determination through the wind-swept garden and among the drifting leaves. Both Comethup and the captain looked eagerly all about, but saw nothing; they made the circuit of the house, and then stopped at the door by which they had previously entered.

The captain raised his stick and struck sharply on the panel; waited a little, but there was no response. Then he stepped back and glanced up at the windows; but they were all closely shuttered, and no light appeared anywhere. The captain stepped up to the door again and renewed his attack on the panel. After another long period of waiting, there was a sound of shuffling feet on the bare boards within, and the door was opened so far as the length of a chain that held it would allow. The captain pressed forward to the aperture and spoke:

"Is Dr. Vernier within?"

"The doctor say he can't see no one," came the reply.

"Oh, I'm much obliged," said the captain. "I wanted to know if the child—the little girl—is well? You remember I——"

"Oh, yes, I knows all about you," replied the woman sharply. "And there's folks as can look after her, and mind their business without no interferin'." The door was slammed quickly, and they heard the shuffling feet going down the hall.

The captain remained very upright for a moment, recovering himself; and then turned to Comethup. "Let that be a warning to you, boy," he said stiffly, "never to argue with your inferiors. The enemy is not to be surprised, that's evident; we must try stratagem. As a soldier, Comethup, I have learned that stratagem is very useful. I despise it, but it's very useful."

But all the stratagem the captain could employ, and all the loyal aid given by Comethup in a cause in which he was desperately interested, failed to bring them any nearer the object of their search. They walked past the garden many times after that, on many successive days, taking it casually in their walks first, and afterward going there of set purpose. But the garden was always empty, and the house apparently deserted. They had almost given up in despair, when one night, rather later than usual, when they passed the gates, Comethup, lingering for a moment, saw the faint flutter of something white among the trees, and ran to it, crying softly "Linda!" The captain went in too, but remained standing just within the gates. With a delicacy which belonged to him, he let the children meet in their own impulsive, breathless fashion alone.

'Linda was clinging to the boy, divided between laughter and tears, when the captain, looking past them, observed a figure hurrying toward them from the house—the figure of a woman certainly not portly enough to be Mrs. Blissett. The captain took a few strides forward, and reached the children at the same moment that the woman came up with them; she stood, almost in an attitude of defiance, looking at him. He noticed that she was tall and rather slight, and quite young. Instinctively his hat came off, and he bowed in his stiff fashion. For a moment there was silence between them; each seemed to be waiting for the other to speak.

"What do you want, sir?" she asked at last, in a suppressed voice.

"I merely called—came here, I should say—in the hope of seeing the child, and knowing that she was well," said the captain. "I found her here the other night, and, though it is no business, of course, of mine, I feared that she was lonely, and, forgive me, perhaps neglected. I came here a few evenings ago, but was refused admittance."

"You are a friend of—of Dr. Vernier's?" she hazarded.

"No, not exactly a friend," replied the captain, diplomatically. "We—we have met—that is all. Are you the child's nurse?"

The woman bent her head and stretched an arm out, and drew the child close against her.

"I thought perhaps you might be a—a relative," ventured the captain, replacing his hat.

"No," she replied, in a low voice, "I am not a relative. Dr. Vernier has engaged me chiefly to look after the child."

"I am glad," said the captain, with awkward gallantry, "that she is in such good hands." The situation was becoming embarrassing; the captain knew that he had no earthly right there, and felt that he must withdraw his forces without delay. He stooped, and held his hand out to the child, who shyly took it; bade her "Good-night" with much gentleness, and turned and left the garden, followed by Comethup, who glanced back again and again at the little white figure walking with the woman in the direction of the house.

Comethup was very serious indeed as they walked toward his father's house. This new figure in the story could not be dealt with with the ease with which a mere Blissett might be tackled. He saw a prospect of losing forever that little figure which had so strongly interested him. He expressed his fears tremblingly to the captain as he trotted beside him.

"Shall we see her again, sir?"

"Don't know, Comethup," replied the captain, dejectedly. "Direct attack has failed; stratagem has failed also. I'm afraid we can't do anything else to assist your little damsel in distress, Comethup."

Comethup went to his bed, to dream that he went again to the garden, and found the gates fastened strongly against him; that he beat his hands against the bars of them, crying to the child to let him in, and to the captain to come with his sword and break the gates down. He awoke in the dark, with the tears still wet upon his cheeks, and cried himself to sleep again.

Sick with the necessity for consolation, he went on the following morning to see the captain. The captain had constituted himself, for some time past, a sort of informal instructor to Comethup; had dragged from an old box some very out-of-date lesson books, and was renewing his own youth by plodding steadily over that first stony ground of knowledge with the boy, taking infinite delight in his pupil's progress. Comethup had learned many things at those lessons—scraps of this and bits of that—and had had, interwoven with the more technical subjects, a certain thread of hard and pure and very fine morality as to straightness of living and one's duty to one's fellows, which had formed the captain's creed throughout all his simple life.

On this particular morning, although neither mentioned his distress to the other, the matter was very fully in the minds of both, and no real attempt was made to take lessons seriously. Indeed, the captain, with a very fine intuition, had guessed what would be the condition of Comethup's mind, and had not even got out the books. Comethup found him standing near the window, examining, with a somewhat troubled face, a pair of boots, passing one finger delicately over places in the uppers which seemed untrustworthy, and holding them from him at arm's length, to get a more general effect in regard to their appearance. The soles of the boots were very thin, and the heels rather high.

"I am going," said the captain, setting the boots down on the window seat, and gravely returning Comethup's salute, "to pay a visit to the shoemaker's." He regarded the boots with a thoughtful frown. "They *might* go a week or two longer, Comethup, but the result would probably be disastrous. One gets used in time, when one is not rich, to judge exactly the moment when delay, in a matter of this kind, is no longer safe, and when the thing must be done, if it is to be done at all. It's like fighting a battle, Comethup; either you must strike at a given moment, or you'd better not strike at all. Will you come with me?"

The captain always addressed the boy with equal courtesy, and Comethup had learned to reply with gravity. He expressed his willingness now to accompany the captain, and they set out.

In a quaint little street, in the very heart of the town—a place which Comethup had not before explored, and which was reached by diving under an archway and then doubling sharply round a corner—they came upon the shop which the captain sought. He had wrapped the boots neatly in brown paper, and carried them tucked under his arm, probably with the desire that no one should guess his errand; he even glanced about him to right and left for a moment before stepping into the low doorway of the shop.

It was a very little shop, so low and small that it seemed half underground; the captain, although by no means a tall man, had to duck his head a little in entering. Comethup noticed at once that it was not like an ordinary shop, in that it had no counter, and that only a heavy bench ran along one side of it, on which an old man was seated, hammering away with much fierceness on something fastened to his knee. But Comethup had no time to take in more than the bare details of the place, for his eyes were arrested by something else: a little figure perched up on the rough bench beside the man and looking with wide, astonished eyes at the captain and the boy. It was 'Linda.

The man who worked had looked up at them for a moment sharply out of keen black eyes, and then had bent his head again over his leather. He worked as one in a frantic hurry—a man who had no time for thought, scarcely a moment even to breathe; the hammer rose and fell sharply, rising up above the level of his head, so closely were his eyes bent on the work. The child sat quite near to him, smiling at the visitors.

The captain's voice broke in across the hammering, and stopped it. "Why, little one," he said, gently, "what are you doing here?"

The hammer rested on the leather, the man's knotted hand grasping it firmly; his black eyes looked up sideways at the captain. "Why not?" he asked in a quick, harsh voice. "What should harm her?" He did not speak like a countryman. Comethup was a little afraid of him, and of his black eyes, but the child beside him only smiled, and did not move.

"Nothing, nothing," said the captain, hastily. "I was merely surprised to see the child here; she is a little friend of mine—we *are* friends, are we not, 'Linda?"

The child nodded, and Comethup, emboldened by her smile, crossed to where she sat and shyly held out his hand. She leaned forward and put her arm about his neck and kissed him. The shoemaker glanced at them sharply, and then, with a grunt, started hammering again at his leather.

"We have been looking for you, 'Linda," said Comethup, softly.

The old man caught the remark and paused in his hammering, in the same fashion as before, and looked quickly round at them. "Yes, that's what you do from the time they lift you first into your cradle till the hour they slip a winding sheet round you; it's the old story, begun by baby lips, and whispered by the dying. Looking for her?" He put out a hand and touched Comethup on the breast and pushed him almost roughly away. "Let be, let be; the little maid can bide here as long as she will." He spoke with a certain stern sadness, and Comethup and the captain looked at him in perplexity.

"Oh, they're very good friends, and he's a good boy," said the captain, laughing. "You don't know the boy."

The old man glanced up at him sharply. "No, but they're all alike." He leaned forward suddenly and took Comethup by the shoulder and drew him toward himself, looking straight into his eyes. Comethup's heart beat a little faster than usual, but he did not flinch.

"Well," said the captain, after the scrutiny had lasted for some moments, "what do you make of him?"

The shoemaker, still keeping a grip of Comethup's shoulder, looked up at the captain and spoke in a low voice. "A good face," he said, "and the eyes of one who will dream dreams, and carry them with him always. I've dreamed my dreams, but"—he passed his hand over his forehead in a lost, dazed fashion—"I've lost them all." He sighed, and took up his hammer and fell to work again, muttering to himself. Presently, coming back to realities with a start, he put down the hammer and asked the captain civilly if he could do anything for him.

The captain produced his parcel and began, with great care, to point out exactly what he wanted done and what he desired left undone. The shoemaker obviously saw here a work on which his finest arts could be exercised, and listened with equal care to the minute directions. The business being finished and the price arranged, the captain lingered in the doorway of the little shop and carelessly put a question:

"Does she come often to see you?"

"When she will," replied the old man, softly hammering. "Sometimes a week goes by and I see nothing of her; and then she'll slip in and sit beside me for an hour, and be gone again—so lightly that I think afterward it's a dream, and that she has not been here at all. It's all dreams; nothing is real."

"Oh, I'm afraid some things are very real," said the captain gravely.

"No." He brought the hammer down sharply to emphasize the word. "If they were real we could not bear them; we should go mad. It's because they are dreams that we can laugh a little sometimes and say that it doesn't matter, and pray for the hour when we shall wake. Nothing's real, nothing's real; we should be glad of that." He fell to hammering again, in the same hurried fashion as when they had first seen him. Indeed, nothing would rouse him again; even when the captain asked that he might take the girl with him, and she slipped down from the bench and walked with Comethup to the door, the shoemaker merely raised his eyes for a moment to look at her, and went on again with his work. They heard the noise of the hammering long after they had passed through the doorway and through the little street; it only seemed to die away when they came out through the archway into the busier parts of the town.

The captain had a delightful new pupil that day. The three went out to the marshes beyond the town, and there, at Comethup's modest suggestion, the captain assisted in the building of the forts and instructed 'Linda in the first principles of military tactics. She proved an apt and eager pupil, overleaping obstacles which appeared to present themselves to the slower mind of the captain, and showing a delightful sense of the fine art of strategy and a quickness of resource in a difficult situation, which elicited that gentleman's warm approval. In the most natural and fearless fashion she walked back with them to the captain's cottage and partook of the captain's simple dinner, unconsciously and quickly taking a position in the small household which no one had dared to occupy before. She showed unbounded delight at the salute given by Homer, the captain's man, and actually called him back into the room again and insisted on his repeating the performance in order that she might see exactly how it was done, making the blushing man do it very slowly indeed, that she might take in every turn and twist of his arm.

Comethup trembled a little, lest the captain should take offence; but the captain's heart had been taken by storm, and he allowed the mite to rule him as completely as she appeared to rule others

with whom she came in contact outside her father's house. Finally, Comethup received instructions to take her back home in safety; and the two children set off hand in hand, the captain standing at the garden gate of his cottage to watch their departure. She had completed her conquest of that gallant warrior by seizing him by the lapels of his coat and drawing his head down in the most unexpected fashion and kissing him before she dashed out of the cottage with Comethup, whose salute to the captain was a mere undignified flying wave of the arm, in consequence of her haste.

At the big iron gates which led to her father's house they saw the woman standing who had been in the garden on the previous day; she drew the child swiftly within the gates, and went down on her knees and held her close to her breast without a word. Comethup, embarrassed, stood looking on, not knowing whether to go or to stay; he felt, however, that the necessity of the situation compelled him to explain the child's absence.

"We met 'Linda quite by accident," he said, "the captain and I, and she has had dinner with the captain. I do assure you, ma'am"—he had got that phrase from the captain—"that she has been perfectly safe."

"Oh, I am quite sure she has," replied the woman, looking round at him with a smile. "And I am very grateful to the captain and to you.—Say 'Good-night,' 'Linda,'" she added to the child.

Comethup was getting quite used to that rapturous hug with which 'Linda favoured her friends—was getting rather to like it. He lingered for a moment outside the gate, until the two figures had disappeared, and then sped away homeward, planning for to-morrow, and for many other morrows, in which the captain and 'Linda explored again with him the wonders of the old town and of the buried ramparts, and renewed acquaintance, for 'Linda's sake, with all the strange things he had learned under the captain's tuition.

It happened that night that the captain was restless and ill at ease. A man of simple tastes and simple habits, he had lived for some years in the old town, scarcely seeing any one but his man Homer before Comethup came into his life. It had cost him not a little to shake himself free from the stiff and rigid rules of life into which he had grown; but, led by Comethup's persuasive hand, he had done so, and had, in a sense, renewed his lost youth in the child's company. He was frightened a little now sometimes when he thought of what it would mean to him if, by any chance or change of circumstance, he lost the boy; he dared not contemplate the barren life he had been content to live for so long, nor think how empty it would be if he had to return to it.

And now, in the strangest fashion, this child had led him to another—had brought even a softer element into his life, and increased his responsibilities. The captain, in a gentle, foolish fashion, was proud of those responsibilities, and would not willingly have let them go. He might have argued with himself that the children had natural guardians who could look after them, and whose rights were greater than any he possessed; but he plumed himself with the idea that the children had turned to him, and relied upon him more completely than on any one else. As he paced about his little room in the dark, he seemed to feel again that baby's arm round his neck and her soft, rounded face pressed to his hollow one; he thought of her sitting in the strange company of the old shoemaker; remembered, with a pang, the forlorn little figure he had first seen in the garden.

It all ended in a determination to see the shoemaker and to learn something more of him. He had visited him on one or two occasions when a specially delicate matter of repairing had to be explained and when the man Homer could scarcely have been intrusted with it, but beyond that he knew nothing of the man. The captain weighed the *pros* and *cons* of the matter carefully, and finally put on his hat and set out for the shoemaker's house.

It was a fine moonlight night, and the captain, on turning into the little street through the archway, saw that the door of the shoemaker's shop was open, and that the man he sought was sitting on the step, with his feet in the room and his back propped against the doorpost. The captain walked on, carelessly swinging his cane, and trying to hum a tune; stopped opposite the little shop, and remarked upon the beauty of the night. The old man grunted some inaudible reply, and looked up at him suspiciously; he was smoking a short, black pipe, pulling and puffing at it as furiously and rapidly as he appeared to do everything.

"If you've come about those boots——" he began aloud, but the captain checked him.

"No; of course I did not expect them yet," he replied. "I happened to be strolling round this way, and thought I should like a chat with you."

The shoemaker took his pipe from between his teeth and stared at the captain for a moment; then replaced the pipe and nodded. The captain was a little disconcerted, but he had an obstinate feeling that he would not go away with his purpose defeated, and so he leaned against the other doorpost and smiled and nodded back at the shoemaker.

"Yes," he said airily, "I was interested in what you said to-day—about—about what you call your dreams; and about—the child."

The shoemaker did a surprising thing: he got up suddenly, thrust his face toward the captain, and looked at him in the moonlight steadily; then turned abruptly, and stumbled down the two steps which led into his shop, leaving the captain gasping and staring after him. In a few moments the captain, looking in through the doorway, saw the glimmer of a light; then saw the old man bending to light a candle which stood on the bench while a gigantic shadow, grotesque and hideous, danced and sprawled all over the wall behind him and the ceiling above. When he had got the candle alight, and had carefully set his foot upon the match, he went to the door again

and beckoned. "Come in," he said; and the captain went down the two steps a little doubtfully.

The shoemaker closed the door and dropped a wooden bar across it. The door fitted above the two steps; the shoemaker seated himself upon the topmost one and waved his hand toward the bench, on one end of which the candle stood.

"Sit down," said the man.

The captain seated himself, and glanced somewhat apprehensively about him. The window was shuttered, and the tools with which the man worked had been piled neatly together on a little table with a raised edge which stood against the wall. Boots in every stage of formation and repair lay all about the place—some mere gaping upper parts, and others having but the faint suggestion of what they might ultimately become in roughly cut leather sheets. The captain drew his coat-tails about his knees and rested his hands on them, and waited for the other to speak. The shoemaker waited for some moments, and then began in a low voice, with his eyes bent on the ground:

"I wasn't born in these parts—it doesn't matter where I came from; some might call me a rough and common man, working at a dirty trade. Yet time was when I read and talked and held my own with men who'd been to school and college. Many and many a night I've laid awake reading and thinking and working—trying, as men say, to better myself. And what has it all brought me?" He threw out his arms with a passionate gesture and without raising his head, and let them fall at his sides again.

The captain was silent, wondering what was coming, seeing in the man's attitude and in his voice some long, pent-up story, and wondering, in his simple fashion, why the man should have chosen him to hear the tale.

"My life was not all work and book-learning. I married. Looking at me now, any man might say I am a hard and bitter creature; but I was the happiest in the world then. We had a child—a baby girl—the fairest, sweetest thing that ever came straight out of God's arms."

He sprang up with a cry and waved his arms fiercely above his head. "Straight out of God's arms!" he cried, in a loud voice. "Let any man deny that she has gone straight back into them!"

"She is dead, then?" said the captain softly.

The man dropped his arms and stared about him for a moment helplessly. "Yes, but that happened long after. I can remember her now, as a tiny child, coming into the room where I worked and climbing on the bench beside me, and prattling to me in her baby fashion—music sweeter than any other that a man hears. I wish"—he had begun to roam restlessly up and down the place, swinging his arms as he went—"I wish it might have been possible for her to remain like that forever. But, of course, that wasn't to be. She grew up, and I was proud of her and proud to think that she belonged to me and held me dearer than any one else. Then into our paradise came the man—as the man always comes. I think he must have loved her—at first, at least; she was so good and beautiful and pure that no man could pass her by and look into her eyes without loving her. And then—oh, ages ago; I've forgotten when it was—she went away, and wrote me a letter saying that she had gone with him and that she would never forget me, and that some day she would come back with him, and that we were all to be happy together."

The captain's elbow was resting on his knee and his head was propped on his hand, so that the hand shaded his eyes. The shoemaker went on, in a dull, heavy voice. He had clearly forgotten that he had a listener.

"I tried to find him, tried everywhere. I watched for her, night after night, until they said that want of sleep and care and sorrow had driven me ill. It was then I first began to dream; I have dreamed ever since. And when at last I was better, and was able to get again to my work, her mother was gone; they did not tell me where at first, but afterward I learned that she had died, and I was completely alone. I came here then; it was a place where no one knew me, and none could ask questions. And here, two years ago, a letter followed me, written by the man, and saying that she was dead. That is the hardest thing of all—that she died in some strange land, far over the seas; and I can not even know where she lies buried, or where she sleeps, or whether the sun shines on her grave. It doesn't matter—it doesn't matter."

The captain raised his head and looked at him. "Perhaps she was happy in her new life; perhaps —"

The man broke in upon the words fiercely. "She died in shame and want and misery. The man had tired of his plaything; in his cold and brutal letter he told me that they had not agreed, and that he had deemed it wiser to part from her. He begged of me to believe"—the scorn in the old man's voice as he flung out his arm passionately was terrible—"that he would have married her had it been possible; he was sorry for her death."

He had drawn his arm, in an uncouth fashion, across his eyes, and his voice shook as he finished. Presently he let his arm fall to his side and looked about him in that curious, helpless way, with something of a smile upon his face.

"And so you see," he went on, in a gentler tone, "I live on here from day to day, and dream my dreams; and am happy to forget sometimes which is truth and which is dream. And then quite suddenly one day, while I sat at my work here, I lifted up my eyes and saw—O God, my heart leaps now when I think of it!—saw *her*; as I thought, come back to me, a baby again, standing in the doorway smiling. That was the best dream of all; that is the best dream still." He raised his eyes, laughed aloud, and clasped his hands.

"Does she come here often?" asked the captain, gently.

"Yes, often and often. We do not even speak to each other sometimes, but I like to feel her close beside me, just as the other one sat, ages and ages ago. Who knows"—he laid a hand upon the captain's arm and sank his voice to a whisper—"who knows but that she is mine, come back, like a fairy child, in purity and innocence, to comfort me, and to tell me that all the rest has been a dream indeed? How else should she come to me? Yes, I like to think that—it comforts me."

The captain would not have stripped away that dream from the man for the world. He was so touched that he begged quite humbly that he might be permitted to come again to see him; and finally went out into the darkness and took his way homeward. But the captain was troubled in spirit, and the shining heavens above him did not seem to have quite the clear and fine message of peace that they had held so long for his simple soul. He took a circuitous route, and came again to the great dreary place where the child lived and looked in through the dilapidated gates. He sighed a little as he turned away, and whispered softly, "God keep you, baby—God keep you!"

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## CHAPTER VII.

### IN WHICH SEPARATIONS ARE SUGGESTED.

In quite the strangest and yet the most natural way the old shoemaker was drawn into that little circle which revolved round the captain. It was a curious little band in most respects, formed of strange beings, with nothing of the practical about them; the captain seemed sometimes to be the youngest of them all.

Comethup's life, at that enchanting time, was very full indeed—so full that he had sometimes to stop and gasp with wonder at all the extraordinary things and the extraordinary people that filled it. The captain had been something to be grateful about, and to hug one's self over; the ghost in the garden had resolved itself into a very sweet and tender personality. And now came this wonderful old man, who hammered away half underground, and talked sometimes like a book and sometimes like scraps out of twenty books, all disjointed; whose hair was wild and whose eyes shone, and who was something to be a little afraid of at first and to love desperately afterward, although, for that matter, there were but few people who came into Comethup's life that he was not able to give some part of his heart to. There was but one little hunger in his heart, and that was that he could not bring Brian into what he would have termed the chief glory of his life, for he had that keen and unerring instinct which told him that Brian would be impatient of the old shoemaker, and as scornful of him as he was of every one else who did not exactly please him.

Comethup got quite into the habit of paying hurried visits to the shoemaker's shop, and then lingering for a while, in the fascination of the man and of the place. Very often he found 'Linda there, seated silently beside the man on the bench. Very few customers ever seemed to come there, and the few who did took no notice of the children. The old man's moods varied greatly: sometimes he was in a savage humour and worked fiercely, hammering away at the leather as if for dear life, and taking no notice of the children; at other times he would sit, with his hands clasped idly on his apron, staring dreamily out of the window, and occasionally muttering to himself. On one such occasion he called Comethup suddenly to him and put his arm about his shoulders and stretched out the other hand toward the window. "Look, boy, look!" he cried. "What do you see?"

Comethup gazed blankly through the window, the panes of which were of old and common glass that distorted everything seen through them. He shook his head, and looked round at the old man. "Nothing," he said, "only the houses, and the church spire at the end of the street."

The shoemaker shook him gently but impatiently. "Look again," he whispered; "move your head from side to side, as I move it—so. See the houses leap and jump and tremble; see the spire of the church double up like a reed, and seem as if it would plunge down into the street. Again—move your head again—see how they leap and tremble and fall!"

Comethup, a little frightened, moved his head, and then laughed faintly. "But it's only the glass," he said.

"Ah, but a man may sit here—a man poor and humble and with no power—and yet dream that he has the power so to sweep away those who have wronged him; to bring their fine houses tumbling about their ears, like things built of cards. Boy, I tell you if a man can dream that, he is stronger and greater than those who have the power to build—eh?"

Comethup obediently said, "Yes, I suppose so," and the old man laughed, and took up his work and fell to hammering. Comethup, after he reached home, tried the plan with other windows, and trembled a little when he remembered the fierce whisper in which the old man had spoken; he wondered, too, why he should carry in his breast the desire to injure any one, or to wreck what he had built. Meanwhile, Brian had to be reckoned with; it was impossible to ignore him completely, and the hours which Comethup spent with him were growing fewer and fewer. But one morning he sprang suddenly into the very midst of it all, as it were, and quite accidentally.

He had been attending the grammar school on the outskirts of the town, in a desultory fashion, staying away when it pleased him, throwing his soul into the work for a day or two, and thinking



of nothing else, and then disappearing for the whole day for about a week, dashing home, tired and hungry and dusty at the end of each day, and refusing any account of his movements. Once or twice, when Comethup had been away with the captain, he had heard on his return that his cousin had called; but when he went himself to his uncle's house, to express his contrition, Mr. Robert Carlaw airily informed him that he hadn't the remotest notion where Brian was, or what he was doing.

"Takes after his father, the young rip. I was just the same when I was a boy; began to go to the devil before I was breeched. It's in the blood, and, damme, I'm the last man to try and stop him, the rascal!"

Comethup usually came away feeling desperately sorry for his cousin, and trembling considerably at the thought of the path that unfortunate youngster was treading, yet having, nevertheless, a sneaking admiration both for him and his ways.

It happened, on the morning in question, that Comethup had arranged to meet the captain; they would, in all probability, find 'Linda at the old shoemaker's, and after that there was the glorious prospect of some hours on the marshes in the captain's delightful company, with deeds of daring to be recited and romantic possibilities to be discussed. It had been firmly agreed upon between the captain and Comethup as to what their duties were to be in a moment of emergency, should the old town, for instance, be attacked by an alien foe, and 'Linda carried off by the besiegers. Comethup almost wished, with a beating heart, that it might happen, because, according to the captain's account—and the captain was very serious when he mentioned it—it would mean midnight rides, and shootings, and maimings, and slaughterings to an absolutely delightful extent.

But this morning disappointment was in store for them. 'Linda was not to be discovered at the shoemaker's, and the old man, being in a bad humour, growlingly stated that he knew nothing about her, not even pausing in his hammering to make the remark. Comethup and the captain turned away sorrowfully. Former experience had taught them that it would be useless to apply at her father's house; but they walked past it, and Comethup even ran a little way into the garden, and softly called her name. But there was no response, and, after waiting a few moments, they were compelled to set out on their expedition without her.

She had taken so prominent a part in their lives of late, and imagination so cruelly suggested her figure in every place they visited, that the business of the day had no zest in it. The captain presently seated himself on a bank out on the marshes, with his cane lying across his knees, while Comethup sprawled at his feet and watched the distant line of the sand hills beyond which the sea lay. Suddenly the captain sat rigidly upright and stared away across the marshes in an opposite direction to that in which Comethup was looking; an ejaculation escaped his lips, and Comethup twisted round on one elbow and followed the direction of the captain's gaze.

Two figures were running toward them, coming breathlessly over the uneven ground, and waving to them as they ran. Comethup sat up with a start. "Why, it's 'Linda!" he exclaimed; and then, in a more surprised tone, "and Brian!"

The two came up pantingly, and the girl dropped down beside Comethup; the boy Brian tossed his hair back from his face, and burst out with his tale.

"We've been looking for you everywhere," he exclaimed. "You know I couldn't find you at your house"—this to Comethup—"nor at the captain's; and dad was in one of his frightful tempers, and had been raving about the house, swearing he'd kill me. He often does that, you know; I'm quite used to it. So you see I didn't know what to do, until at last I thought of that house we went to see, Comethup, you know, the one that was haunted. It wasn't half bad in the daylight, and it wasn't haunted, after all."

"I know that," said Comethup. "And so does the captain."

"How did you find this—this child?" asked the captain, dropping one hand lightly on the girl's head.

"I'm coming to that," replied Brian, briskly. "I went into the garden and had a good look round, and there didn't seem to be anything to be afraid of. So I walked round the house to see what there was to be seen, and I——"

"And you saw me up at the window," broke in 'Linda, with a laugh.

The boy smiled back at her, and dropped down beside her on the sandy ground. "Yes," he said, "and I asked you if you were the ghost, and what you were doing up there; and you said you were waiting for Comethup. And I said that I was looking for him, too, and we'd better go and look together. Then I showed you how to get down from the window by the ivy, and—and here we are." He rolled over on his back, crossed his hands under his head, and laughed again.

It was all true. He had stormed the situation in a fashion which neither Comethup nor the captain would have dreamed of; had flung himself joyously, as it were, into the midst of a matter from which they had innocently plotted to exclude him. 'Linda, too, had entertained him with an account of all that had happened: of her expeditions with Comethup and the captain, down to the minutest details, proud of the fact that she had so much to tell to this new and charming companion.

Comethup and the captain, with a quick mutual appreciation of the matter born of their intimacy, glanced at each other rapidly; the captain turned away his head, and sighed a little. 'Linda saw that, in some strange fashion, she had offended her former friends; the keen edge had been taken

from the adventure, and she looked at Comethup with a little sudden quivering of the lip. Brian, blissfully unconscious, lay on his back on the ground, whistling softly to himself.

The situation was becoming embarrassing, and the captain had just cleared his throat, with the idea of making some commonplace remark which should set them all at their ease, when, looking up, he descried another figure coming swinging toward them at a rapid rate. The swirl of the coat-tails and the poise of the hat were not to be mistaken. He exclaimed hurriedly, "Brian, here's your father!"

Brian Carlaw turned lazily over on one side and surveyed the approaching figure; resumed his former attitude, and said with a laugh: "I suppose he's come to kill me; I didn't think he'd find me here." He appeared quite unconcerned about the matter, and Comethup could not help looking at him with increasing admiration as he observed his indifference to the approaching danger.

But it was obvious, as Mr. Robert Carlaw drew nearer, that he had no hostile intention. He was apparently greatly agitated, and seemed to be shouting something to them as he almost ran forward over the ground. He waved in his right hand a sheet of paper. He came upon the waiting group literally at a bound, and so out of breath that for a few moments he could do nothing but alternately thump his chest and tap the sheet of paper with a trembling forefinger and stretch it out appealingly toward his son. His dignity was too great to permit him to sit down, even on the bank beside the captain; he remained pacing about, and gaspingly endeavouring to speak for some moments, before he could get a word out, and when the words came they were, in view of what Brian said, certainly surprising.

"My son, my beloved son!" He stretched out his arms toward the recumbent boy, and something seemed to catch in his throat, as though he swallowed with difficulty.

Brian raised himself on one elbow and looked at his father through half-closed eyes. "I thought you were going to lick me," he said.

Mr. Robert Carlaw again agitatedly indicated the letter. "My boy, forgive me, I beg. This is a moment when indiscretion, hastinesses of temper, may be forgotten. This is a moment that comes but once in every man's life. You are not—not too young to understand. My boy, I have sought for you"—he swept his arm vaguely toward the horizon—"everywhere. I have been cut—cut to the heart at the thought that I—I had driven you from me. My son, thank Heaven I have found you!" He took off his hat, breathed heavily, and mopped his face with a delicate handkerchief. They looked at him in astonishment, not unmixed with awe; he appeared to be so terribly in earnest.

"Is anything the matter?" asked the captain, breaking a silence which began to be oppressive.

Robert Carlaw replaced his hat at a greater angle than usual, struck himself on the breast, laughed, and shook the letter at the little captain with ferocious playfulness. "Matter, sir? Matter enough! No longer can it be said that Robert Carlaw and his son hide their heads under a bushel—or under two bushels; this letter, sir, contains the promise of fortune—fortune rightly bestowed. No longer shall my son live obscurely, as his wretched parent has been compelled to do; no longer shall he herd with the sons of tradesmen and commoners; henceforth he takes that brilliant path which Fortune has mapped out for him." He laughed again, and stretched out his arms again toward Brian, who was sitting up, staring at him in amazement.

"I'm afraid we don't understand," said the captain mildly.

Robert Carlaw, feeling that he had to deal with inferior minds, came down from the heights. "My dear sir, the matter, bluntly, is this. We are friends here, and there is no reason why all the world should not know such news as I have to tell. This, sir"—he indicated the paper he held—"is a letter from an eccentric lady, of—er—excellent birth—in point of fact, my sister; older than myself, a spinster, and childless. She writes, in her dear eccentric fashion—sweet woman, but, like myself, a spice of brimstone in her—to say that her loneliness tells upon her with advancing years; that she seeks some one to whom she may give what tenderness is in her, some one who shall become her heir. She suggests—nay, in her eccentric fashion, demands—my son. He is to fill the vacant place in her heart, and in her house; he is to become, when it shall please the good Lord"—Mr. Carlaw raised his eyes piously, and touched the brim of his hat with his fingers—"to call her from us, the possessor of her wealth."

"That's very fine for the boy," said the captain slowly.

"Yes," responded Mr. Carlaw, thoughtfully, "the boy is like his father; he was not built for toil. There are those who are made—positively made, sir—to cut a figure in the world, that duller eyes may look on them, and admire. I am one of those; it is in the blood; Brian is another." With a great show of hurry upon him, he thrust the precious letter in his pocket, and stooped and caught Brian by the arm and dragged him to his feet. The boy, with that unbelief in his father which past experience had probably sown deep in his breast, resisted a little, and did not enter quite so joyously into the spirit of the matter as his parent wished.

"But what have I got to do?" he asked, petulantly, rising slowly to his feet with his father's assistance.

"Do?" exclaimed that gentleman. "My son, there is not a moment to be lost. You do not know your Aunt Charlotte; I have but stated the case mildly when I say that she is eccentric. She may change her mind at any moment; may have forgotten the suggestion she makes in this letter before we have time to reach London. Come; there is not a moment to be lost; it is the opportunity of a lifetime."

"Oh, we're going to London, are we?" asked the boy, his face brightening.

"Yes, my son," cried Mr. Carlaw, clapping him affectionately on the shoulder, "to London! London the glorious, the wonderful! London, where you shall take your place among the best of them, and be no more hidden from sight here. Your poor father would have taken his place among its notables years ago, but that the purse-strings had to be kept too tightly. Come, my son, it wrings a father's heart to have to part with you, but Fate has been good to you, my son, Fate has been very good to you."

He had got his arm round the boy's shoulders, and was actually dragging him away, without remembering the proprieties, when Brian turned and looked back over his shoulder, compelling his father to halt for a moment. The smile that Comethup thought always was like light played about his face for a moment as they sat there watching him.

"Good-bye!" he called. "I don't want to go a bit, but if dad says I must, there's no help for it. Good-bye; don't forget me. I won't forget you, any of you, and I'll come back soon to see you. Good-bye, Comethup."

The last they saw of him was his slight, boyish figure, still encircled by his father's arm, going across the uneven ground toward the town. Mr. Robert Carlaw was waving his disengaged hand enthusiastically in that direction, as though he pointed to fortune and all desirable things.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### COMETHUP SUFFERS A LOSS.

Comethup was glad to think, as he sat at the captain's feet, looking after Brian and his father, that Brian had appeared to remember him last and most of all; he was glad to recall it afterward when Brian was gone. The suddenness of the boy's departure made the whole circumstance more surprising and dramatic than it otherwise would have been; this sudden whipping of him off into fortune and grandeur, at a few moments' notice, quite took away Comethup's breath. Indeed, the emotional meeting between father and son, acted out to the accompaniment of sounding phrases on the part of Mr. Robert Carlaw before their very eyes, had held them all breathless. It was only when the two figures disappeared over a ridge that the three watching ones seemed to gasp in concert, and to blink their eyelids, as though awaking from a dream.

"Dear me!" said the captain, pushing his hat back from his forehead and looking down at Comethup, "it's very sudden, isn't it?" In his simple heart, although he scarcely liked to acknowledge it to himself, he felt a certain great relief come upon him with the departure of father and son. It can not be actually said that he disliked Brian; but he was puzzled by him—perhaps even a little afraid of him. With their going, the peace of the day seemed to be restored, and the captain could find it in his heart to hope that fortune might indeed be awaiting Brian in London, and that the boy might remain there to enjoy it.

"I'm sorry he's gone," said Comethup, smothering a sigh.

"I expect you'll miss him?" said the captain. Comethup detected, with quick sympathy, young though he was, a little note of jealousy in the captain's tones, and did not reply.

"He didn't want to go," said 'Linda, slowly, with her eyes still turned toward where the two figures had disappeared.

"No, but I'll warrant he'll want to stay," said the captain sagely, with a laugh.

They fell to talking of him, and of the wonder of his sudden fortune; and from that the captain drifted into telling them of London, and of the width and length of its streets, and the glory of its buildings, and the wonder and mystery that the monster held, a riddle never to be read. He went on talking of the place, as he had known it years before, almost forgetful of his audience, while the children listened breathlessly. Presently, remembering where he was, and that time was flying, he got up abruptly, and took a hand of each and marched them off to his cottage to dinner.

Comethup felt his cousin's absence more than might have been supposed. Now that there was no longer any necessity for fitting in his meetings with the boy and with the captain so as to preserve with nicety the balance between them, he blamed himself, in his sensitive little soul, for possible past neglect, remembered that Brian had called to him last of all before he disappeared, and wished many times that he could have made some atonement. The charm of Brian's light-hearted, mad way of taking life, his resource and daring, were full upon the gentler boy; his disappearance to claim that mysterious fortune which awaited him seemed but a fitting part of all he had done before. Comethup thought of him at night when he lay awake; pictured him in those wondrous streets and palaces and buildings, the glory of which the captain had but faintly suggested; saw him petted and admired; looked forward to a time when he would come back to the sleepy old town, richly dressed, perhaps even with a carriage and prancing horses, to pay a flying visit to his old friends.

Nearly a week went by, during which he paid his daily visit to the captain, and saw 'Linda once or twice, and went through the old quiet routine. He had almost settled in his own mind that Brian had gone out of his life, and was beginning, with the carelessness of childhood, to dismiss the matter from his mind, or at all events to cease to think strongly about it, when one evening, as he sat at the window of his father's house, conning over a lesson which the captain had set him, he heard a shout, and, looking up, saw with astonishment the laughing face of Brian on the other

side of the glass, nodding at him. Comethup had time to notice, even as he hurriedly pushed open the window, that there was no new grandeur about Brian: that he wore the clothes he had been accustomed to wear, and looked in every respect precisely as though he had never set out with his father to discover his eccentric aunt and her great wealth.

"Why, you've come back!" gasped Comethup.

Brian leaned his elbows easily on the window sill, and nodded and laughed. "Yes," he said, "I've come back. But we had a lot of fun and saw a lot of things. My word, you should see London!"

But Comethup was absolutely palpitating with questions. "But have you come down to see us? And how long do you stay? And when are you going back?"

Brian laughed, and shook his head. "I'm not going back," he said. "I don't quite understand it; all I know is that my aunt didn't like me, and she and dad almost had a fight about it, and called each other names. You never saw such a rumpus. And now we've come back, and it's all over." He laughed quite light-heartedly and good-naturedly, with no appreciation of the disaster.

"And you won't have the fortune?" said Comethup, looking at him with wide, distressful eyes.

"No, and I don't want it. I couldn't possibly have lived with her; you never saw such a woman. Why, she's quite blind, and goes feeling her way about with a stick. And if anything upsets her she swears, just as dad does; I really don't know which of them got the best of it. But I'm glad it's all over, although dad went on like a madman about it at first. But he'll get over that in time."

"And you won't go to London again?" said Comethup.

"No. But we had fun while it lasted. I believe dad went back to her house every day from the hotel to try and see her, and kept on ringing the bell until he found it was no use, and then we came back here. Of course I don't care a bit; I don't want her beastly money; but I'd liked to have stopped in London a little longer; it was jolly—would have been jollier if dad hadn't been in such a fury all the time. Good-night; we've only just got back, you know, and so I ran round to see you. Good-night!" He was off out of the garden and down the street almost before Comethup could gasp out a reply.

The true story of that visit to London, and its failure as a commercial speculation, only came out long afterward. Indeed, nothing in regard to it would have been known had not Mr. Robert Carlaw remembered that, in the first flush of his joy, he had unconsciously taken the captain into his confidence; to return, apparently beaten and without his purpose accomplished, would, he felt, discredit him in that gentleman's eyes; and he therefore hastened to give him some explanation, from his own point of view, at least. He paid a visit to the captain on the very evening of his arrival from London.

The captain was, perhaps, as greatly surprised by the visit as Comethup had been by the apparition of Brian. Mr. Robert Carlaw had lifted the latch of the cottage door without ceremony, and stood in the dim light of the evening, a heavy figure, gazing half defiantly at the little captain, who had risen in haste from his chair. Mr. Carlaw, in characteristic fashion, seized the situation at once, and plunged into his explanation before the captain had had time to utter a word.

"My dear sir," he exclaimed, advancing into the room and stretching out a hand with much cordiality, "you're surprised to see me? Confess it; I am surprised to see myself, as our French neighbours would say. I believe I told you when we went to London something of the object of our visit, but"—he shrugged his shoulders and took off his hat with a flourish and banged it down on the little table—"the situation was absolutely impossible, not to be tolerated for an instant by a man of spirit."

The captain did not commit himself to any expression of opinion. He crossed the room, closed the door, and came slowly back again, waiting for his visitor to continue.

"Imagine, my dear sir, what it would mean to be at the mere beck and call of a petticoat—and such a petticoat! All women are unreasonable—dear creatures, I admit, and they've played the devil with Bob Carlaw—but there is reason in all things. To be confronted with a shrieking harridan who doesn't know her own mind for five minutes together, who insults her own flesh and blood." (Mr. Carlaw struck himself frantically on the breast and wagged his head) "and loads my cherished son with reproaches—no, sir, it was not to be borne. Charlotte is a dear sister and a worthy woman, and I esteem her; but—there are limits. I trust, whatever my faults may be, that I shall never be accused of a lack of what I may term the gentler virtues. Vices I have, but they are, thank God, the vices of a gentleman. In short, sir, the situation was impossible. I am glad to think that I controlled myself and—as a soldier might express it—retreated with dignity. Frankly, I do not mind confessing that the loss, from a monetary point of view, is great. My son will not set forth upon that career for which I had destined him with such bright prospects as he might have done. But, sir, you will agree with me that there are limits—limits which may not be passed."

Mr. Robert Carlaw leaned back in his chair and gazed at the ceiling; he breathed heavily, and tapped the fingers of one hand upon the table. The captain began to think that he had misjudged Mr. Carlaw, and that he might be, after all, rather a fine fellow.

"I am sorry," he said, slowly, "for the boy's sake."

"Yes; for myself I do not care; the world has handled me roughly, but I have contrived, thank Heaven, to turn a smiling face to it, as a gentleman should. I have hopes for my son; he is not—not of common clay, and I think you will admit that his appearance is such that he should be able to cut a figure in the world. My dear sir"—he leaned forward and spoke confidentially—"I will not deceive you. There may have been—nay, there was—a selfish thought in my breast in the matter.

I had a vision of my son taking his place, as he should take it, with the aid of that wealth without which we can do nothing; and I had a vision, too, of his old father, who would do him no discredit, mind you, leaning upon the boy, perhaps even guiding him a little, amid the many temptations which would beset him. I repeat, I may have had such a thought, but it was not wholly selfish; it was for the boy's sake, entirely for the boy's sake."

The captain began sadly to think that he had been a little hasty in forming that better judgment of Mr. Carlaw; but he spoke diplomatically. "No doubt," he said, "you would have been of great assistance to him."

"My knowledge of the world and of its pitfalls would, of course, have enabled me to support rather than to lean upon him," replied the other. "But, there, it's useless talking of the matter; the thing is done. You may not be aware of it, my dear sir," he added, moodily, "but disastrous luck has followed me—dogged me—all my days. Think of this: here is my son, who, it has been said, favours his father, and is—again I am quoting others—decidedly a handsome boy. Yet what does it avail him? Nothing; for the very woman whom it is necessary to impress is stone blind."

"Blind?" ejaculated the captain.

"Exactly. Did you ever hear of such a piece of misfortune? I do not refer to her, but to the boy's prospects. Had she been able but to look at him—only once—the thing would have been different. But it happens that she was born blind; she is the sturdiest and the strongest of the family; but her very affliction caused my father to leave practically the whole of his fortune to her. I was left to struggle along on a mere pittance. My younger sister, since dead, got nothing. Yet that very circumstance, which has given her every luxury which money can command, is the undoing of my boy's fortunes. Think of it!"

"Then did she—did she object to the boy?" asked the captain.

"Would have nothing to do with him; didn't like his voice; didn't like his manner of speech to her; didn't like anything. Then, again, she got on troublesome family matters—matters on which we were never able to agree; she rubbed me very much the wrong way; in short, the whole thing was impossible. I shook the dust of her house from my feet and came away. Mine is a nature, sir, that will not brook interference; that bows to no man, certainly to no woman."

He got up, picked up his hat, and began to move toward the door. He had something further, however, to say; the nervousness of his manner proclaimed it. The captain rose politely to open the door for his guest, and Mr. Carlaw swung round in the doorway, as he put on his hat, and spoke in a less self-confident manner.

"I—I am bound to confess that—that the matter—has troubled me. I had—well, perhaps I hoped great things for the boy, that Fortune might smile on him more kindly than it has done on his wretched father." He laughed, and shrugged his shoulders. "However, that's done with; I desire to hear no more about it. After all, I suppose we all take our throw with the dice at Fortune's table some time or other; if we lose—well, we take our bad luck like gentlemen still."

"Certainly, certainly," murmured the captain.

"I—I believe that I've mentioned—something about the matter to you before our departure for London. Of course, I regard you as—well, may I say?—a friend; and it is hardly necessary for me to add that I have no desire that this matter—"

He was stumbling so awkwardly among his words that the captain came a little stiffly to his relief. "The matter is not one which concerns me," he said, "and as I have been honoured with your confidence, I shall, of course, regard it as a confidence."

Mr. Robert Carlaw's face cleared suddenly, and he darted out a hand and caught that of the captain. "My dear sir, I knew it was unnecessary for me to make such a request. You are very good. Good-night, good-night!" He went swinging away through the garden and down the street, humming a tune as he walked. The captain stood looking after him.

Within a few days matters had settled down to their usual routine. It seemed impossible that Brian could ever have been away, or that it could ever have been suggested that his absence was to be permanent. Comethup was quite glad to have his small circle of friends complete again, and, as Brian himself did not appear to regret the loss of that visionary fortune, Comethup began to think that it could not matter so very greatly after all. In those early days, on which the child looked back so often afterward, there was nothing to mar his peace of mind, now that Brian had been admitted, in a sense, into complete intimacy with them all by his discovery of 'Linda, except one circumstance—a circumstance small enough in itself, but one which troubled him nevertheless.

Brian, eager at all times to be in the very thick of everything, however slight, that was in progress around him, had paid a visit to the shoemaker's shop, going there with Comethup one morning in search of 'Linda. Before they entered, he had glanced up at the overhanging shop front, and had read there the painted name of the proprietor, "M. Theed." He appeared to carry the name in his remembrance after he entered the place, and to be fitting it together in some way and puzzling over it. Even as he saw 'Linda seated on the bench, and nodded laughingly to her, he turned in his quick fashion to the old man, who had ceased hammering and was looking curiously at him, and asked, "What's your other name?"

The shoemaker looked at him for a moment in silence, and then replied slowly, "Medmer."

"That's a queer name," said the boy—"Medmer Theed; and what a queer place you've got here!" He glanced round, and then appeared to dismiss the matter altogether from his mind. "We've

come to find 'Linda," he added.

The old man laid down his hammer and put an arm about the child, as though to draw her to him. Comethup was a little surprised and a little frightened, on glancing at him, to see the expression of his eyes.

"Let the little maid stay here," he said, almost in a growl; "she has naught to do with you."

Brian stared at him and laughed, and looked with raised eyebrows toward Comethup. Comethup came quickly to the rescue.

"Why, Brian is our great friend—my cousin, you know. He's known 'Linda a long time."

The shoemaker did not reply for some minutes; he sat, with his arm drawn round the child and his head bent, muttering to himself. Then presently, with a sigh, he withdrew his arm and took up his work, and began hammering again steadily, as though no one were near him. After waiting for a few moments, Comethup drew nearer to the bench; and 'Linda scrambled down and put her hand in his, and prepared to go with them. Comethup politely wished the shoemaker "Good-day"; but he kept on steadily at his work, and did not appear to hear. The three children went out together, and down the little narrow street. Comethup, glancing back over his shoulder for a moment, saw that the shoemaker had come to the door of his shop, and was standing there, with one hand shading his eyes, looking after them.

Nor did his distrust of Brian appear to leave him. Absurd as it may seem, when the object of that dislike was so young a boy, the old man's feelings were not to be mistaken. He maintained a rigid silence whenever Brian came near him, even watched him suspiciously; and although the boy, conscious of it, tried every art and charm he possessed to ingratiate himself with the shoemaker, he signally failed. His boisterousness and high spirits were useless here. Medmer Theed, like most distorted characters, was evidently as strong in his dislikes as in his likes, however unreasonable the former might be.

Nearly a year had slipped by since the sudden journey of Brian and his father to London—a year of uneventful things, during which Comethup plodded steadily on with his elementary studies with the captain, and made, according to that gentleman's glowing accounts to David Willis, considerable progress. David Willis, in his talks with the captain, was full of vague schemes for the boy's future—schools he should attend, and the prizes he should gain, and the brilliant things he should do generally. The two men nodded heads over him on winter evenings long after he was asleep, the captain taking as much as, if not more, personal pride in his achievements than the father. David Willis had, of course, made up his mind that the boy must be a musician; it was the one profession in the world, and there were great prizes in it—prizes which David himself had never been able to clutch, but which would lie easily within the reach of his son. The captain said nothing on that point, but shook his head in secret as he walked home through the frosty streets; there was but one profession in his mind for Comethup, and he—the captain—had already sown the seeds which should make for an abundant harvest in it. Comethup Willis should yet shine in the annals of his country as a greater soldier than the captain had ever been, and should be able to point with pride to the man who had first given him a lesson in military tactics. The captain did not see quite clearly how it was all to be managed; but Fate is good in the case of such a wonderful boy as Comethup, and things could be done somehow. At all events, there was plenty of time yet.

So another summer came round again, with its promise of a renewal of all the old delights, and Comethup was eight years old. Not a great age, certainly, save to the mind of a little child; but Comethup was older than his years, and looked on life, perhaps, with graver eyes than most. Nothing seemed to have changed in his small world; the captain looked exactly the same as of old, and carried himself as stiffly erect as ever. 'Linda had grown, but not to an extent to be marked by one who saw her almost daily. Then suddenly into Comethup's quiet life came a great and terrible change.

One summer Sunday morning he was waiting as usual for the captain at the door of his father's cottage. The bells above him were ringing for church, and he was expecting every moment that his father would pass him, as usual, with his books under his arm, and a kindly word for the child on his lips, on his way into the church. But this morning, although he could see at the far end of the sunlit street the figure of the captain marching toward him, he had seen nothing of his father; and the bell above him had started that slow, dull tolling which gave warning that it would stop in a few moments. Fearing that something might have delayed his father, or that he might—although that seemed impossible—have forgotten the time, he turned, and ran up the stairs to his father's room. It was a small room near his own; the big best bedroom in which he had been born and in which his mother had died, was never used, and was always kept scrupulously clean and neat behind its closed door.

But David Willis was not in his room, and Comethup, a little vaguely frightened, was coming down again, when he saw that the door of the unused room stood slightly open. He paused, and then drew near and peeped in. In the semi-darkness—for the blinds were always drawn there—he saw his father kneeling beside the great bed, with his arms stretched out upon it, and his head buried between them; he seemed to be praying. Ashamed even at the thought of prying at such a moment, Comethup stole gently down the stairs, turned at the foot of them, and called loudly to his father, for the bell had stopped ringing now, and the captain was standing, watch in hand, in the cottage doorway.

He heard a movement above him, and his father came hurriedly down the stairs. He looked dazed, and something glistened about his eyes like tears; but Comethup had never seen a man

cry, and did not believe that they could, and therefore dismissed that suggestion as impossible.

"I—I had quite forgotten," said David Willis, glancing with a smile at the captain. "And the bell has stopped. I must hurry." He went past them at a run, and Comethup and the captain quickly followed.

Late though he was, he paused for a moment at the church door and looked away across the little graveyard to the mound which Comethup had seen him decorate so often with flowers from his dead wife's garden; then, remembering himself, he hurried into the church. The captain and Comethup crept in noiselessly by their own door and got into their places. They heard the first wheezy sounds of the organ above them, and then the first notes of the voluntary; then, even while the congregation were rising to their feet, the organ stopped abruptly, dying away on a long, thin note like a wail.

In the silence which followed—a silence in which he did not even seem to hear the sharp whispers of those about him, and in which the beating of his own heart was painfully loud and stifled—Comethup had time to feel with unerring instinct that something dreadful had happened. Moreover, the captain, who was looking up toward the organ-loft, had closed his hands on the boy's shoulder with a grip which hurt him. A moment later, while the people were still standing looking up in the same direction, the captain had pushed past Comethup, bidding him, in a stern whisper, to stay where he was, and was making his way toward the organ-loft. Some one near at hand—a woman—cried out suddenly, and there was a movement about her, and, before Comethup had quite realized all that had happened, another woman, young and pretty and with eyes that smiled at him through tears, had glided into the pew where the boy stood and had drawn him down on the seat, with his head against her breast. Then, dimly understanding that something was very wrong indeed, he clung to her, and let his tears have vent.

The next thing that he remembered was that the captain was in the pew behind, bending over and touching his head softly with one lean old hand; the woman was rocking him to and fro and murmuring to him, as though he had been in pain. And the people were all rustling out of church.

"Boy," said the captain, in a low voice, "you did not—did not know your mother?"

The boy turned his head and looked up at the captain without answering.

"She was very beautiful and very good, Comethup. She—she went away when you came into the world. Your father was very fond of her—loved her dearly." The captain bent his head, turned away his face, and lowered his voice. "And he is gone to meet her. Come home with me, Comethup."

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE COMING OF AUNT CHARLOTTE.

Comethup slept that night on a hastily made-up bed in an empty room of the captain's cottage. He remembered, long afterward, standing in the room, holding a candle, and shaking every now and then from head to foot with the last of his sobs, while the captain and the man Homer shook out the sheets and punched the pillows, and made the bed as comfortable as they could under the circumstances. It was made up on some old boxes and a chair or two, and the captain was touchingly apologetic about it and its meagreness. Comethup assured him, however, that it would be quite comfortable, and undressed and got into it gratefully; for the excitement of the day had worn him out, and he was very soon asleep. Before consciousness completely left him, however, he had a dim idea that the captain stole softly into the room more than once and bent over him to listen to his breathing, and then crept away again. But so dim was the recollection that he thought afterward it might only have been a fancy.

Breakfasting with the captain was a new experience. The meal passed almost in silence, for Comethup was still weighed down by the strangeness of his situation, and the captain, for his part, felt that gravity was necessary to the occasion. Even in that house, so far away from the actual house of death, everything appeared subdued. The captain gave his orders to Homer in a lower tone than usual, and addressed his few remarks to Comethup in a voice that was scarcely more than a whisper. Moreover, the boy found that a new and sad importance had been thrust upon him by the event of the previous day; the captain was kinder even than usual, had pressed simple dishes upon his notice, and was particular about the sweetening of his very coffee. Comethup found, too, that this importance clung to him after he had passed into the streets. People turned and looked after him as he walked beside the captain, and whispered; more than one seemed to possess an inclination to stop and speak, but the captain held steadily on, and stopped for nothing.

Comethup had expressed a wish to go back to his father's house; had put the matter delicately and with tears, in his desire not to wound his friend's feelings, and in fear lest the captain should think him ungrateful. But he could not bear the thought that his father was lying alone there in a house which he seemed to know by instinct would be more hushed and melancholy than the captain's. So they went together.

Halfway to the house they saw, swinging toward them down the street, Mr. Robert Carlaw. He carried a beaming face, and took up even more of the pavement than usual as he walked. At the

sight of Comethup he seemed to recollect himself; the expression of his face changed, and he sighed. The captain would have passed on, after a word or two, but Mr. Carlaw stood full in the way on the narrow pavement, and there was nothing for it but to stop.

"Ah, my poor little friend! I have been thinking of you all night; have passed a sleepless night. These things touch me more acutely than you might imagine; my nature is highly strung and these things wound me—cut me to the heart. But"—he shrugged his shoulders and shook his head—"in the midst of life we are in death,' you know, and I suppose we must all be prepared for these things.—It was very sudden, eh?" he added, turning to the captain.

"Terribly sudden," replied the captain, in a low voice.

"Ah! these things are not in our hands. I am sorry, very sorry; the shock of it has even tempered the joy I have in some unexpected news this morning." His face began to beam again, try as he would to control it, and the captain looked at him with rising anger, but had no time to utter a protest; the other swept on with what he had to say, scarcely taking breath.

"A letter—yes, my dear sir, another letter has arrived from that dear eccentric soul, my sister. She appears to have repented of her conduct to me and suggests——"

"But, my dear sir," began the captain, "this does not concern——"

"Wait, wait!" cried the other impulsively. "She suggests that she will come here—here, to this very town, at once—to-day. With some compunction, I suppose, for her behaviour to me—although, Heaven knows, I have forgotten and forgiven it long ago, poor soul—she suggests that she will not stay with me, but will put up at an inn. Oh, I know her; I know the dear creature. Protests are useless. I must go to the best inn this wretched town can boast and secure rooms for her. Think of it, she may arrive at any moment. And Brian, the blessed rascal——"

The captain pushed hurriedly past him and went on his way. But Mr. Carlaw in a moment came running after them again, and strode along beside them with a forlorn expression of countenance and with a hurried appeal to Comethup to bear his trouble manfully, and to look to something higher for consolation. Then he turned, and was off again, his step growing jauntier as the distance increased between them.

The captain strode along fiercely, muttering to himself; only at the garden gate did his features relax, and he passed into the house with a gentler face.

The dead man had been carried in there and laid in that big best room upstairs. Comethup had a wish to see him, and expressed it to the captain. But the captain shook his head. He sat down and drew the boy, in the old fashion, against his knee, and put his arm about him. "There are foolish, morbid people, boy, who'd be only too glad to let a little child look on death; but if you'll take your old friend's advice, don't do it. I told you that he had gone to meet your mother; all the best of him has gone, and what is left scarcely concerns us any more. If you saw him now you would carry the remembrance with you to your grave. He died quite suddenly, and very peacefully; think of him as you saw him last, when he stood at the church door in the sunshine, with a smile upon his face. The rest is nothing, boy; the best of him is gone."

Comethup urged no more. The very tones of the captain's voice seemed to bring peace and consolation to him, and he went about the house—into every room except that which was closed against him—and wandered in the garden of the roses, almost believing that the roses drooped their heads a little, in pity for his sorrow.

While he was wandering aimlessly there he heard a noise in the street beyond, and saw that a fly had driven up and stopped. The driver descended from his box and opened the door, and out of the vehicle got, with considerable difficulty, a strange figure. It was the figure of an elderly lady, very richly dressed and enormously stout—so stout that Comethup saw she had a difficulty in getting through the narrow doorway of the fly. Her difficulty in alighting appeared, too, to be increased by the fact that she groped for the step with one foot, even though her arm was resting on the arm of the driver. She had a heavy black polished stick in her hand, and when she reached the pavement, still leaning on the man's arm, she moved the stick gently in front of her, as though to feel her way. As the man pushed open the garden gate, and allowed her to walk inside, Comethup saw that her eyes were closed, and that she still moved the stick in front of her, feeling her way delicately with its point along the edge where the gravel joined the grass. Comethup knew then that she was blind.

The man walked behind her, as though to render assistance if necessary, but she came on fearlessly, stopping when within about a foot of where Comethup stood, drawn up close at the side of the path. "Who's there?" she asked sharply.

Comethup was about to reply, but she felt her way to him, dropped her hand on his shoulder, and shook him a little. "I want a man called Willis—David Willis. Is this his house?"

Comethup, at a loss what to say, was in danger of being shaken again, when the captain appeared at the door. He came forward courteously, with a hand extended to guide her. "This is David Willis's house," he said. "Are you seeking him?"

"I am. What the devil should I be here for if I weren't? Gracious—what ridiculous questions people can ask on a hot day!"

"Can I assist you, madam?" asked the captain, making a step forward.

But she waved him back fiercely. "Keep off, keep off!" she cried. "I'm not a baby, and I can find my way alone, even in such a pokey place as this." Still pushing Comethup before her, she got



into the house and, in some fashion or other, into the little parlour. The captain had backed nervously away from her, as though he were backing from royalty, and now stood at a few paces distant, indefinitely waving his hands toward a chair which he had placed for her. But she stood, and waved her stick round the room, like some strange enchantress, still keeping her hand on the boy's shoulder. There was an awkward pause for a moment or two, and then she spoke again, with growing impatience and in a higher key.

"Well, where is the man? Everybody seems to have lost their wits to-day. That infernal driver at the station sighed, as though his breakfast hadn't agreed with him, when I mentioned where I wanted to go; and now here's a man and a boy who've lost their tongues, and are staring at me as though I'd just come from paradise. Will no one speak? Where's David Willis?"

"David Willis is—is upstairs, madam," said the captain, with the idea of breaking the matter gently to her.

"Well, fetch him down. Gracious, what fools men are!"

"I regret that it is impossible," said the captain.

"Why? What's the matter with the man?"

"David Willis is dead."

"Dead! What on earth are you talking about?" she asked, sharply. She sat down then, still keeping her grip of Comethup's shoulder and leaning heavily on her stick with the other hand.

"I'm telling you the simple truth," replied the captain. "David Willis died quite suddenly yesterday."

She was silent for a moment, and appeared to be ruminating, although there was no expression save that of baffled anger on her great face. Comethup, glancing timidly up at her, saw that above the face, and under her bonnet of many colours, was a great mass of very beautiful snow-white hair. After a moment she spoke again, although her voice was scarcely any more gentle than before.

"Well, this is the last time I'll come on such a fool's errand as this," she exclaimed. "Here I've been wandering about since early morning, swearing at porters and wondering all the time why I ever started, and the very man I came to see has died before I could get to him. Why the devil couldn't he die next week, or a month ago, or any other time? Who are you, sir?" she asked, quite suddenly and fiercely, addressing the captain.

The captain presented himself with some formality, and she nodded at him in acknowledgment. The captain went on to state briefly that he was a friend of the dead man, and had come there that day chiefly on account of the child. She became alert and eager in an instant.

"Ah, I'd almost forgotten it. I heard there was a child. Where is he?—what is he?—how is he?—can't you speak, man?"

"He is beside you now, madam," said the captain, quietly.

She twisted Comethup round, and dropped her stick with a clatter, and took him by both shoulders. Comethup almost felt that the closed eyes could see him, so closely did she hold him for a moment and so still did she sit. Then, in the same abrupt fashion as before, she cried: "Well, can't you speak? What's your name, boy?"

"Comethup Willis," replied the boy.

She dropped her hands with startling suddenness from his shoulders and got up, and spread the hands out before her. She was shaking and trembling violently, and the corners of her mouth were twitching. "Who spoke?" she asked, and her voice had fallen almost to a whisper. "Whose voice was that?"

The captain wonderingly replied that it was the boy who had spoken. She passed her hand across her forehead once or twice, still trembling a little; it seemed as though she were trying to recall some old remembrance, to bring back something which had long since slipped away from her. Presently she sighed, then laughed nervously, and then frowned. "Give me my stick there," she said.

Comethup picked up the stick and put it into her hand. She closed her own hand over his and detained him, felt for her chair with her foot, and sat down again.

"I am sorry, ma'am, if I frightened you," said Comethup politely.

"No, you didn't frighten me; it wasn't that. I—I like to hear you speak. You never saw your mother, did you?" she asked abruptly.

"No," replied Comethup. "She died when I was born."

"Ah, well, you've got her voice, boy, just as she used to talk to me. That's what startled me, coming from the grave like that." Still holding his hand, she sat for a long time with her chin resting on the top of her stick and without taking the slightest notice of anybody.

The captain broke the silence at last. "May I suggest, madam, that we have not the pleasure of knowing—of knowing—"

She sat up with a start. "Oh, I'd forgotten all about it. My name's Carlaw—Charlotte Carlaw. I'm this boy's aunt."

"I met your brother this morning in some excitement," said the captain. "He informed me that he

had had a letter from you, and that he expected you to arrive. He was on his way to engage rooms for you at an inn."

Comethup, watching her face, saw that it began to work convulsively in a most appalling manner; then she bent over her stick and began to shake; and finally her great face broke up altogether and she burst into hearty laughter, swaying and rocking herself in her chair and seeming as though she would never stop. When, presently, she recovered somewhat, she ejaculated breathlessly: "Well, that's good; Brother Bob flaring about the town, looking for me, and seeing that my bed is properly aired, and that fires are lighted, and warming pans got ready, and that people understand my due importance. Oh, it's good, it's very good!"

"He seemed very anxious, certainly," said the captain.

"Anxious? I should think so. I knew what a tremor he'd be in when I sent that letter. Well, I only hope he'll engage rooms at every blessed inn in the place—and pay for 'em. I won't stop anywhere now, especially a place of his choosing. No inn shall hold me; I'll stop here."

"But, my dear madam——" began the captain.

She turned on him fiercely. "Silence, sir! How dare you? This is my brother-in-law's house, and I have a right to stop here if I will. What's it to do with you? I never heard of such a thing. Do you think I'm afraid of a dead man, or forty dead men? I'll stop just where I please, I'll have you know." She turned away from him angrily, and drew Comethup toward her. Bidding him stand quite still, she began to pass her hands over his face, touching every feature so lightly that he scarcely felt the touch at all; she dropped her hands finally with a sigh of satisfaction, bade him speak again, and, on being obeyed, sighed with still deeper satisfaction, and sat for a long time deep in thought. The captain was beginning to wonder what he should do, and was doubtful whether to stay or to go, although he scarcely cared to leave the boy in that house of death, when Miss Charlotte Carlaw seemed to plunge at once into his thoughts and to know them unerringly.

"You needn't be afraid to leave the boy here," she said, sharply. "I can look after myself and him better than any two of you if I am blind. I suppose there's a servant in the house, so that I can send for anything if it's wanted?"

The captain reassured her upon that point, and she jerked her head at him in dismissal. The captain courteously bade her "Good-day," patted Comethup on the shoulder as he passed, and went out. After a few moments of silence she asked the boy abruptly: "Your voice startled me so that I forget what you said your name was. What is it?"

Comethup told her, slurring the word as much as he could to get over the cumbrousness of it; but she made him repeat it again and again, and each time more slowly, until she had got it completely; then she turned it over and over angrily, pronouncing it quickly and slowly, and with the accent here and the accent there; finally shook her head over it and exclaimed: "I can't think what they gave you that ridiculous name for; I don't like it. We'll change it."

Comethup thought of 'Linda, and of how she had expressed her appreciation of it, and said courageously, "I like it."

"Oh, then we won't change it," said Miss Carlaw, and began to talk of other things.

Now it happened that the captain, on his way to his house, ran full tilt against Mr. Robert Carlaw, who was coming round a corner looking very dejected. He informed the captain that he had been to the station five times and had met every possible train, that he had engaged rooms, that he had done everything, and still there was no sign of that dear eccentric creature, his sister.

"Of course, you see, the difficulty is, one never knows when she may swoop down, so to speak, upon one, and a man does not like to be taken at a disadvantage; naturally he does not. This sort of thing is worrying."

"I think I can relieve your mind," said the captain, with a smile. "I've just seen your sister."

Mr. Robert Carlaw seized him excitedly by the arm. "Where? When? Take me to her, I beg!"

The captain shortly related the circumstance of Miss Carlaw's visit to David Willis's house, and, almost before the words were out of his mouth, his hearer had turned sharply and set off at a run, with a beaming face; his dejection was gone, and it was only when he neared the house that he recollected the necessity for a dignified bearing, and moderated his pace. As he turned into the garden, he strolled quite easily and casually up the garden path and tapped at the door.

His sister heard him, and asked Comethup who it was. The boy, who had glanced out of the window, told her. She began to laugh again, but straightened her face as her brother entered the room.

That brother, who had been admitted by the little servant, advanced toward Comethup as though to speak to him; saw the great figure in the chair, rocking itself over the head of its stick, and started back in astonishment. "My dear sister," he exclaimed, "I never expected to find you here. I do assure you I——"

"Don't tell lies," she exclaimed.

"My dear Charlotte, I have been hunting everywhere for you."

"Well, I know that," she returned. "And you've just met Captain What's-his-name, and he told you where I was. Why the devil can't you tell the truth for once, Bob?"

"My dear sister, I do assure you——" he began; but she fiercely interrupted him.

"There, save your breath. What do you want with me?"

"My dear girl——"

"Don't talk like a fool; I'm not a girl, nor a child—as you've found before to-day. When the Lord sent me into the world without eyes, the devil gave me some of his wits, to redress his Master's unfairness; you've found that out before to-day, Bob. Let us understand each other. I simply wrote and told you I was coming down here, because if you'd met me unexpectedly in the street it might have been too much for your nerves. But I don't think we have anything to say to each other; I don't like you, and you don't like me; we fought like Kilkenny cats when we were youngsters, and you generally got the worst of it, although I couldn't see where I was hitting. Now we have to behave like decent members of society, and we can't pummel each other, but I generally manage to get the best of it still. What do you want?"

Mr. Robert Carlaw cleared his throat and settled his neckcloth, and hesitated for a moment before speaking. At last he began: "My dear sister, I had hoped that some—some of the unpleasantness which embittered—yes, I repeat, embittered—my visit to London might have been swept away at this later interview. Of course, I admit that the fault was mine—it must have been—but——"

"Don't worry yourself; it was your fault. But we don't come any nearer to what you want."

Mr. Carlaw sighed, and stretched out his hand toward his sister; showed his teeth in a fierce grin, and shook a fist at her. "I have endeavoured to explain. My object in desiring to meet you is a pure and a simple one—I may say a brotherly one."

She began to rock herself over the head of her stick again in that dreadful fashion which had alarmed Comethup before. The boy would have been glad to escape from an interview in which he appeared to have no part, but that Miss Carlaw had laid her hand again on his shoulder, and was detaining him beside her.

"O Bob, Bob, what a humbug you are! You're one of those fellows who can't take a straight line. If fifty different roads branched out before you, and you were blindfolded, and forty-nine of those roads made for good and the other didn't, by the Lord, you'd choose the other! I believe you've always been rather popular with women—I can see you twirling your mustache; I'm sure you are, you dog—but you haven't been popular with me. The others had ordinary eyes to see your perfections; I had other eyes which served me better." She sat up fiercely, and brought her stick down sharply on the floor. "Why the devil can't you be honest? Why can't you say that you want my money? There, don't protest; I swear I'd like you the better if you'd only say straight out what you want. You've got all our late respected father's cant and none of his firmness. Now, listen to me. Are you listening?"

"I am all attention, my dear Charlotte," replied Mr. Robert Carlaw, humbly.

"Very well, then; let me tell you at once that I'm sick of all this hunting and bowing and scraping after a poor old blind woman's money. Hear me, you rascal! I've had not an ounce of real love or real pity on this benighted earth since my mother died, years and years ago. People have professed to pity me for what they deemed an affliction, and have whispered in the next breath that my money was surely a compensation. There have been men low enough and mean enough to be ready to marry me—professing all sorts of things—for my money; my own flesh and blood, in the shape of my dear brother Bob, is prepared to grovel and bend humbly before me, in the hope that I may remember him, and that he may fatten on what I leave when he has ceased to remember me. Listen to me again. There is no more accursed being on God's grossly mismanaged earth than the forlorn creature with money, and without that which money can not buy. Now, brother Bob, I'm getting old, and there'll be a chance for some of you before long to fly at each other's throats on my account. But I'm going to try an experiment; do you understand me—an experiment?"

Mr. Robert Carlaw at once expressed the keenest interest. "Delightful! What vigour you still possess, my dear Charlotte! What is the experiment to be?"

"I'll tell you. I'm going to make myself useful for once, in a way, if I can. I haven't quite lost sight of the hope that there's some good, some sweetness, in the world. You don't possess any, but that probably isn't your fault. I don't possess much, although I'm a devilish sight better than you are; but I may be able to find some. I've been haunted a little lately by the memory of that girl—our sister—who didn't care, or seem to care, a bit for any of the things I clutch so strongly, and you would clutch if you could. She was fool enough, in the world's eyes, to wait twenty years for a man who wasn't fit to touch her hand—at least that's my view—and then to die before she quite knew what the experiment was worth. God forgive me!—I might have eased the way for both of them; but I chose to laugh, as others did, and then was too ashamed afterward to do anything. Look here"—she pushed Comethup forward a little—"this is her boy; and I've learned, in a pretty long experience, to judge people by their voices and by their faces, for I can know a face better than you could if you had a dozen eyes. Bob, my dear, I'm going to make up for past neglect. This child is left alone in the world; I'm going to look after it."

Mr. Robert Carlaw's jaw dropped; he hesitated a moment, and then came forward protestingly. "But, my dear Charlotte, may I remind you that you have already held out hopes to——"

"Nothing of the kind," she ejaculated. "I gave *your* boy the chance I might have given to any one else; I can't say I liked him, any more than I like his father; but he's got a father to look after him, and this lad hasn't. Besides"—she laughed a little—"your boy will make his way in the world; he's got the voice and the manner for it; he'll sail smoothly through things that would upset any one

else. Therein he favours his father. No, this is my experiment, and if I can squeeze a little love and tenderness out of this baby for my own sake, and not for the sake of my bank account—well, I sha'n't quite have failed."

She got up, still with her hand on the boy's shoulder, and began to pace up and down that side of the room, firing a shot or two at Mr. Robert Carlaw as she moved.

"You've been monstrous kind, Bob, and you've pretty well run yourself off those fine legs of yours on my account this morning. I'm much obliged to you, and, just to show you that I'm in a good humour, I'll pay whatever bills you've been incurring on my account. And that reminds me: I suppose, with funeral about to take place, and other matters of that sort, I should be rather in the way here; besides, I want to go to an inn, where I can swear at the waiters if necessary; it relieves the mind wonderfully. So I won't stop here, after all; I'll go to the inn."

"My dear Charlotte, my house, poor though it is, is quite at your disposal."

"Thanks, I think not. No, my mind is made up, and I shall go to the inn. This boy, with the name I haven't digested yet, can show me the way. What is the place?"

"I ventured to take rooms for you at The Bell, in the High Street."

"Good; we shall find it. Good-day to you, brother Bob. Don't carry any bitter thoughts in your mind about me, because it might destroy your sleep, and I wouldn't have that happen for the world. Good-day to you!"

There was such a finality about those last words, and she began to pace so resolutely up and down the room, pushing Comethup before her, that Mr. Carlaw, after opening his mouth once or twice, as if to speak, apparently gave up the matter as hopeless, and shrugged his shoulders and went out without a word. After he had passed through the garden and into the street Miss Carlaw, who had stopped in her walk, gave a short laugh and addressed the boy.

"Nice man, that! Ran through one big fortune—married money—ran through pretty well all that, with the exception of a fixed sum which the wife was cute enough to secure for the boy and which is tied up, so that the father can only use so much a quarter. Oh, a nice man! And he hadn't even the *nous* to go to the devil decently, whimpered over it, and did it by halves, till the devil must have been pretty well ashamed of his follower. There, we'll forget all about it. Take me to this inn he mentioned. Is it far?"

"A very little way, ma'am," replied Comethup.

"Then we'll walk; I don't want to squeeze into that wretched fly again if I can help it. And I suppose it's been waiting there all this time." She got out her purse and deftly opened it, seeming to know every coin it held by the mere touch of her quick fingers, selected two coins, and handed them to Comethup. "There, run out and give him these and come back to me. And, boy," she recalled him as he was hastening to the door, "just remember that I'm your aunt, and call me so."

"Yes, aunt," he replied.

"That's better."

Comethup ran out and paid the driver, and ran back again. When his cap was in his hand and she had got him again by the shoulder she stopped, as they were nearing the door, hesitated a moment, and then spoke.

"You're not afraid of me?"

Comethup laughed, and assured her that he was not.

"That's well; you've no reason to be, as you shall find. Now go on, and be careful how you go; remember you are my eyes for the future."

And the strange pair set out together.

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## CHAPTER X.

### COMETHUP LEAVES THE OLD LIFE.

Comethup carefully conducted his aunt to the inn and saw her comfortably established there. She appeared to have the whole establishment, from the landlord to the boots, at her beck and call within two minutes after passing the portals; was ordering dishes to her liking and sharply questioning those in attendance upon her, and flinging out an occasional biting word of sarcasm, that held them breathless and awed. At first she insisted that Comethup should stay and lunch with her; but he was equally firm in refusing. He remembered that the captain had enlarged his own simple meal for that day on Comethup's account. He was divided, as usual, between the picture of this new friend, blind and helpless in a strange place, and the other picture of the captain, who had been so curtly dismissed but a few hours since, awaiting dinner for him.

To his relief, Miss Carlaw appeared to understand the situation at once. "That's right; say what you mean, and stick to it. I suppose you've got another appointment—some one else has asked you to dinner, eh?"

"Yes, aunt, the captain."

"Oh, yes, I remember. You needn't mind me; I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself, and if they don't do what I want here, I'll know the reason why, by the Lord I will! Come back here when you leave the captain. Off with you."

Comethup was late, and, although he ran as hard as he could, the captain had already sat down to his meal when he arrived. His face lit up when he saw the boy, although, quite mechanically, and for the due preservation of discipline, he glanced at his watch.

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Comethup, breathlessly, as he saluted just within the doorway; "but my aunt wished me to show her to the inn, and I've been detained. I'm very sorry."

"Never mind," said the captain. "Come in and have some dinner.—Homer, another plate, please."

Very little was said during the progress of the meal. The captain had a vague load on his mind, Comethup a very real one. The captain had been pacing about his room for an hour past, putting the case as clearly before himself as he could; telling himself, in so many frank and brutal words, that this child was an orphan and penniless; that this strange old woman had enormous wealth, and seemed to have taken a great fancy to the boy. Well, that was as it should be. The boy had his way to make in the world, and a poor old half-pay captain, going slowly but surely toward the end of his earthly journey, was not the man to be able to do much to help any one. The captain's heart ached a little, it is true, and he looked back on the years that had stretched before the coming of this child, and the years that would stretch on after he had gone.

Comethup, for his part, tried once or twice to break the matter; he was not very definite in his ideas about it at all yet; he only knew that his aunt practically claimed him, and that she was not likely to remain in the old town with him. He watched the captain nervously, and was quite glad at last when that gentleman opened the matter.

"Rather strange lady, your aunt, eh?" he began.

"Yes," replied Comethup. "But very kind, sir, I think."

"I've no doubt of it," said the captain, heartily. "She certainly appears to be very good-hearted."

There was another long pause, and then Comethup said, "She means—means to be very kind to me, sir."

"Ah!" The captain nodded, and then added, with what cheerfulness he might: "That's good; that's very good, Comethup."

Comethup swallowed the lump in his throat and looked at the captain wistfully. "She says—says she's going to look after me."

The captain nodded again, but did not speak; he turned his head and looked out of the window at the sky.

"I hope—I'm afraid—afraid she may mean me to go away with her." It was out at last, and Comethup waited breathlessly for the captain to speak. But the captain merely stood up and murmured the words of the simple grace which closed each meal, and then walked across to the window. He stood there looking out for a long time, and finally twisted round and spoke a little more sharply than usual, perhaps to hide that which he did not care to show.

"Boy, life's a big campaigning ground, where every man is under orders from a general he doesn't even see. Sometimes it's his good luck to march shoulder to shoulder with a friend for a bit, even to fight shoulder to shoulder with him. But an order may come suddenly, and the one marches off to some other place where he is wanted, or where promotion is quicker. Old and young, rich and poor, gentle and simple, we're all under orders, boy, and if at the last, when the fight is done, there's a comrade beside us to close our eyes and hold our hand for the last time—well, the great general has been merciful, that's all."

He paused for a moment, then sat down on the window seat and shaded his eyes with his hand.

"If it should happen that you have to go out into the great world now, as you surely must go some day—well, I'd be a poor fellow, and a bad friend, and no true soldier, if I held you back. It may not happen now, but—if it does"—he looked up quickly and smiled at the boy—"we sha'n't be the worse friends, Comethup, and we sha'n't forget each other—shall we?"

Comethup's heart was almost too full to reply, but he gasped out, "No, sir," and the captain got up with a smile.

"That's well, boy. Now, I suppose your aunt will be expecting you, and you'd better go back to her. Please let me know what she proposes you should do, and when you are to leave us, if you go at all."

Comethup saluted gravely and went out of the house with a heavy heart. At the inn he found his aunt impatiently walking up and down her sitting room; she stopped as he entered and addressed him by name, although he had not spoken.

"Well, Comethup, settled it with the captain, eh?"

"I've had dinner with him," replied Comethup evasively.

"Ah—and talked about me the whole time, I'll warrant! Well, I'm sure I don't mind, and you don't either of you know enough of me to say any harm."

"I do assure you, aunt," said Comethup, "that the captain spoke most highly of you."

"Very nice of him, I'm sure. Quite pleasant to know that you impress people like that. However,

we won't talk about the captain now, or anybody else. Come over here."

She seated herself near a window and put her hand on the boy's shoulder in the same fashion as before. Comethup felt that his fate was about to be decided, and trembled a little, a fact which she instantly detected.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" she asked, although not unkindly. "Do you think I'm going to eat you, or do something else dreadful to you? Have you ever read any fairy tales? Have you ever heard about a fairy godmother?"

"Yes," said Comethup.

"Well, then, I'm going to be your fairy godmother. I'm going to show you what the world is like, boy; I'm going to look after you, and—if you've got the stuff in you, as I think you have—I'm going to make a man of you. Understand this: I want to make a bargain with you—a bargain I think you're sensible enough to understand. Treat me fairly, and be straight and clear with me, and tell me the truth in everything you do, and, by the Lord! I'll never desert you; play me false, or prove anything but what I believe you to be, and I'll turn you out of doors at a moment's notice to starve. I don't want to make a prig of you. I don't mind if you get into trouble, or what you do, so that you're a *man*; anything short of that I won't stand. Now, will you take the risk?"

It was a strange proposition to make to a child, but, in her deep earnestness, she did not seem to understand the strangeness of it. Comethup hesitated for a moment, and then began politely, "It's very kind of you, aunt, and——" but she instantly checked him.

"Never mind that. What do you say? You must remember that I'm a lonely old woman, and a bit short in my temper on occasion; but I'll be a good friend to you if you'll be a good friend to me. That's fair and square, isn't it? I only want you to love me a little, Comethup, and you may be sure I shall know the difference between the false and the real. If you try to humbug me, I've done with you. Now, what's it to be? Yes or No?"

"Yes," said Comethup.

"Good! Not another word. If you don't mind kissing a blind old fright you can kiss me, and we'll call it sealed. Now, when will you be ready to start?"

"To London?" asked Comethup, anxiously.

"Yes, to London. You can't start being a man in this one-eyed old town; you'd simply vegetate."

"You see, aunt," he began, timidly, "there are people—people I should like to say good-bye to. They've all been very kind to me, and I shouldn't like them to think——"

"That you were turning your back on them in a hurry, eh? You're quite right, boy; only I don't want to stop here forever, and you must get your farewells done with. How many of these people are there? Half the town full, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," replied Comethup, laughing; "there's only the captain and—and 'Linda——"

She caught him up swiftly on that name. "Halloo! who's 'Linda?"

"A—a little girl," said Comethup faintly.

"Oh, you dog! you've begun precious early. Why, you oughtn't to know what a petticoat means at your age. Is she pretty, child?"

"Very pretty," said Comethup, with an air of deep conviction.

She rocked herself over her stick and laughed delightedly, and shook him by the shoulders. "I like you the better for it; we'll make a man of you all the more easily. I suppose you'll break your heart, or hers, when you leave her?"

"I shall be very sorry," replied the boy, "and I think she'll be sorry too."

"Well, well, you shall come back and see her; I don't want you to lose any of your friends. Only, mind, I must be first; I'm beginning to have a devil of a jealousy in me, child, of all these friends of yours who seem so fond of you. Is there any one else?"

"Yes; there's Brian."

The old lady stiffened a little. "Well, it won't break his heart, at all events. Any one else?"

"Yes, one more; Mr. Theed."

"And who the devil's Mr. Theed?" she asked, wrinkling her brow.

"Oh, he's a shoemaker—quite a nice shoemaker, I do assure you; he has dreams, and visions, and things. The captain likes him immensely, and 'Linda worships him. I think that's all."

"And enough, too," she ejaculated. "Lord, what a family! The strangest collection I should think anybody could have got together! Comethup, I'm beginning to think you're a very remarkable child. Well, how long do you want to say 'Good-bye' to these people? Of course we must stay here for a day or two—until after the funeral. Suppose we say a week; will that be long enough?"

Comethup caught gladly at the suggestion, and so the matter was settled. His aunt informed him that she had taken a room for him at the inn, and that he was to sleep there during the remainder of his stay in the old town. She gave him perfect freedom during the day, making the sole stipulation that he must dine with her at seven o'clock every evening; he could leave her immediately after breakfast, but he must never fail to put in an appearance at dinner. Having said this, she quite abruptly dismissed him, and he left her pacing up and down the room, with

her stick lightly tapping the floor before her as she walked.

That strange week passed all too swiftly. There was so much to be crowded into it; so many delightful places—never so delightful as now—crowded with childish memories which had to be visited, and to which silent farewells had to be given. Not all the importance which his new dignity gave to him could quite swallow up the sorrow he felt in tearing himself away from the only place he had ever known. He wished, ungratefully enough sometimes, that he might wake suddenly and find that it had all been a dream, and that his aunt had never really come into his life, save in a dream; wished passionately that he might keep the people and the things about him just as they had ever been. Knowing nothing of that inevitable and seemingly cruel shifting about of the pawn in the great game of life, he resented it miserably and wondered why it should be necessary.

He saw the captain every day. Like an older child than himself, the captain planned to make the week seem longer than it really was; spun out the hours, arranged excursions to their old haunts, and tried valiantly to set aside the thought that their parting was near at hand. Once, indeed, when they were together on the old sandy waste outside the town he started a lesson, new and subtle, in military operations, but broke down in the middle and sat brooding, with his chin resting on his hands. They walked home silently, hand in hand, afterward, and the captain's voice was husky when Comethup left him at the gate of his cottage garden.

With 'Linda it was a different matter. Comethup sought her one afternoon in the desolate garden of her father's house, and, by good chance, found her wandering alone there. She ran to him with a cry of delight and hugged him in the usual tumultuous fashion; then, seeing his grave face, became grave in an instant for sympathy, and asked him what was the matter.

"I—I'm going away," said Comethup, "I've come to say good-bye."

She held him from her at arm's length for a moment, and then threw her arms about him and clung to him, and shook him despairingly. "Oh, but you mustn't, you mustn't! Who's going to take you away? What shall I do when you're gone?"

"I'm dreadfully sorry," said Comethup, miserably. "But you see I can't help it. My father's dead, and my aunt has come down to take me to London. You know, 'Linda, there's the captain, and Brian, and Mr. Theed; you won't be *quite* alone, will you?"

"Oh, it's bad of you, it's cruel of you!" she exclaimed, crying, and shaking him, and clinging to him by turns. "None of them are like you; I don't love any of them as I love you, you know I don't."

That was very gratifying to Comethup; he felt his heart swell within him, even in the midst of his misery. "Yes, I know, I know," he said, striving to soothe her. "But I'm coming down to see you, you know; I'm not going away altogether. In fact, I'm not going away at all for a day or two. It hurts me very much, indeed it does, to have to say good-bye at all; but I can't help it, and I don't really want to go at all."

But she was not to be soothed or convinced. He left her in the desolate garden, with her arms laid against the trunk of a tree and her head resting upon them. He could scarcely find his way between the big iron gates for the tears in his own eyes.

He saw her again, a couple of days later, in the old shoemaker's shop; and then, with the quick forgetfulness of childhood, her sorrow seemed to have gone in great measure, and she asked him eagerly about what he was going to do, and spoke with sparkling eyes of the glories of that London to which he was going—glories which the captain had painted for them. The shoemaker hammered away at his work, apparently without listening; but he must have heard the conversation, for, when Comethup was leaving with the girl, he ceased hammering, looked up, and spoke.

"You'd better have stayed here, boy," he said sharply. "Folks that go to great cities lose their dreams, lose everything that's worth the keeping. You'll be rich; you'll wear fine clothes and see fine people; it'll spoil ye. That life spoils 'em all. *He* came from a great city," he added, in a lower voice.

Comethup gently replied that he hoped it would not spoil him; and presently, after gravely shaking hands with Medmer Theed, went away with the girl. But, after they had stepped into the street, the old man came hurriedly to the door and called him back. Waving the girl aside, he bent down and whispered in the boy's ear:

"If I've been harsh to ye, don't take heed of it. And look to yourself, boy. I had a dream of ye last night, when the moon was high, and it troubles me. I can't quite make it out, but there was blood upon you, boy, and it frightens me. Look to yourself in that great city. Yes, I remember there was blood upon ye."

Comethup, a little frightened, stared at the old man for a moment, and then hurriedly joined 'Linda and drew her away. He turned the matter over in his mind once or twice, but, remembering the wild dreams the old man had had before, and being but a child, with many more important things to think of, it slipped from his memory, happily enough, and did not trouble him.

He took 'Linda back to her father's house in the late afternoon, after roaming about with her during the day, and set off for the captain's cottage. For the captain had been invited by Miss Charlotte Carlaw to dine with her that evening, and he was to accompany Comethup back to the inn. Miss Carlaw had asked the boy, kindly enough, if he would care to invite his old friend, and

Comethup had gladly seized the opportunity. He found the captain a gorgeous figure—in his eyes at least.

That gallant gentleman had raked out of his wardrobe his dress suit; it had lain there unworn for years, since his seclusion in the country, and was very old-fashioned and somewhat threadbare. But Comethup felt more proud than ever of his friend, and only wished that his aunt had eyes to see him. Comethup, for his part, cut a somewhat better figure in the matter of dress than he had hitherto done, for his aunt had had him measured for a new suit of mourning, and had gone down to the little shop at which it was being made, every hour or two during the day, and had so frightened the unfortunate tailor that the clothes had been completed in an incredibly short space of time.

The captain put on his old military cloak, in order to hide something of his glory from the mere ordinary people in the streets, and the two set out for the inn together. Comethup, remembering his aunt's attitude toward the captain on the occasion of their first meeting, trembled a little as to the reception he would meet with; but was delighted to find that the old lady was graciousness itself. She welcomed the captain to her quarters with profuse apologies for the poorness of the fare and the meagreness of the room.

"Not my fault, you know, sir," she said, "but that infernal brother of mine. Of course, I've not been able to discover whether there is a better inn than this in the town, but I'm convinced there must be, and that it's just a trick on the part of Bob Carlaw to cause me annoyance. Oh, I know him, and I'll be even with him some day."

"I fear, madam," said the captain, "that our little town is somewhat deficient in accommodation for travellers. You see, we never have anybody here, or very rarely. This is a very good inn in its way, and I—"

"I beg your pardon, captain," she interrupted, sharply, "you haven't lived in it. I say that it's a devilish bad inn. There, there, forgive my short temper. I shall be very glad to get back to London again, where I know every turn and corner of the house I live in, and can't run against things unexpectedly. Will you oblige me, captain, by informing me if it's after seven o'clock?"

The captain consulted his old-fashioned watch. "By the clock of the parish church, madam, it is some three minutes past the hour," he said.

She rapped impatiently on the floor with her stick. "Comethup, ring the bell; ring it hard. I'll let these people know that when I say seven I mean seven."

The entrance of dinner as Comethup's hand was on the bell saved a further explosion, and they sat down. The captain could not but admire, as Comethup had done before, the ease and dexterity with which Miss Carlaw found everything she wanted, seeming to know by the slightest movement of her quick hands exactly where everything about her was. She kept up a running fire of comment on herself and her mode of life, and on all she had already planned to do for her nephew.

"I suppose, like the rest of them, captain, you think I'm a helpless old woman, and bemoan my fate to be shut up in darkness, eh?" She went on rapidly, without giving him time for a reply: "Indeed, you're quite mistaken. I've got such a blessed lot to be thankful for that I haven't time to think about any little trifle that might otherwise worry me. Look at me, sound and strong and hearty, with everything I want in this world, and the other one too far off to be thought of yet a bit. Oh, and I can assure you I'm not a lonely old woman by any means. I love company; I love to hear voices and laughter and music all about me; there's nothing like it to keep the heart young. I can tell you there's generally a house full where Charlotte Carlaw is—and merry times the rogues have, men and women alike." She paused, and her face grew grave and thoughtful for a moment. "Only sometimes, when they're all gone, and the music has ceased and the house is quiet, I've felt—I'm an old fool, I know—but I've felt it would be good to have some one, pure and sweet of heart—some one who didn't love me for my money, or because I said smart things, or sharp things, or because I was eccentric; some one who'd gone deeper into the heart of the old woman than that, and understood her a little. D'you know what I mean?"

"Yes, I think so," said the captain.

Comethup, at that change in the old woman's voice, had unconsciously moved his hand along the table nearer toward her; she must have been aware of the movement, for she dropped her own unerringly upon it. "And even here, you see," she went on, "the Lord was good to me; I found this baby. I tried to find one before, but, oh! that boy! I sha'n't forget it in a hurry. He'll do big things, I don't doubt; there's no knowing what he will do; but he was too much for me. It's all surface—surface there; I suppose he can't help it, but it's all sparkle and dash and nothing else. This chap's different, I think."

"I know it," said the captain.

"You're rather fond of the boy, aren't you?" she asked.

"We're very good friends," said the captain, with a smile at Comethup. "I was a lonely old man before he came; I suppose I shall be a lonely old man again. But I'm not—not such a curmudgeon that I can't be glad at his good fortune."

"Well spoken, well spoken," cried Miss Carlaw, rapping her knuckles on the table. "And you mustn't think you're losing the boy; I'll trot him down here to see you as often as I can spare him. And you must come up and pay me a visit in London; we'll always be glad to see you."

Comethup's face brightened, and the captain thanked Miss Carlaw cordially. She gave the old



soldier permission to smoke, and signed to Comethup to produce a box of cigars, the best the inn could afford, from the side-board.

"You must forget my sex, you know, captain," she said, "and look upon me as a host rather than a hostess. I should probably smoke myself if it weren't that I'm afraid that I might startle this baby. Oh, I'm going to make a man of him, captain; I'm going to make a devilish fine man of him. And, by the Lord! I think he shall be a soldier."

The captain beamed upon her; saw in this the opportunity for the gratification of those desires he had had, but which he had seen so little prospect of carrying into effect. With the delighted boy sitting between them, they began eagerly to build plans for his future, until, before the captain took his leave, Comethup had grown, in their loving imagination, into a giant of six feet five at least, and was a guardsman in a shining helmet and with a long, drooping mustache. Finally, when the moment for parting came, this extraordinary old woman started up and insisted on the three of them joining hands and singing "For Auld Lang Syne" until the tears stood in Comethup's eyes and he wanted to embrace both his friends from sheer emotion.

But there was a sadder day to come—a day when the parting was to be in earnest. Comethup had already said his farewells to Brian, who, indeed, took the matter light-heartedly enough, and waved aside Comethup's carefully prepared apology to him for having apparently stepped into his shoes. Comethup was glad indeed to think that his cousin bore no resentment toward him.

Miss Charlotte Carlaw, delicately enough, had prevented the boy's presence at his father's funeral; only on the day following it the captain had gone with him to the churchyard, and had shown him a new mound, on which fresh wreaths of flowers were lying—a mound close beside the one he already knew so well. It had been a conspiracy between his aunt and the captain to keep his thoughts away from that sad subject, and the boy was a little remorseful at the thought of how well they had succeeded; but his father's life had been in a sense a thing apart from his—a thing so peaceful and full of quiet dreams that it seemed but a natural and fitting ending, even to the mind of the child, that he should sleep here calmly, in this beautiful place, beside the woman he had loved.

The captain had arranged to collect such personal effects of the late David Willis as might be of interest to his son—personal papers, and some portraits of his dead mother, and a few trinkets; the rest were to be sold. Comethup's life in that quiet old place seemed to have closed strangely enough; he seemed, in a sense, to have left those who belonged to him sleeping quietly near their home, and to be going out of the life he had known quite naturally, now that the life itself existed no more.

The day fixed for the departure came at last, dawning just as placidly as a hundred other days had dawned. Comethup even thought it strange that people whose faces he knew passed along in the street below the window of the inn where he sat and went about their business quite heedless of the small boy who seemed to be leaving everything behind. He reflected miserably that everything would go on just the same when he had gone—that the snow would come, and the leaves fall, and the roses bloom again, for some one else; that the captain would take his walks abroad, and sit in church on sunny Sunday mornings; that 'Linda would wander forlorn among the trees in that dreary garden. He fell upon his knees before he left his room and prayed desperately and with tears that God would teach them not to forget him.

He was very silent over breakfast, and his aunt was quick to understand the cause. "What, not all the farewells made yet, boy? How many more people have you got to weep over before you're carried away captive? There, there, I'm not laughing at you; the Lord forbid! I dare say you want an hour or two to yourself, just to rush round and embrace folks. I've ordered a carriage, and I'm going to drive to Deal. I can get a train direct there to London; if I went to the wretched little station here, I should have to change once at least, and that's a nuisance. It's not a long drive, and I shall leave here directly after lunch. Lunch at two, sharp; we'll leave at a quarter to three. So I'll give you until two o'clock. Off with you."

Comethup made the most of those few hours. In quite a systematic fashion he went from place to place that he had known, going first to his father's house, and looking up at the shuttered windows, for the place had been closed, and the captain had the key until after the sale. The boy wandered through the garden of the roses, and into every nook and corner wherein he had played so often in those earlier years; thence into the churchyard, with no feeling of fear, and scarcely one of any very deep sorrow. The place was so quiet and lay so calmly in the sunshine, and the birds fluttered and chirped so gayly about it, that it seemed a good thing that the two gentle creatures, who had loved each other and him so well, should be sleeping quietly there. He stole into the church, sat down in the captain's pew, and thought of all that had happened since last he sat there. But he was young, and there were living things to be seen, and he did not remain there long.

He ran hard to the captain, only to discover that that gentleman was out. The man Homer informed him that the captain had gone out immediately after breakfast, and had not said when he would return. Comethup, after waiting impatiently a little while, saluted Homer, and then shook hands with him and went away.

The day seemed marked out for disappointment. 'Linda was not in the garden, and when, taking his courage in both hands, he knocked boldly at the door of Dr. Vernier's house, there was no response. Nor was she to be discovered in the shop of Medmer Theed; and that strange old man himself appeared to be so frantically busy that he hammered away as if for dear life, and scarcely returned Comethup's greeting.

The boy wandered disconsolately out on to the sandy wastes beyond the town, looking keenly in all directions, in the hope of seeing a familiar figure. But no one was in sight, and when presently he heard the clock of the old church chime the three quarters he hurried back to the inn.

"Well," cried Miss Carlaw as he entered, "have you got it all over, eh?"

"I haven't seen any one," said Comethup.

"Ah, that's unfortunate. But I can't give you any more hours, you know. Too much emotion isn't good for the young, and you've had a week of it. Come, eat your lunch."

The carriage was at the inn door exactly to the minute, and the small luggage put upon it. Comethup, before he followed his aunt into the vehicle, looked wistfully up and down the street, but no one he knew was in sight. Their way, however, lay past the captain's cottage, and there, to his infinite delight, was the captain at his garden gate, shading his eyes with his hand and looking up and down the road.

"Oh, please," cried Comethup, frantically, "please may we stop?"

"What the devil for?" asked Miss Carlaw, sharply.

"Oh, there's the captain, standing at his gate, looking for me. I really can't go without saying good-bye to him."

"All right; I suppose you must. Call to the man to stop. A minute, mind, no longer."

Comethup tumbled out of the carriage, almost before it had stopped, and ran back to the captain. The captain saw the boy flying down the road toward him; tried to salute in the old stiff fashion, but changed in a moment, and caught the little figure in his arms and held him tightly. For a moment neither could speak; and then the captain, as if ashamed of showing any emotion, thrust the boy gently away, cleared his throat, and spoke quickly. "Thought I'd missed you, Comethup. Make a man of yourself, so that I'll be proud of you. And—and write to me; tell me all you do. There's your aunt waving from the carriage. Good-bye."

Comethup hurried back to the carriage, turning his head once, as he ran, to see the captain standing stiffly at the garden gate shading his eyes and looking after him. The boy got into the carriage, and the horses started again.

"Well, now I hope you're satisfied," exclaimed Miss Carlaw. "Just understand I don't stop for anything else—not a minute. We sha'n't get to Deal this time next week if I have to keep dropping you on the road to embrace all the inhabitants."

As the carriage turned out of the town Comethup, looking out of the window, saw two figures moving slowly along a road across the end of which they drove. Their faces were toward him, although they were not looking at him; he saw that it was his cousin Brian and 'Linda. The boy's arm was thrown round the girl's shoulders, and he seemed to be explaining something to her about some flowers or grasses he held as they strolled along. Comethup gazed wistfully at them, but, remembering his aunt's words, he was silent, and the carriage soon left them out of sight. The last spire of the old town, the last red roof, had disappeared, and only the flat country lay on either side of the broad road. And so Comethup Willis left the things he knew behind him.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### AND BECOMES A PERSONAGE.

The strange pair travelled in state. Comethup had been given such a sum of money by his aunt that the mere handling of the yellow and white coins in his pocket almost sufficed to take his breath away. The old lady was so jealous that the boy's sovereignty should begin at once that she left the paying of porters and the purchase of first-class railway tickets entirely to him, merely telling him the amounts he was to pay, and being careful, in every instance, that the necessary homage in return for the coin was exacted from the man to whom it was given.

"Did he touch his cap to you? Was the rascal respectful?" These were her constant inquiries; and, to do her justice, it may be said that she held her head higher, as she walked with her hand on the boy's shoulder, than she had been in the habit of doing. Indeed, her blindness seemed to affect her more than it had ever done before; she seemed anxious to know what was going on about her, and what notice they attracted. "Do people stare at us? Do they whisper? Why don't you tell me everything, just as you would tell it to yourself? You must remember I'm walking in the dark; you are my eyes for the future."

Again, when London was reached and he had helped her out of the railway carriage, she chuckled softly to herself as she leaned upon him, and nodded her head approvingly. "You walk well, boy; you carry yourself like a gentleman. A man always can, or a boy either, when he has money jingling in his pockets. And I swear that yours shall never be empty."

A servant in livery approached them and touched his hat. He glanced with some surprise at the boy, and spoke to his mistress and offered his arm to her. But Miss Carlaw waved him scornfully aside. "You needn't trouble, William; I can dispense with your help in the future. Where's the carriage?"

The servant led the way across the station to where a fine carriage with two horses was drawn up; he opened the door, and Miss Carlaw got in, followed by Comethup, who began to realize that he had indeed entered upon a life of luxury. The noise and roar of the streets through which they drove surprised and startled him, after the sleepy quiet of the old town he had left. His aunt was eager with anticipations of all they were to do, and of all the changes she contemplated making in her own mode of life, for the boy's comfort.

"Oh, we'll do big things with you, Comethup; you shall be the best-known boy in London. By the Lord! I've never had a chance like this before. I'll dress you like a prince, and let them see that I've got some one young and handsome—for you *are* handsome, you dog, there's not a doubt of that—some one young and handsome about me, who loves me. Oh, I'll be good to you, Comethup, if you keep to your part of the bargain, for I'm precious hungry for somebody's love, I can assure you. I've waited a devilish long time for it."

The carriage drew up at the door of a large house in a square, with a huge garden, protected by an iron railing, in the center of the square. As they alighted, Comethup felt that it must be a very grand neighbourhood indeed, for other carriages were stopping at other doors, and elegant ladies were getting in and out of them. Almost before his aunt had alighted from her carriage the wide door at the top of the steps was opened, and Comethup had a glimpse of a hall beautifully furnished and hung with old-fashioned armour, such as he had heard the captain describe in giving accounts of historic battles—a hall large enough, the boy thought, to be a room itself, and not a mere passageway to other rooms, as it proved to be when they had passed through it. There seemed to be servants everywhere, both male and female, opening doors, and coming in noiselessly with tea, and bringing letters and other things which had arrived for Miss Carlaw during her absence.

It appeared to have been the work of a confidential servant—an elderly, staid woman, who was apparently the housekeeper—to open and read these letters aloud to her mistress; but when she was about to do this now, Miss Carlaw stopped her and turned to Comethup. "Can you read?" she asked, sharply.

"A little," replied Comethup. "The captain taught me."

"Give me one of those letters," said Miss Carlaw, holding out her hand to the housekeeper. A letter was handed to her, over the back of which she swiftly passed her hand; she appeared to know in an instant from whom it came, by the crest on the back, and even muttered the name. This she handed to Comethup. "Open it," she said, "and read it."

Comethup opened it tremblingly, and floundered about for a moment among the strange, cramped handwriting; then blushing confessed that he had not been used to reading writing.

"No, of course not; very foolish of me to think you would be able to," replied his aunt, taking the letter from him. "For the present we shall have to go on in the old way, until you've learned a little more, Comethup; and then we'll dispense with everybody else for our private matters."

The letters were opened by the housekeeper, and read aloud, Miss Charlotte Carlaw making audible comments upon them as the reading proceeded. Then a minute account was given of all that had occurred in her absence—the names of callers, and what they had said and what messages they had left. When all was finished, and Miss Carlaw had drunk her tea and had seen that Comethup was also provided with refreshment, she gave orders that all the servants in the place were to be brought to her.

"Every Jack and Jill of 'em," she exclaimed, emphatically; "I've something to say to them."

When they were all wonderingly and somewhat sheepishly assembled, she delivered herself, proudly and firmly, of what she had made up her mind to say.

"Now, just attend to me, all of you, for I'm in deadly earnest, and I mean to see that my orders are carried, out. You see this young gentleman"—she indicated Comethup, who was seated beside her—"this is Master Willis, my nephew. For the future he takes a place in this house, and wherever I may be, second only to mine. If he says a thing is to be done, understand that it is to be done; if he gives an order to any one of you, it must be obeyed, as swiftly as though I had given it myself. You needn't be alarmed, any of you; he's not the sort of fellow to give any of you any trouble. But, trouble or no trouble, you will understand he's the young master here, and the Lord help the man or the woman that forgets it! You know me, or you should by this time, and you know that, although I can't actually see you, I know what you're doing, every one of you, by night or by day. I know your tricks, and your humours, and your little tempers, and all the rest of it; but we'll have no tricks or humours or tempers with Master Willis. As I say, you won't find him exacting; but what he wants he's to have. That's all; I've nothing more to say."

They appeared to understand very perfectly. One of them—Comethup thought it was the butler—even stepped forward and murmured a little incoherent speech, intended to convey the loyalty of himself and his fellow-servants to the young master. Miss Charlotte Carlaw nodded approval, even punctuated the broken speech with nods, and dismissed them all with a wave of her hand.

"Now you understand, Comethup," she said, turning to the boy when they had gone, and putting her hand on his shoulder, "what your power here is. You'll find, although I don't think you need the advice, that all the money in the world won't enable you to hold that power if you don't set about your life in the right way. If you're peevish, or tyrannical, or unjust—well, you must expect to get sour looks and unwilling service; if you are a gentleman, and show that you only demand what is your right, and demand it courteously—for servants are human beings, and have their feelings—you'll be served gladly and faithfully; at least that's what I've found. Now come with

me, and I'll show you over the house, and I'll show you your rooms."

She appeared to know every inch of the great house, from the lowest floor to the garret, telling him instantly what each room was, even to the servants' rooms. "I keep a butler and a housekeeper," she explained, "but I like to know everything myself, and what everybody is doing. They used to think once they could cheat me because I couldn't see 'em; but they found out their mistake long since."

It was indeed a beautiful house, scrupulously kept, and very richly furnished. Rare pictures hung on the walls, and wonderful china stood on shelves in cabinets; and the tables and chairs and other articles of furniture were many of them richly inlaid with rare and precious woods. "I can't see any of these things, you know, Comethup; I can only tell the shape of them, and I'm a pretty good judge in that way. But all these things are here because it pleases me to think that I can afford to buy them, and to delight other people's eyes with them, perhaps even to make some of 'em a little envious. I was born to have eyes, if ever any creature was, for I love rich and beautiful things, even pictures. I've got a man who happens to be honest, and knows a good picture when he sees one. When you've grown older, and studied hard, you'll know the value of all these things, Comethup, and you'll be able to describe, in your own way, all the pictures to me; and that will please us both. Now come and look at your own rooms."

The two rooms which had been allotted to him seemed, to his delighted eyes, the most beautiful in the house. They were quite high up, and quite simply furnished; but the windows of both looked out over the square, where all the life and bustle that were so fascinating went on; and each seemed to contain exactly everything that a boy could possibly need. In the sitting room were pictures of battle scenes, and deeds of daring generally, choice engravings and etchings for the most part; and on the tables and on shelves were numbers of books, beautifully bound, whose very titles, as he glanced at them, gave promise of the delights to be found within.

Miss Charlotte Carlaw stood perfectly still, with her hand upon his shoulder, until she heard his astonished gasps; then she chuckled with satisfaction and marched him through into the bedroom. Here a young man in a sober brown suit was unpacking his box and carefully arranging its contents in the wardrobe and in a huge press that stood at one side of the room. He was a round-faced, good-humoured-looking young man, and Comethup liked his appearance.

"Ah, is that you, Gwilt?" cried Miss Carlaw. "This is your young master, Master Willis.—Comethup, Gwilt will attend to you, and do everything you want—brush your clothes and keep them in order, and assist you to dress when necessary. He is your special servant, and will have no other duties. Now tell me; do you like these rooms?"

"I think they're beautiful," said Comethup.

"Well, just look round them, and tell me if you think there's anything else you would like. What do you think of the pictures? I got a man specially to choose them, told him they must be bright, and just the sort of things a boy would like; no sickly love-making, or cottage interiors, or nonsense of that kind, but just a few with some blood in 'em—fighting, and chopping up, and highwaymen, and nice little delicacies of that kind. Like 'em, eh?"

"I don't think I shall ever get tired of looking at them," said Comethup. "And there are a heap of books here, too, aunt—quite the most beautiful books I've ever seen," he added.

"Of course, I'd forgotten the books. I wrote to a bookseller to send me all he could think of that would be likely to appeal to you—same style as the pictures, you know. Now there isn't much time before dinner, so just wash your hands, and come down to the drawing room when you hear the first bell. I'll go and change my frock."

She was going out of the room, with her stick moving before her, when Comethup sprang to her side. "Won't you let me—let me take you——" he began.

She understood in a moment, and her face lighted up as she looked down at him. She did not merely put her hand on his shoulder, as she had done before; she drew it round his neck. "That's my dear boy!" she said, almost in a whisper.

He conducted her safely to the door of her room, and then dashed upstairs again to his own. It was quite a new sensation to have some one to attend on him, to anticipate his smallest wants, and be ready silently and respectfully with each thing he required. The young man was deft and quick, and seemed really proud of his young charge; he even delicately turned him round for inspection at the last moment, and smiled and nodded approval.

"There's a tailor, and a bootmaker, and other people a-coming to-morrow, sir; Miss Carlaw's orders, you know. Miss Carlaw says as she'll be present for the measurin', sir, so as to tell the men what she wants you to have, sir. They'll be here at eleven in the morning, sir."

"Oh, thank you," said Comethup, a little staggered by the intelligence.

He found his aunt in the drawing room, pacing up and down in her old fashion, with her black stick lightly touching the carpet before her. Her hand upon his shoulder, as they went into the dining room, reminded her of the subject of his clothes; she moved her fingers over the cloth impatiently.

"Yes, we'll change all this, Comethup," she said. "I told you we'd dress you like a prince; we'll have a velvet dinner suit for you. Lord! I'll make 'em stare at you; I'll give 'em something to talk about. They talk of their brats to me, and the beauty of them, and the cleverness, and the devil knows what; we'll outshine 'em all, Comethup."

They dined in solemn state that evening, Comethup sitting near his aunt at one end of the long table, with the grave butler—who looked so very great and so awe-inspiring that Comethup had felt a sudden inclination, on entering the room, to bow to him—and some three or four gigantic footmen in attendance. There were many courses, and Comethup was considerably at a loss as to how to manage, until he began to watch his aunt and to do exactly as she did, after which he got on pretty well.

Soon after dinner she dismissed him, telling him that she knew he must be tired, and that she should go soon to bed herself. He kissed her, and, out of the fulness of his heart, murmured a few grateful words to her; she laughed and thrust him gently away, telling him, as he went out, to ring for his man if he wanted him. Comethup was too full of the joy of those wondrous rooms of his to want a stranger near him then; he rambled happily about the rooms for some time, looking at the pictures, and opening the books, and examining everything that was to be examined. Finally he undressed and got into bed and fell asleep, and dreamed that Gwilt had turned suddenly into an ogre and swallowed all his clothes, so that he could not get up, although his aunt was calling him from the bottom of the stairs, and a perfect army of servants were lined up and down the staircase, bowing and waiting for him to pass.

He was awakened in the morning by Gwilt, who looked anything but an ogre, with his fresh, cheerful, smiling face, with the information that his bath was ready. He was getting a little used by now to this wondrous change in his fortunes, and to the fact that grown men and women seemed to take a delight in ministering to the needs of such a small and insignificant boy as himself. He got through the day very well, passing through the ordeal of being measured for an enormous quantity of clothing, which he felt he should never under any circumstances wear out, and noting with surprise how completely his aunt seemed to understand exactly what she wanted him to wear, and how unerringly she knew the texture of cloth and velvet and laces by the mere touch of those quick fingers of hers.

On this second day there were again no visitors, a fact which Miss Carlaw explained to Comethup after the servants had been dismissed and while she was drinking her wine after dinner. "You see, Comethup, I don't believe in half-measures. I've made up my mind to spring you on them all at once, as it were, to show you forth in all your glory. I'm quite sure you're a handsome boy, even as you are in your country clothes; but I'm going to make you look handsomer yet. By the Lord, I'll dazzle 'em!"

The clothes began to arrive in an incredibly short space of time, and in about a week from Comethup's first appearance in London his aunt informed him one morning that a big dinner party was to be given that night at which he was to be present. She was evidently very anxious about the matter—so much so that she communicated some of her anxiety to him, and it was an exciting day for both of them.

"The people who are coming are chatterers, fools, every one of 'em; but they're just the people we want to give you a send-off and to blazon the whole thing right and left. You shall be dressed like a prince to-night, indeed; I've given Gwilt his orders. And understand that when you've taken me to my set, *you* are to take the one at the other end of the table; don't forget that. You've nothing to be frightened at, child; they'll rally you, and tease you, some of 'em, but you've only got to be yourself, and to be quite simple and natural, and I'm sure I sha'n't blush for you. There are two golden rules for any one of the male sex entering society: one is, that every man he meets is a fine fellow, worthy of his admiration; and the other, that every woman, even if she's ninety, and ugly as the devil, is a goddess to be bowed before. Let him remember that always, and, by the Lord! he'll be popular."

Comethup was dressed early that night, by his aunt's instructions, in a soft, loose suit of brown velvet, with a wide lace collar on his shoulders—lace of a value which had made Comethup blink at the mere naming of the price in his hearing. Deep lace ruffles fell over his small hands, and he looked altogether a captivating little figure as he joined his aunt in the drawing room, where she was awaiting the arrival of her guests. She drew him toward her and ran her hands quickly all over him, to assure herself that everything was right.

"I wish I had eyes to-night, child," she said, with a little sigh. "But I shall know what you look like by the impression you create."

Comethup only dimly remembered that evening afterward. He knew that a great number of people came, all very richly dressed, and most of the ladies blazing with diamonds; that a number of the ladies went into raptures over him, and that one of the gentlemen, who chuckled tremendously at everything any one said, dubbed him "Prince Charming"; that, seated at his end of the table, with a gigantic footman standing behind him, he sent every one within hearing into paroxysms of laughter by returning what he thought were perfectly polite and natural answers to questions which were asked him; that Miss Carlaw leaned her head sideways to catch what was said, and nodded and smiled, and was altogether immensely delighted with the success her nephew was achieving.

Indeed, the astute old lady made quite a mystery of him; hinted at a romantic parentage, and refused to say where she had discovered him, or anything about him. She called him to her, as the ladies were leaving the room, and put her arm about his neck and bent down and whispered: "You're a wonder, Comethup; I'm very well pleased with you, Prince Charming."

His last sleepy recollection of that night was of standing with his aunt in the hall, where she was bidding her guests good-night, with the summer-night wind blowing in upon them through the open door, and the lights of the carriages outside, while every man gravely shook hands with

him, and every woman insisted on kissing him. He wondered then what they would have thought if he had suddenly saluted in the fashion the captain had taught him. And with that thought he wondered what the captain was doing then, and whether he had missed his small boy friend.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CAPTAIN SPEAKS HIS MIND.

If Miss Charlotte Carlaw, through all her strange life, had lived for such pleasures as she might manage to squeeze out of each day, with the aid of her wealth, it may be said that with Comethup's appearance she began to live for the gratification of her vanity in regard to the boy. She was fiercely jealous of him—jealous almost of any thought he gave to any one but herself; and yet she was as jealous, on the other hand, for his success in attracting notice, and in winning that very admiration the expression of which aroused her jealousy. She was torn always between two feelings in regard to him: she must be first and everything in his life; and yet others must worship him, and hold him, if possible, to be first in theirs.

It was a strange, unnatural life for a child. He saw no one of his own age; he was waited on, at every hour of the day, by bowing, obsequious men and women, to whom often he would have been glad, but for the fear of his aunt, to be on a more friendly footing, and to have chatted naturally with; he met strange people, day after day, who talked of things he could not understand; and, despite all that was done for him, it must be confessed that he was often desperately lonely.

Tutors had been provided for him, not only for elementary subjects, but for music and painting and other accomplishments. He had a passionate desire to learn, to become a great and clever man, if it were possible, although, of course, with the inconstancy of childhood, he changed his ideas of a profession at least once in every twenty-four hours. But of all the strange, unnatural life he led, perhaps the strangest and most unnatural times of all were some of the nights he spent with his aunt's guests.

For it must be said at once that Miss Charlotte Carlaw had not been dubbed eccentric for nothing. The one passion of her life had been to be amused. A creature of moods, subject to horrible fits of depression and melancholy, she sought eagerly, and had sought all her days, for something to keep her mind employed and to drive away dulness. Her first dinner party had been highly respectable, because it was necessary that Comethup should be seen and valued by the best people; but some of the subsequent ones were of a different order altogether.

Comethup thought that that second order of gathering was a much more jolly function than the first—the men were so very amusing and laughed so heartily, and were such jovial good fellows, and the women were so very, very pretty, and had such bright eyes. Then, too, at those gatherings everybody seemed to talk at once and to shout out the most extraordinary things, with roars of laughter to accompany each speech or story. The stories Comethup did not understand in the least, which perhaps was well for him. Again, they had a delightful fashion, both men and women, of calling each other by their Christian names, which Comethup thought was very nice and familiar, and saved a lot of trouble.

But it was after dinner that the real excitement of the evening began, for the ladies—there were always a less number of ladies than gentlemen—did not go into the drawing room, as on the more formal occasions; they stopped and chatted, while the gentlemen smoked. Indeed, some of the ladies puffed a cigarette in the most natural manner, quite as though they liked it, and then, later on, they would all troop noisily into the drawing room, Comethup and his aunt leading the way; and there mysterious games were played.

To his utter astonishment, he discovered that his aunt was a most wonderful card-player; she had the cards pricked through, in some curious fashion, so that she knew unerringly what each was by the lightest touch; and she was said, by all who knew her, to be a most formidable antagonist. Certainly she took the keenest delight in every game, and staked largely. Indeed, they all did that, and Comethup soon ceased to think with any surprise of the sums which changed hands in one evening.

Then, too, there were other mysterious games played—some on a green table with squares marked upon it—games at which every one grew very eager indeed, and some of them very silent. There were beautiful little square cubes, with dots marked upon them, which were shaken up in a silver-mounted box and turned out on a table amid shouts and exclamations and mutterings; and all the time, in every game, the money clinked and rattled and changed about from one to the other.

One night Miss Carlaw suddenly called out his name, and he went to her. "Here, we can't have Prince Charming standing about looking at others playing. He's the master here, and, by the Lord! he shall play himself. Turn out your pockets; let's see what money you've got. I have had the devil's own luck to-night, and perhaps you'll be able to fleece some of these good folk too. Turn out your pockets, you rascal!"

The boy did as he was told, and she counted it rapidly over, touching each piece with her fingers. Then she took some coins from a pile of gold and silver before her and added it to Comethup's

stock, and thrust the whole lot in his hand.

"There, take that and sit down here. If you're sharp you'll soon get into the way of it; and if any of these people take advantage of your youth and innocence, I'll be the death of them. Now, boys and girls, on we go again!"

Comethup, child though he was, soon got into the excitement of the thing. With promptings from the others, he learned what to do and what to say, and, fortune favouring him, he went to his room that night with his stock of money still further increased. Altogether, he thought it was rather a glorious business, and couldn't quite understand why some of the men wore sour looks when they went away.

It became quite a regular thing for the child to take his place among those excited, eager gamblers. Time after time he went to bed in the small hours of the morning, sometimes so worn out that he was glad to let the sympathetic Gwilt undress him and lift him into bed. Sometimes he made horrible blunders with the cards and lost heavily; sometimes he won. But, under any circumstances, it did not affect him, for his aunt was careful to see that he always had plenty of money.

They drove out nearly every day, and seemed to spend a great part of their time in shops. Miss Charlotte Carlaw had a perfect passion for buying. Anything that was pointed out to her, and of which she approved, or anything that the boy noticed, was bought at once. She encouraged Comethup to spend his money royally, and never hesitated for an instant about anything she thought he would like, however costly it might be. The whirl and the excitement and the intoxication of the new life were upon him, so that he had but little time for thought; yet sometimes he found his thoughts straying back to the simple life in the old town, which seemed all so very far away, and to the simple people he had known and loved there. He ventured to approach his aunt on the subject one day when they were alone.

"Aunt, I've been thinking—about the captain," he began timidly.

"What captain?" she asked sharply.

"*The* captain—Captain Garraway-Kyle. You remember he was very kind to me."

"Ah! So you're getting tired of me, are you?"

"Indeed, no," said Comethup. "I'm sure you don't think that. But I've thought of the captain very often, and I shouldn't like him to think that I'd forgotten him. Besides, you asked him to come and see me yourself."

"Quite right, Comethup, quite right. I'm a foolish old woman, and you're a good fellow not to forget your old friend. Write to him to-night, and ask him to come here and stay as long as he likes. Tell him to let you know by what train he is coming, and on what day, and you can drive down to the station to meet him. Will that satisfy you?"

Comethup thanked her gratefully, and wrote to the captain within the hour, begging him to come to town at the earliest possible moment and to stay as long as he could. He wrote the letter very carefully, and scanned it anxiously afterward; but finally sent it, and began to count the hours before a reply could be received. He began, too, to arrange what should be done for the captain's entertainment when he arrived.

Two days elapsed, and then there came a letter addressed to Master Comethup Willis in a small, stiff, rather cramped handwriting. The letter was brought to him while he sat at breakfast with his aunt; he tore it open eagerly, and exclaimed at once, "Oh, he's coming, he's coming!"

"The captain?" inquired his aunt.

"Yes. He writes very nicely. He says he will be most—where is it?—oh, he says he'll be 'most delighted to accept, and will come on Thursday'; that's to-morrow. He's very particular; he's written quite plainly the name of the station, and the time the train arrives."

"Well, order the carriage, and go down to meet him. And don't forget you're to give him a good time while he's in London; if you think he'd like to go to any particular place, take him there. You ought to know by this time that you can do as you like in those matters. Besides, I want the captain to understand who Prince Charming is, and what position he takes. You'd better interview Mrs. Currie, and tell her a gentleman is coming to stay with you, and that she is to make arrangements about his room. Give your orders, Prince Charming, give your orders."

It happened that on the day fixed for the captain's arrival a dinner party had been arranged at Miss Charlotte Carlaw's house—a dinner party of the more riotous kind. The captain had decided upon so late a train that he reached London but little before the dinner hour. Comethup, who was to play his usual part in the festivities, had to be dressed in all his glory before setting out for the station; there would have been no time for dressing afterward. Thus it happened that the simple old gentleman, stepping out of the railway carriage in the dusk of an autumn evening, was confronted by a gaily dressed little figure in the costume, on a miniature scale, of a gallant of the days of Charles I, with plumed hat and lace ruffles and everything complete. Beside this figure stood a tall footman.

The captain had some difficulty in recognising his young friend, and, even when he did so, he did not appear to be quite at his ease. The footman who took his small portmanteau from his hand evidently overawed him; it is impossible to say what dream the captain had had as he travelled to town, but it is certain that he had not expected to meet the child in this fashion.

Comethup got into the carriage, and it was only then that they really began to talk to each other.

Comethup had slipped one hand timidly into the captain's and the captain's fingers had closed over it; the man looked down at the child beside him.

"Well, little friend!" he said.

"Oh, sir," said Comethup, with a deep sigh of content, "you don't know how glad I am to see you! It seemed such a long time before your letter came; I thought all sorts of horrible things must have happened—that you had gone away—or—or anything. But it's all right now, and I'm so glad you've come."

"That's good, Comethup, that's good," murmured the captain, more moved than he cared to show. "This is quite a holiday for me, and we must make the most of it, eh?"

"Oh, yes, we've arranged lots of things for you, so as to give you what aunt calls a good time while you're in London. There's a dinner party to-night—that's why I was obliged to come looking such a swell, as aunt calls it; I didn't mean to come to meet you like this, you know, but there wouldn't have been time to dress after I got back—and a lot of nice people are coming; you *will* enjoy yourself."

"I hope so, I'm sure," said the captain. "And I'm sure I don't mind you're being a swell in the least, Comethup. I suppose," he added, a little wistfully, "I suppose your aunt is very good to you?"

Comethup nodded and laughed. "There never was anybody half so good—except you, sir, of course. She gives me everything I want, and some things that I scarcely want at all. It's really quite wonderful; I really didn't think anybody could have so much money."

"And you're quite happy?" asked the captain.

"Y—yes," replied Comethup, after turning the matter over in his mind for a moment. "You see, I can't help thinking sometimes about you, and 'Linda, and——"

"Ah, that reminds me," said the captain. "I saw 'Linda to-day, and told her I was coming to see you. She sends her love to you; I think she would have liked to come with me."

The carriage drew up at the house, and the captain alighted. He held himself very erect, shabby little figure that he was, as he went up the steps and into the house. He was conducted at once to the room which had been set apart for him, and presently made his appearance in the drawing room, where quite a number of people had already assembled, and approached Miss Carlaw. She stood, as usual, with her hand on the boy's shoulder. She seemed to know the captain's step at once, and greeted him cordially.

"Well, captain, so you've really come to see how Prince Charming likes his kingdom? What do you think of him now, eh? Are you prepared, like every other Jack and Jill, to prostrate yourself and worship? What do you think of him?"

"I think he looks—looks very well," said the captain.

"He's reason to be," she retorted, with a little note of defiance in her voice. "Prince Charming knows he's only got to clap his hands, and his foolish old fairy godmother will get whatever he wants, if it's to come from the other end of the world. Oh, we do things properly here, I'll warrant you, sir—don't we, my prince?"

Comethup took his usual place at table, at the opposite end to his aunt, and had the captain at his right hand. The boy, young as he was, could not but remark to himself what an incongruous figure the captain cut in that assembly; his quiet, delicate, old-world face and manner contrasted so strongly with the faces about him; his dress, perfectly neat though it was, seemed to belong to a bygone day when compared with theirs. Once or twice, too, when things were said and stories told which Comethup did not understand, the captain was the only one who did not laugh; indeed, he stiffened a little in his chair, and once laid his hand upon Comethup's, where it rested on the table, and pressed it slightly, as though in sympathy.

Miss Charlotte Carlaw had been in a strange mood all the evening, had told her wildest stories, had laughed more loudly than any of her guests. After the men had lighted their cigars and cigarettes, and some of the women had begun also to smoke, she suddenly clapped her hands and cried out: "Where's Prince Charming?—Come here, you dog, I want you."

The captain, watching her after the boy had run to her, saw her with her arm about him, whispering something to him, insisting upon something; the child was hanging back and blushing, and pleading with her, also in a whisper. At last he laughed, and appeared to consent. She clasped her hands again, and cried for silence.

"Silence for Prince Charming! Boys and girls, you have not yet learned all our prince's accomplishments. He can play like a born gambler; he can whisper a pretty speech in a lady's ear; now you shall hear him sing. Oh, you need not be afraid; he has lessons daily from one of the best masters.—Come, up with you, Comethup!"

One of the men caught him up and put him on the table just in front of his aunt; she held one of his legs, so that he might not overbalance. One of the ladies ran to the piano and played a few notes, and then Comethup, very timidly at first, but more boldly as he went on, sang his song.

It was a foolish thing for a child to sing under any circumstances—a riotous chant of drinking, and women's eyes, and red lips, and what not; but it had a rousing refrain, and after he had sung it once, they all stood up, shouting, with their glasses in their hands, and roared it all over again. Comethup, for his part, seemed to see none of them; he sang with all his might and main and put



his heart into the wretched ditty, and he sang to the captain. And the captain sat still, with his head resting on his hand, and watched him.

The uproar as he finished was deafening, and as they trooped into the drawing room two of the men carried him shoulder-high between them, and some one started to sing, "For he's a jolly good fellow." It was taken up by them all except, perhaps, by the captain, who walked quietly along in the rear.

The cards and dice were got out at once, and Miss Carlaw plunged into the game. Comethup had slipped away, and had stolen over to where the captain sat apart; he drew near him, and the old man put his arm about him and held him close, without speaking. Presently, however, Miss Carlaw remembered the boy, and stopped her game to call aloud for him.

"Where's Comethup? He's been winning people's money all the week, now he's got to give them a chance of revenge.—A man can't slink away with full pockets, you know, Prince Charming. Where are you? Come and take a hand here at once."

The boy rose obediently, and the captain rose with him. Indeed, the captain walked with him to Miss Carlaw's side, and then ventured to interpose, in a low voice, "You surely do not let this child play, madam, and for money?"

She turned her face up to him, with a frown upon it. "And why not, pray? He's got money enough and to spare; let him win or lose as he will. Don't spoil sport, captain; sit down, and take a hand yourself."

"No, no; I am but a poor gentleman, and have nothing to lose; it is as well to be frank on such matters." He turned and walked back to his former place, changed his mind, and came back to watch the child play.

Comethup was in luck that night; more than once Miss Carlaw patted his shoulder approvingly when the money was pushed toward him. When at last play was finished, and the guests had departed, the captain lingered a little uneasily, glancing once or twice at the old woman, as though he wished to speak. Perhaps she guessed his intention, for she kept her hand obstinately on Comethup's shoulder and said pointedly: "Well, I suppose we're all tired, and had better get to bed.—Why, you're quite sleepy, Prince Charming."

The captain raised his head. "If you would spare me a matter of five minutes, madam, I should be glad. There is something I wish to say—"

"What, at this time of night? Won't it keep till morning?"

"I'm afraid not," replied the captain, quietly.

"Just like a man—so devilish unreasonable! Very well, let's have it."

"Not before the child," said the captain, in the same tone as before.

"Oh! You seem determined to have your own way, so I suppose I must humour you. If I fall asleep, don't accuse me of rudeness.—Prince Charming, go to bed."

Comethup, wondering a little, kissed his aunt and gravely shook hands with the captain. When he had gone, and the door was closed, Miss Carlaw seated herself, rested her hands on the top of her stick and her chin on her hands, and waited for the captain to begin. He seemed somewhat at a loss, and paced about nervously for a few moments before speaking.

"Miss Carlaw, what I am—about to say—may appear—I fear it must—in the light of an impertinence. I know that I have no right to say anything, no right to interfere; but I happen, lonely old fellow though I am, to have a great affection for this child you have so generously taken under your care." The captain paused for a moment and then swung round and spoke almost fiercely, "In God's name, madam, what are you making of him?"

"That's good," said Miss Carlaw, in a tone of approval. "I like a man to come to the point and hit out straight. So you want to know what I'm making of him, do you?" She started up from her chair, and advanced toward the captain threateningly. "I'll tell you, sir. I'm making a gentleman of him; I'm showing him what the world is like, and—"

"The worst side of the world, madam," said the captain, indignantly.

"It's good enough for me," she retorted.

"That may be; you are a woman of the world, and can choose for yourself. This child is helpless; his fresh young mind can take in everything he sees about him. You stand at the present moment as everything to him—his benefactress, almost his goddess. What you do must be right, simply because you do it. You told me just now that you were training this boy to be a gentleman; I tell you, madam, you are training him to be a blackguard, and probably worse, if there is anything worse."

Miss Carlaw had stopped, and was listening intently. Her brows were drawn down, but she nodded sternly as the captain finished speaking. "Go on, sir," she said.

"I've known this boy, madam, since he was a baby—he's little more than a baby now—and I've never found a sweeter, cleaner, purer soul on this muddy old earth of ours yet. He turns naturally to sweet things, to everything that has the sunlight and free air upon it; he's as clear as crystal. Think of his age, madam! Is it an age when he should be mixing with men and women—forgive the discourtesy, I beg of you—with men and women not too choice in their conversation or their manners? Is it an age when he should be gambling and tossing gold about at an hour when he should be in bed? Believe me, I do not stand before you as a prig, or as one who would have a

word to say against anything in its proper place or its proper season; you choose your own guests, and your choice is doubtless a right one, for every man and every woman chooses in this world according to his or her need. But with this boy—this baby—it's different. His soul is in your hands, to do what you will with it. And I say, frankly, madam, that you are doing with it badly."

She did not speak; she turned about, and went to her chair and sat down in the same attitude as before, except that she rested her forehead on her hands instead of her chin. After a pause the captain spoke again.

"I trust—I beg that you will forgive me if anything I have said appears harsh. I am not used to women's ways, and have been but little in their society, but I have spoken out of the depths of my heart. It hurt me when the child left me, but I was glad, for his sake, and I readily recognise the unstinted generosity you appear to display toward him. But, madam, I entreat you to remember not only the child, but the man who is growing up under your hands."

She sat for a long time in the same attitude, and when, presently, she raised her head and spoke, he saw with contrition that her lips were quivering; she even stretched one hand toward him for a moment, as though to ask his pardon.

"You're a good man," she said, in a curiously altered voice. "And I am—well, I'm a wicked old fool. I've been treating this child like a toy, holding him before all my friends, that they might see what a beautiful thing I had managed to secure. Friends, indeed!" she cried, fiercely, getting up and beginning to pace about, "there isn't one of them I care a brass farthing for; there isn't one of them I wouldn't show the door to-morrow. Oh, you're right; you're very right, and I'm a monster. I've been given this glorious thing from God, and I don't even know how to take care of it. Captain, I'm sorry to think, from what I know of the world, that there are very few men who would have been brave enough to say what you have said to-night. But there's a Providence in your coming—a Providence that set the boy longing to see you. I—I am more glad than I can say that you came here. I've been blind—blind in two senses—but I'll end it. By the Lord! I'll make this boy what you say he should be; he sha'n't minister to my whims any longer." She began to laugh, and shook her head at him whimsically. "Oh, I like you; it's refreshing to meet a man like you occasionally—you're precious rare. By George! you did more for the boy than I did, and knew more about him—upon my word you did. Oh, I'll be good to him, I'll be proud of him. I want—I want to think about all this; and then I'll talk to you about what's best to be done for him. Give me your hand. Will you promise to stay here a week at least—now, I'll take no denial—a week at least? It'll make the boy happy, and it'll do him good, and it'll take him away from me, which'll do him good too."

"Then I won't stay," said the captain, with a smile.

"Very well then," she exclaimed, "we'll do what we can with him together. Oh, you needn't be afraid; I haven't spoiled him yet. But you've got to advise me what to do. It's evident, although it hurts me to say it, that I'm no good at the game."

So the captain remained in town for a week, while Comethup's fate was decided. Long discussions were held late at night, after he had gone to bed, between Miss Carlaw and his earlier friend. During the day the boy, blissfully unconscious of any change being contemplated, drove about with the captain and his aunt to every conceivable quarter of London, in the frantic desire to give the captain what he called "a good time." It often happened that they drifted, quite naturally, toward one of the large barracks, or down to the Horse Guards, where the captain cocked his head knowingly and became at once, in the eyes of his admiring young friend, an expert; indeed, the mere passing of a soldier in the streets stiffened the little old gentleman's figure and gave a sternness to his eyes, which showed, Comethup thought, that he ought really to have been a very great and very wonderful general indeed.

No more dinner parties were given during that week; but once or twice the three, after dining together, went to a theatre, Miss Carlaw appearing to understand the play, whatever it might be, quite as clearly as her companions. She had a wonderful faculty for locating a voice; and when once Comethup, in a rapid whisper, had explained to her what the scene was, she appeared to know exactly where each particular character came on, and how he or she moved about, and when they made their exits. It was truly wonderful, and Comethup lost a great part of the real business of the stage by watching her eager, listening face, and wondering that the loss of her eyes was really so little of a loss after all.

The captain's visit was drawing to a close when one evening after dinner Miss Carlaw turned to him and waved a hand toward the boy, and said abruptly, "Now tell him all about it."

Comethup looked from one to the other, while the captain cleared his throat and coughed, flushed a little, and drew himself up in his chair. Miss Carlaw waited impatiently, lightly tapping her fingers on the table before her. At last the captain spoke.

"You must know, Comethup, that your aunt, Miss Carlaw"—he bowed with much ceremony toward that lady—"your aunt has been good enough to ask my advice, and to place some confidence in me, in regard to your future. Of course, Comethup, I need hardly say that she is far more competent than I can hope to be to—"

"No, no," ejaculated Miss Carlaw, shaking her head vigorously. "But go on."

"To put the matter briefly, my dear boy, your aunt feels that there is not only a time for play but a time for work. We are both very proud of you; we hope to be prouder still. No man can do anything in this world unless he learns to work; unless he learns to fight his way with others, and find out what the world is like, and learn some of its lessons."

"Well put, captain, excellently put," interrupted Miss Carlaw again.

"To come to the point, Comethup, your aunt thinks that it would be wiser for you to mix with boys of your own age, and she intends to send you to school. She has already selected a good school, and——"

"And look here, Prince Charming," broke in the old woman, "I think I know my boy well enough by this time to know that he'll do whatever we think best, for his own sake as well as for ours. The captain here has told you very prettily why we think it's necessary; just let me say that if you don't like it when you get there, you can just come straight back again. I'm sure you're brave enough to like it, and to make the best of it, although you're only a little chap. And you shall come to me every holiday—oh, they've got precious long holidays, I can tell you—and you shall see the captain whenever you like. This school is only a few miles from your old home, and is right close to the sea. Of course I don't know, but I should think it's extremely likely that our good friend here might find time to run over to see you occasionally on half holidays."

"Most assuredly," said the captain.

"Well, what do you say to it all?" inquired Miss Carlaw.

Comethup's heart had been beating a little faster than usual while they spoke; but the prospect was really more alluring than they thought, and the pill they desired him to swallow needed no gilding, for the boy's life had been recently an unnatural one—strange and wonderful, but still unnatural; and the prospect of meeting boys of his own age, the greater prospect of learning something, and becoming a clever man, made his heart leap indeed. Then, too, the thought of frequently meeting the captain, of being within but a few miles of him, was attractive; he could scarcely hope for better fortune. After a pause he said slowly: "Of course, I should like to go to school, and—and learn; and it would be nice to see the captain, and to come back to you for the holidays. I'm quite sure I should like it."

Miss Carlaw clapped her hands and smiled. The captain nodded at the boy approvingly. "I knew just what he'd say," exclaimed Miss Carlaw.—"Come here, Prince Charming."

The boy slipped down from his seat and went to her side. She drew her arm about him and said, with a tenderness that was strange to her: "You mustn't think, Comethup, that I want to get rid of you—God forbid! But you're all I have in the world, all I've got to think of or to be proud of. And I want you to be a clever man; I want to be able to point to you and say: 'There's my boy; match him if you can!' That's what I want to think. And so you'll work hard and grow fast, and this foolish old aunt of yours will wait at home in patience until you come back to her." Her voice had fallen almost to a whisper, and he felt her lips lightly touch his hair before she pushed him gently from her.

The final details were arranged on the morrow, not without conflicts between Miss Carlaw and the captain. The old lady would have sent the boy to school dressed as a prince; the captain was for plain clothes in order that there might be no distinction between him and his fellows, and the captain had his way. The next serious point of difference was on the question of pocket money, Miss Carlaw having firmly made up her mind that the boy must be possessed of no less a sum than a sovereign a week, and the captain urging that a half-crown would be more than he possibly could spend. The two worthy creatures came to high words over the matter, and finally arrived at a compromise: Comethup was to have five shillings a week, and the captain exacted a promise from Miss Carlaw that this was not to be supplemented by any additional sum, at all events for the present.

It had been arranged that the captain was to accompany the boy to the school and see him safely established there; it was scarcely necessary for Miss Carlaw to go, when the place was really almost on the captain's road home. The captain, proud of having got his own way in the matter, and prouder still of his mission, was very particular in discussing matters with the principal of the school about the airing of beds and the arrangements generally for the boy's comfort; quite gave himself airs, in a gentlemanly fashion, over the matter. But when it was all done and the two had parted at the school gate, and the captain had watched the figure of the child going back slowly across the deserted playground to his new life, the little gentleman drooped a little, and was not so cheery or confident as he had been; lingered about so long, indeed, near the gate, that he nearly lost the last train to the dull little town in which he lived, and had to make a run for it.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### A RETROSPECT—AND A FLUTTERING OF HEARTS.

Comethup Willis had passed his sixteenth birthday, and could afford to smile, with something of complacency, at the thought of that small and trembling boy who, eight long years before, had parted from the captain at the school gate on a certain summer evening. Yet, looking back over the years themselves, though they had been long in the going, the span of them seemed not so great after all. Comethup thought, with a comfortable sigh of content, what happy years they had been; what a wonderful time of close, strong friendships, and boyish vows of faithfulness; what days of work and play, and strong and vigorous life; what nights of perfect, dreamless sleep!

It had indeed been a happy time; he wondered, in his grateful heart, if ever boy had been so

blessed before. The school had been a good and healthy one—a place where a boy was taught to work hard and to play harder; and Comethup, in the atmosphere of it, had grown into a tall, straight-limbed lad, with a strength about him which his dreamy face and slow, quiet smile belied.

He sat on a seat in the playground, with his head leaning against the trunk of a tree, and dreamily watched the boys at play, and thought about the eight years that had slipped so peacefully by. To-morrow was to be his last day at school; to-morrow the captain was coming, quite early in the morning, and they were going away together in the evening. The captain always came early on great match days; and to-morrow was a great match day, and Comethup was to play for the school for the last time.

Comethup thought of the captain with tenderness; remembered his many visits to the school, and the keen delight he had taken in his young friend's progress. Was it not the captain who had been present on that memorable occasion when Comethup Willis made his first century? That was two years ago, before the boy had shown signs of growing to his present height. It is a matter for doubt as to which of them—the captain or Comethup—trembled the most on that occasion. It had been one of those disastrous days, from the schoolboy's standpoint, when luck had gone clean against them; when unfeeling rivals had bowled balls and manipulated catches in a manner which appeared to leave no hope of victory. Comethup had gone in last but one, and it was the first great match he had played in. He remembered now, as though it were yesterday, how he had seemed to see a crowd of faces in a great square about him, and here and there a little patch of colour from a lady's dress; remembered, too, how he had passed the captain on his way to the wicket, and of how the captain, in a trembling voice, had whispered to him huskily to save the day. As he bent over his bat for a moment he murmured a prayer—for which he may surely be forgiven—that God would let him save the day and please the captain.

His heart leaped a little, even now, at the thought of that day; at the thought of how he managed to get most of the bowling, while the other batsmen "kept his end up"; of the cheering, frantic crowd of boys as he hit as he had never hit before—as one inspired, indeed—while the score crept steadily up on the board; of the wild tumult when the hit was made which assured them of victory; of the carrying out of his bat, while a score of youngsters struggled for the honour of bearing him shoulder-high to the tent. He remembered it all perfectly, and smiled at the recollection; smiled, too, to think how the captain had marched proudly in front while the boy was carried along; and of how, when he grasped Comethup's hand, there had been tears in the little gentleman's eyes.

In everything that had happened in his school life the captain seemed to have taken a prominent place. There was scarcely a boy in the great school who did not know him—scarcely one, indeed, with whose name he was not familiar. Nearly every half-holiday had seen his erect figure turn in at the gates, and his quick eyes, under the gray eyebrows, look about in search for Comethup. On summer days, when the cricket field was dotted with white fingers and the pleasant click of bat against ball was heard in the drowsy afternoon, the captain was there, and never a stroke, good or bad, escaped him; on winter days, when the snow was deep and boys were blowing on cold fingers, and the sharp cries and shouts of the sliders cut keenly through the frosty air, there was the captain again, buttoned to the chin, clapping his gloved hands furiously, and laughing with the best of them. He had become, in time, quite an institution, and may be said to have again considerably renewed his youth, in that place where youth was monarch of all.

And to-morrow was to end it; to-morrow the last farewells must be said, and he would go away, appropriately enough, with the captain. It had been arranged that he was to stay for a week with the captain in the place of his birth before going on to London to join his aunt; after that the plans for him were indefinite.

Curiously enough, during all the years of his school life he had never once visited the old town; something had always occurred to prevent his doing so. It was but a few miles distant from the sea; but the captain had visited him so frequently, and was always to be expected on half-holidays; and his own holidays were spent, from start to finish, with his aunt in London, so that he really had had no opportunity of going back to the old place. But now the captain had begged him to spend a week at his cottage, and Comethup, after consulting Miss Carlaw, had gladly accepted.

The boy had heard frequently, through the captain, of the welfare of those in whom he was interested. Not having seen them since he had been a child himself, it was difficult to realize that changes could have taken place, or that others, as well as himself, must have grown older. He thought of 'Linda still as a little child wandering in the garden among the drifting leaves and under the whispering trees; saw Medmer Theed, the shoemaker, hammering away at his work, without an additional wrinkle; was forced to believe, in a vague fashion, that Brian must have grown, because he himself had grown, and Brian was certainly older. The captain had shaken his head more than once at the mention of Brian's name, and hinted that father and son did not pull well together.

"Not the lad's fault, you know, Comethup," he had said, "although I never liked the boy. But Robert Carlaw ought never to have been a father—ought never to have been anything, for the matter of that. And yet the boy's clever, I'm told; but it's a cleverness, an infernal smartness, I don't like."

The afternoon wore away, and Comethup was roused from his reverie by the clanging of the bell summoning the boys to roll-call. He got up lazily and stretched himself, and suddenly saw a small boy standing before him, panting and eager.

"Willis, there's some one to see you."

"See me? Where?" He thought at first that it might be the captain, who had not been able to wait longer, in his eagerness for the morrow.

"Out by the gate there," said the small boy, pointing behind him. "A man—a young man. Asked me to find you."

"All right," cried Comethup, and went leaping and striding toward the gate. There seemed to be no one there at first, until he went out a pace or two into the road; and there, leaning easily with his back against the wall, was a young man smoking a cigarette. "Did you want to see—" began Comethup; and then, as the young man turned quickly, the boy stopped, and looked at him with a puzzled expression for a moment; as the other smiled and threw back his head, Comethup gasped out, "Why—it's Brian!"

Brian nodded, and stepped forward and shook Comethup by the hand. It was the first time they had met since Comethup had left the old place with his aunt; yet there were things about this tall, handsome fellow of eighteen that were the things he had known in the Brian who had been a child. It was the same smile that broke over his face suddenly, like light; the dark eyes, that seemed to see so much farther and so much more than any other eyes; the brown hair, waving back from his forehead, and worn rather long; the slightly swaggering fashion of carrying himself—the fashion which his father had carried to an excess. There were, besides all this, a carelessness of dress and a recklessness of manner that seemed to be a part of his natural growth, too.

"Yes; it's Brian. I thought I might be able to see you. By Jove! you haven't altered a bit, my cousin of the queer name. Of course you're bigger, but you've still got that angelic face and that maiden air of goodness. I'll put you into a poem some day, only no one will believe I've drawn you from life. There, let's stop jesting; I want you to help me. The truth of the matter is, there's been a kick-up between my father and myself; we never did hit it; his ways are not my ways, and he's a blackguard, and not with my sort of blackguardism either." He laughed, and clapped a hand on Comethup's shoulder. "Look here, old boy, I'm not envying you the plums of life you've got, but I want—oh, I have the right, as far as that goes—I want you to help me."

"Why, of course," began Comethup, "if I can—"

"You can do everything. According to my father, you stole my birthright from me, you rascal, although that wasn't your fault. Some of us get the bread in this world, and the others, for all the asking, get the stone. Let's cut all this and come to the point. I'm going to London; it's the only place where a man with brains—and I *am* a man now, although I am only eighteen, and I know I've got the brains—it's the only place where a man can do anything, or show what stuff is in him. In the country, among these grinning, slow, dead-and-alive yokels, one can't move; one seems to get stuck in their beastly clayey soil, and to take root there and never to move again. London's the place; I saw it once when I was a boy; I've dreamed of it ever since. I know what I can do there; I'll make men recognise me. But I'm a beggar, so far as money is concerned, and I'm heavily in debt. I don't care a hang about the debts; dad'll have to pay them; that was what the row was about. However, it's his own fault, and in any case it doesn't matter now. What I want to know is this: can you let me have enough money to take me to London, and give me a bit over until I find my feet? I know you've got plenty, and I don't know any one else to whom I can turn. I knew you were here, because I saw the captain—that old starched chap—a day or two back, and he told me where you were."

"I'll gladly help you," said Comethup. "How much money do you want? I am afraid I haven't very much."

"Well, have you got five pounds you can spare?"

Now it happened that within the past year Miss Charlotte Carlaw, in the pride of her heart, had been in the habit of breaking her promise to the captain and forwarding sums of money to Comethup whenever she could find an excuse for so doing—whenever, for instance, he had made a big score at cricket, or had written her a letter with which she was particularly pleased. Moreover, as every bill—and they were not many—which he contracted was promptly paid, without question, by his aunt, he found it somewhat difficult, as a mere schoolboy, to get rid of all the money he had, although it seemed to slip through his fingers pretty quickly. Only on the previous day Miss Carlaw had sent him twenty pounds in bank notes, with a message to the effect that, as he was visiting the captain, he would probably want some money to spend, and ten pounds was for that; and, as he was now a gentleman at large and his school days were left behind, he would want some further money in his pocket, and ten pounds was for that.

"I don't think five pounds is much good to you," said Comethup. "Hadn't you better take ten?"

"By all means," exclaimed Brian, with much alacrity. "Hadn't the least idea you'd got so much. By George! I shall be a millionaire; ten pounds will last a deuce of a long time."

Comethup put his hand into his pocket and produced the money. "Don't you think," he said, "that it would be better for you to go and see my aunt—*your* aunt, too, you know—and tell her what you mean to do? She's awfully good, and I know that she—"

"No, thanks, I'd rather not; I had one experience with the old girl, and that was enough. Oh, I'll get on capitally. And if I want anything more, I can easily come to you. You won't mind, will you?"

"Not a bit," said Comethup. "I'll give you our address in London, and you can write to me. I shall be up there in a week's time."

He wrote it down on the back of an envelope and gave it to Brian. They shook hands again quite heartily, and Brian, retaining Comethup's hand for a moment, said, in his friendly fashion: "Wish me luck. I'm going to set the Thames on fire, if ever a man set it flaring yet. You know what that means, don't you? They say that of any one who's going to do something more wonderful than any one else. I know what's in me; I know what I can do. And that wretched old sleepy hollow where you and I once lived, Comethup—I've done with the infernal place. It shall be proud of me some day—proud to think that I lived there, that I was born there; oh, I'll make them whisper my name with awe, and condone all my past offences. Good-bye, old chap; it's awfully good of you, and some day, when I'm rich and famous, I'll pay it back—I will, indeed. Good-bye; I'll write and let you know how I get on. But you'll hear of me—oh, you'll hear of me."

He crammed the envelope and the notes into his pocket and set off down the road, turning once to wave his hand to Comethup, who stood at the gate watching him.

The captain turned in briskly at the school gates on the following morning immediately after breakfast. He seemed to glow with the conscious pride of one intimately associated with the most important man of the day; to be proud of the fact that he was bearing off the boy whom it was the school's delight to honour, for Comethup was the head boy of the school and captain of the Eleven—a man whom little boys regarded with awe, as he, when a little boy, had once regarded the captains who had long since passed out of the school. Very proud, too, was the captain to have this big lad slip his hand under his own weaker arm and stroll with him about the playground and among groups of admiring boys; prouder still when the head master, whom the modest captain regarded as a very wonder for learning, came to him and shook hands and murmured a few appropriate words about the loss the school would suffer with the departure of Comethup Willis.

The day, with its cricket match—in which Comethup covered himself, for the last time, with glory—came to an end, and the captain and the boy were free to depart. A fly was at the gate; Comethup's boxes were piled upon it, and a crowd of younger boys had gathered about to see him go and to give him a final cheer. In the pride of the hour he had determined to drive the captain the whole of the way home, in order to save the trouble of the short train journey; the captain had expostulated, but Comethup had laughingly had his way.

As the fly started, the eldest boy, who would be captain next term in Comethup's place, cried lustily, "Three cheers for Willis!" and Captain Garraway-Kyle stood up in the vehicle, snatched off his hat and waved it, and responded heartily. As he sat down again, and the fly, turning the corner of the road, left the familiar faces behind, he said in a gratified tone: "That's music, boy; that's the best of all music. When it comes from the throats of those who love you, it's the finest orchestra in the world; sometimes it comes falsely, and means nothing; and then, if you have but the right ears to hear, the music is all jangled horribly, and means nothing but lies, and fawnings, and hypocrisy. But that's the right music, boys—the music that comes from those who love us."

They drove on for some time in silence, and then the captain said abruptly: "I had a visitor this morning, in a state of great excitement; he hasn't been near me since you went to London. Can you guess?"

Comethup looked at him inquiringly and shook his head. "No," he said. "Who was it?"

"Your uncle, Robert Carlaw. Said he'd had a great shock; that Brian had left him suddenly, without giving the slightest warning of where he was going or what his intentions were; he had merely left a curt note—I saw the note, and it was really very rude—a curt note saying he was going away, and did not intend to return or to trouble his father again. I suppose that mad fellow, your uncle, was fond of the boy in his way; at all events, he ramped and raved about the place, and talked of ingratitude, and serpents' teeth, and thankless children, and what not, until I was quite glad to get rid of him. I wonder where the boy has gone?"

"I saw him yesterday," said Comethup. "He came here—to the school, you know—to see me. He told me he was going to London to make his fortune; that he'd quarrelled with his father, and didn't mean to go back to him. I was awfully surprised to see him."

"But what's he going to do in London, without friends and without money?" Then, as Comethup sat silent, looking before him, the captain dropped a hand on the boy's arm. "Comethup, he didn't come to you merely to say good-bye, after seeing nothing of you for eight years. I suppose you —"

"Oh, I could see that he was in distress," broke in Comethup, hurriedly, "and when I'd got such a lot I couldn't very well let him go to London without a penny. You see, London is a big place, and he might starve—anything might happen. So I just gave him—well, just a little money; and I told him to write to me and let me know how he was getting on; I gave him my address in London."

The captain was silent for a few moments, and then he said: "Well, well, I suppose you were right; you couldn't let the fellow go without a penny. But if I were you, Comethup, I shouldn't mention the matter to your aunt. I detest deceit, but there are some things it's just as well in this world to say nothing about. Miss Carlaw—very properly, no doubt—dislikes your cousin, and she might be hurt if she thought you were spending her money on him. Personally, I don't like the fellow, but I think it was the only thing you could do. But I don't think I'd say anything to Miss Carlaw about it."

It was quite a new sensation, and a very pleasant and exciting one, to drive into the old town seated beside the captain. The eight years, which had seemed to bring so many changes to the growing boy, had not changed the place at all; it appeared a little dwarfed, perhaps, grown

smaller and less imposing; the gaunt old buildings, which had towered to the sky in the imagination of the small child, had dwindled, in the eyes of the youth, to mere ordinary dwellings. But, best of all, the things about it that were changeless were the solemn hush and peace that lay upon it, a stillness that belonged to no other place. The roar of London, the busy, murmuring life of school, were dropped completely behind; it was like coming home to rest, to some little place set in the heart of woods, after the toil and fret of a long day.

Homer was there, at the door of the captain's cottage, saluting in the old fashion; he had grown a little grayer and a little less erect in attitude. The old familiar room, looking out over the garden and the street, seemed smaller than before and a little shabbier. Of everything the boy remembered so well, the captain alone seemed as though the years had leaped over him and left him unaltered.

Comethup was up very early the next morning—long before the captain had risen; he had a feeling that he would like to visit some of the old places alone. He lifted the latch of the cottage door—for no one thought of locking doors in that part of the country—and stole out softly through the garden and into the street. One or two early risers whom he passed looked at him curiously, and he thought he recognised some faces he had seen in the streets as a child. He sniffed the sweet morning air with delight, thinking how good it was to be rich and free and healthy; he might have thought, too, how good it was to be very young, but for the fact that he did not consciously appreciate that blessing.

He went to the house in which he had been born; it was held by strangers now, and there were curtains of a hideous colour in the windows, and one of the blinds had been drawn up by a careless hand and hung awry. But the roses were there in all their beauty—roses grown for other hands to pluck and to delight other eyes. He leaned over the little gate which led from the street and looked about him; looked into all the familiar corners that had held such terrors for him when he had been very young indeed; thought of the mother who had wandered there, as he had heard his father describe. And that brought him quite naturally to the churchyard, where he found the two mounds—a little less prominent than they had been—side by side, with some fresh flowers upon them. He knew that the flowers must have come from the captain, and his heart swelled a little, with renewed gratitude to his old friend.

It was too early for breakfast yet, and he set off through the town; aimlessly, as he told himself, and yet of fixed purpose. There seemed to be but one place that he desired to visit, and his pulses thumped a little, in an unaccustomed fashion, as he drew near to it; it was the garden in which he had found 'Linda.

The years had brought one change on the very threshold of it: one of the gates—that which had hung by a single hinge so long—had given way completely, and lay prone upon the grass inside, half covered with dead leaves and choking weeds. Comethup picked his way across it and walked cautiously under the trees. Bright as the morning was, it seemed quite dark here, and he shivered a little as he went on. He almost expected to see a little figure he remembered so clearly spring up again in his path and run to him, crying his name; but no one was in the garden, and only a bird fluttered among the leaves and cried in quick alarm to his mate. He made the circuit of the house, and looked up at the blank windows; but the place seemed quite deserted, and he came away, wondering a little impatiently where the girl could be, and filled with a determination to invoke the aid of the captain in order that he might see her.

A glance at his watch told him that the captain's breakfast hour was near at hand, and he hurried back to the cottage. As he drew near to it he saw that some one was in the garden—a young girl, tall and slim, in a sober gray gown, with little ruffles at the throat and wrists. Her back was turned toward him, and she was busily gathering the choicest of the captain's roses. Even then no suspicion of her identity entered his mind; he stopped for a moment, wondering, and then walked to the gate and pushed it open.

The click of the iron latch caught her ear, and she turned swiftly, with the roses held close against her breast. Comethup caught his breath as he looked at her. Something strangely familiar, and yet strangely unfamiliar, was in her attitude, and in the glance she gave him; he was still tugging at his memory and hesitating on that half recognition of her, when she came forward slowly, smiling and colouring a little. And then he knew her.

"Linda!" he faltered, and pulled his cap off awkwardly.

She thrust the bundle of roses into the curve of one arm and shyly held out her hand to him, yet with a self-possession that only increased his nervousness. He took the hand and held it, and did not quite know what to do with it, until she released it, and laughed, and looked at her roses.

"The captain told me you were coming, Comethup," she said. And then, quite irrelevantly, "Isn't it a beautiful morning?"

"Lovely," murmured Comethup absently, looking at her rather than at the sky. "I—I've been looking for you at—at the old house."

"Have you? I got up quite early this morning; we must have missed each other. You see, the captain likes roses, and I thought that these would look nice—in a bowl, you know—on the breakfast table."

"I'm sure they will," said Comethup, getting his voice a little under control and wondering vaguely why his throat was so dry. "Do you know, I didn't know you at first, 'Linda; I'd quite forgotten that you'd be—be grown up. It's such a long time, you see; everything seems to have altered."

"Yes. *You've* altered, Comethup, very much." She plucked another rose and added it to the bunch, and pressed her face down upon them. Without looking up, she said, "Shall we go in and put them in water?"

"Yes, I think we'd better." He was so much in awe of her that he was quite afraid to come near her, and kept his distance, accordingly, in the narrow path. He opened the door for her, and, in her nervousness, she caught her foot on the step and tumbled against him; they both blushed and laughed, and she dropped some of the roses. Comethup stooped to pick them up, and found that they were not at all easy things to get hold of; they seemed to slip out of his fingers as easily as they had slipped out of hers. However, they were all picked up at last, and the two went together into the captain's little sitting room.

There a bowl had to be found, and Comethup was quite glad to get away for a moment to fetch water, in order that he might recover his feelings. She was very busy with the flowers when he came back, setting them in place in the big bowl, and singing softly to herself as she did so. Once, when a flower fell over the edge, Comethup sprang to reach it, and their hands met on the table; the hand and arm seemed to burn, and he wondered, desperately and foolishly, if his face had turned red, and why it was so impossible to talk naturally and easily to her—why, indeed, he could find nothing to talk about.

The entrance of the captain seemed to put them both at their ease. He came a little way into the room and stood there, with his hands behind him, looking with a pleased smile at Comethup and at the face of the girl glancing up at him from the flowers. She nodded brightly to him and ran across and took him by the lapels of his coat and kissed him.

"So you stole a march on me, eh?" said the captain, glancing from one to the other. "While the old boy is asleep you two youngsters have been getting the benefit of the morning air, eh? Well, you look as bright and fresh as the morning, both of you.—What do you think of her, Comethup?"

Comethup laughed and blushed, shifted from one foot to the other, and weakly hazarded the opinion that she had grown.

"Grown!" exclaimed the captain. "I should think so. Time stands still with the old ones, but, Lord! what a change a year or two makes! Why, I remember the time when I had to stoop and bend my old back for her to stand on tiptoe to kiss me; and now—well, look at her, boy; I can keep as straight as a lance, and still the rogue's lips can reach me. So you didn't lose time about finding your old playmate, Comethup."

"Well, sir," said Comethup, "I found her in the garden here, only a few minutes ago."

"Yes," broke in 'Linda, "but he says that he'd been to look for me, and couldn't find me."

"And yet found you after all, eh? Trust him for that. Now let's have some breakfast."

'Linda, after a little protest, took off her hat and sat down with them. She kept very near to the captain, and seldom looked at Comethup, save now and then shyly, after he had found his tongue, and was relating in boyish fashion some of his school adventures. The captain threw in interjectional remarks for 'Linda's benefit, such as "There's a boy for you!" or "What do you think of that now?" and others to the like effect. After breakfast, the girl, in seeming haste, put on her hat and hurriedly kissed the captain, shyly touched Comethup's hand, and prepared to depart. Comethup found his courage then and said blushinglly:

"You know I'm only stopping with the captain for a week, 'Linda. I suppose—I hope I shall see you—very often?"

The captain broke in heartily before she had time to reply. "Why, of course; you must come to breakfast every morning, and then we can plan some excursion for the day and make the most of our time."

"Yes," urged Comethup eagerly. "We might go for a drive sometimes, you know. It would be rather jolly, sir"—he turned to the captain appealingly—"it would be jolly if we could go for a picnic one day, and take our lunch with us, wouldn't it? You see, 'Linda, we could go wherever you liked."

"That would be splendid!" said the girl, clasping her hands. "I've never been for a drive in my life."

"Then we'll go to-morrow," said Comethup. "We can start directly after breakfast and make a day of it."

The captain and Comethup spent that first day in strolling about the neighbourhood and sitting out on the sandy hillocks beyond the town, talking—mostly of the future—and dreaming old dreams over again of the past. There seemed so much to be said in that familiar atmosphere; it seemed so easy to live over again the old days, when Comethup had known no other existence.

On the day arranged for the picnic 'Linda came running into the garden just as breakfast was placed on the table; breathlessly kissed the captain, and shook hands with Comethup; announced, with a roguish shake of her head, that she would not take off her hat, as they were to start so soon; and chattered ceaselessly and happily about everything—the weather, the horses that were to take them, the road by which they should go, and a thousand other things. Comethup had ordered a capacious carriage from the inn the night before—an open carriage to hold four, with two horses. Homer—most wonderful of men—had prepared a huge luncheon basket, to the contents of which Comethup had added a couple of bottles of claret. The carriage drew up at the gate just as they had finished breakfast, and 'Linda ran out to inspect it.



Comethup followed her, and stood beside her at the gate, waiting for the captain. "I'm so glad," he said, slowly, "that it's a fine day, and—and that you're so pleased."

She turned round swiftly, her dark eyes dancing. "Oh, it's the first real holiday I've ever had; I couldn't sleep last night for thinking about it. But"—her brows wrinkled a little anxiously—"won't this cost—cost a lot of money?" She waved her hand toward the carriage.

"No, not much," said Comethup carelessly. "Besides, it doesn't matter; we'll have a jolly day, and you know I've got plenty of money."

He heard a sigh flutter from her lips, and had a boyish longing to tell her that he should like to share every penny he had, or every penny he ever would have, with her; that she might never have any fear that he would go away and leave her without a holiday. He was almost making up his mind to say that he would give her just such a holiday as this every day of his life, irrespective of weather, when the captain came down the path and joined them, followed by Homer staggering under the weight of the luncheon basket.

The captain had a new tie for the occasion, and was dressed in his best; he gallantly handed 'Linda in, and she and Comethup took their places at the back of the carriage, the captain facing them. The captain was in high feather; heard the regular beat of the horses' hoofs behind him, and held himself more erect in consequence. Comethup and 'Linda sat silent, except when they answered the captain's remarks, or when 'Linda said something about the beauty of the day, or of the scenery, on which occasions Comethup eagerly and cordially indorsed her opinion.

They were to drive to a little wood the beauty of which was celebrated in the neighbourhood, although neither the captain nor his companions had ever penetrated so far. It was some fifteen miles distant, near a little old-world village, and they leaned back contentedly in their seats with the prospect of a long and pleasant drive before them. Suddenly, from the side of the road, they heard a hail, and the horses were drawn up sharply. Comethup turned about, and saw a figure hurrying toward them—the figure of a man, with long coat-tails flapping in the wind and a hand waving to them. The captain frowned a little, and muttered something under his breath. The figure came rapidly nearer, and disclosed itself as that of Mr. Robert Carlaw, heated and flushed; a little more full of habit, Comethup thought, than in former days, and a little more red in the face, but the same smiling, swaggering Robert Carlaw as of old.

He stopped at the carriage door, and pulled off his hat with a flourish to 'Linda; saw Comethup, and fell back a step, in delighted amazement. "What!" he cried, "is it possible that I look again upon the little nephew of whom I have thought so often? And yet, little no longer. Alas! time works changes upon us all. My boy"—he spoke with some emotion—"give me your hand. Little Comethup! And so you've come back to your old haunts, you lucky man of fortune, to turn the heads of all the pretty girls, eh?" He glanced at 'Linda, and smiled and shook his head. "Gad! you make me wish my youth could come back to me, although I never had *your* chances. With good looks, and fortune, and youth—well, the ball's at your feet now; you're a lucky rascal. And so we drive our carriage, do we?"

Comethup had shaken hands with him somewhat diffidently. "I am very glad to see you, uncle," he said, as soon as Mr. Carlaw had finished speaking. "We're just off for a picnic; I'm staying with the captain for a week, before I go on to London. I've just left school, you know."

"A picnic! Oh, for the days of picnics, and pretty faces, and murmuring brooks, and the deuce knows what else! Gone, alas! forever. But what do I see? A vacant seat. Youth and beauty on one side, and crabbed age on the other. Gad! I'll balance you; youth and beauty run in couples, captain—crabbed age shall pair as well. I'll join you."

He had the carriage door open and a foot on the step before any one could speak. But the captain put out a hand. "My dear sir," he said, "I can assure you that we did not contemplate an addition \_\_\_"

But Mr. Robert Carlaw cut him short. "Not a word, not a word," he exclaimed. "Picnics are like all other joyous things in the world—the more the merrier. And I'm not a great eater, by any means." He was into the carriage by this time, and had dropped with a sigh of contentment beside the captain, thrusting that little gentleman ruthlessly out of the way. He closed the door, and the carriage moved on again.

He had taken the matter so completely by storm, and it was so impossible to tell him that he wasn't wanted, and to stop the carriage and thrust him out again, that the three holiday-makers resigned themselves to the inevitable and sat in awkward silence, casting furtive glances at him.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### AN INCUBUS, AND THE DEMON OF JEALOUSY.

Of all the people in their small world, it is possible that Mr. Robert Carlaw was quite the last they would have chosen as a companion for what had promised to be a happy day. He sat for some time in gloomy thought, waking now and then to a sudden smile, as though joyousness were expected of him, but showing plainly that the effort cost him something, and was difficult. The lightness had gone out of the others, too; they sat more stiffly than they had done, and looked anywhere but at him. At last, with a sigh, he broke the silence.

"I can not tell you," he began, "how grateful I am to Providence that I met you. For me the sun shines no more; blackness creeps about me. If I should laugh a little in the sun to-day, if I should be glad that bright faces are before me"—he bowed toward the young people—"believe that it is only a passing thing, and that despair—horrible despair—will claim me for its own within a few hours. Sir"—he turned abruptly on the captain—"I am a most unhappy man."

"Indeed, I am sorry to hear it," replied the captain coldly.

"A most unhappy man," pursued the other. "I have been stung, sir, stung to the quick; I have nursed—nay, fondled—a viper in my bosom, with the inevitable result. I allude, sir, to my son. Debts I could have forgiven, recklessness I could condone—it is in the blood, and must out; but ingratitude, never! When I think of all that that boy owes to me—his talents, his education, everything—I feel that it is too much. Even the family temper—the temper that will take him far—he owes to me. And now, sir, what does he do?"

The captain shifted uneasily in his seat, and Comethup looked distressed; 'Linda had turned her head away.

"He forsakes me in my declining years; mocks the hand that fed him; leaves me to loneliness and despair. And yet, foolish creature that I am, my heart still yearns for him; my hearth is still warm for him. After all," he pursued, in a lighter vein, "I suppose I have no right to complain. As I have said, it is in the blood; he bears the taint that has kept his wretched father down in the world, and yet—thank God!—the taint which has kept him a gentleman." His breast swelled, and he shook his head valiantly.

No one quite knew what to say, and there was an awkward silence. Comethup glanced at 'Linda, but she was still looking out across the country, and he could not clearly see her face.

"I suppose," went on Mr. Robert Carlaw, rapidly regaining his more joyous manner—"I suppose that one must expect that young birds will try their wings, and fly from the nest in time. I trust that he will fly strongly; I'm *sure* he will fly strongly. But he was made for better things than to seek his fortune in the rough-and-tumble of the world. Like his unfortunate father, he is a disappointed man; he should have had a fortune, but for the caprices—there, there, we will say no more of that. I had hoped, too, that he might have remained, for another reason; I had almost believed that a childish attachment was ripening into—but no matter; time will show."

Comethup glanced at 'Linda again; her face was still averted, but on her cheek he could see that a sudden flush had grown, and that her hands were toying nervously with a ribbon at her waist. Deep down in his heart a little sudden chill of uneasiness sprang up and clouded the day for him; he had a quick memory of the last time he had traversed that road in a carriage as a child, when he had seen his cousin and the girl strolling down a lane together, the boy's arm round her neck. He wanted to spring up and tell Mr. Robert Carlaw that it wasn't true, that no one wanted him there, and that he was spoiling everything and making every one unhappy. But he sat still, and for a time they drove on in silence.

The picnic was not a success. The day was perfect, Homer's catering of the best, and the wine excellent; but, hovering over all, was the melancholy spirit of Mr. Robert Carlaw, accompanied, strangely enough, in Comethup's mind at least, by another spirit—that of a bright-faced, handsome fellow, wandering alone in a big city and fighting hard against desperate odds. Certainly Mr. Carlaw did his best to be agreeable; showed much alacrity in opening bottles and spreading out the contents of the basket; was eager in his attentions to Comethup, whom he persistently styled "my lucky nephew." Indeed, it became evident that he was anxious to ingratiate himself in Comethup's good graces; he pressed wine upon him, as though the feast had been of his giving; sat beside him and flattered him with talk of the boy's school career—of which he professed to have heard minute details; and generally endeavoured to be very lively and agreeable.

After the meal was ended, and they had all regained something of their lost spirits, 'Linda laughingly announced that she was going to search for fairies in the wood, and ran off among the trees; Comethup sprang up and went after her. But even here Robert Carlaw was not to be shaken off; he cried out something about his youth returning, and plunged after them. The fairies were forgotten, and Comethup strolled sulkily beside her, with Mr. Robert Carlaw close at his elbow, swinging his stick jauntily and humming an air.

"A word with you, my dear nephew," he said, linking his arm in that of the boy and bending his head toward him. "Our young friend here does not matter, and is probably"—he smiled and nodded at her—"sympathetic. I have always had a kindly feeling for you, my dear boy. In the case of another man, who carried his heart less openly on his sleeve than I do, that feeling might have been lessened by the fact that an inscrutable Providence thrust you into my boy's place. But that, sir, does not influence me; my heart rings true to those of my own blood, those I would call my friends, without any consideration of mere earthly gain to influence me. In a word, boy"—this with charming frankness—"I like you; fortune has not spoiled you, and I feel that there is much in our natures—simplicity and guilelessness—that is akin. I want you to look upon me as your friend; I do not want us to lose sight of each other. The world is a wicked place, full, I am told, of schemers and double dealers. You may need protection; count on me. Remember that my poor house, such as it is, is open to you. I may be coming to London—probably in search of my truant—and we may meet. There are those in London who know Bob Carlaw—good fellows all, mind you, and gentlemen—and I promise you sha'n't have a dull moment. Oh, I assure you Bob is well known in town—among the best."

Comethup, who was really a little captivated by the man's manner, murmured politely that he

would be very glad to see him in town, and that he was quite sure they would always be good friends. Mr. Robert Carlaw wrung his hand and clapped him on the shoulder, and appeared very grateful and very much moved. So complete was his gratitude, indeed, that he was not to be shaken off in any way; he kept quite close to his young friend until they were all ready to get again into the carriage.

The drive home was a silent one, at least for some part of it. Within a few miles of the town Mr. Robert Carlaw fell into a heavy slumber, and the three drew heads together and conversed in whispers. Comethup, who had not been very happy all day, received unexpected comfort, for, as he sat beside the girl, he suddenly felt her warm, slim fingers slipped into his hand, and he held them softly until the carriage stopped. If the captain saw anything, he was discreet enough not to appear to notice it.

They shook Mr. Carlaw to consciousness at his own gate. He was profuse in apologies and thanks, and it was somewhat difficult to get rid of him; indeed, he ran back to the carriage just as it was starting, to grasp Comethup again by the hand and to look fervently into his eyes.

They all got out at the captain's cottage, and Linda and Comethup lingered for a moment in the garden among the roses, while the captain went inside. When the captain came out again, smoking, the girl announced that she must go home at once; it was getting late. Comethup immediately offered to escort her, and she kissed the captain and went off with the boy down the road in the twilight.

Now there were a hundred things which Comethup wished to say; a hundred indefinite and tantalizing matters to which he seemed vaguely to seek an answer. But the boy was more afraid of this slip of a girl than he had ever been of anything or any one in all his life; the very flutter of her dress in the semi-darkness, the light touch of a ribbon-end which blew out and whipped his hand once as he walked beside her, were disquieting and awe-inspiring things. He tried frantically, as he had tried before, to hark back to the old days when they had been children, and she had clung to him and cried upon his shoulder. But this was no child; this was something wonderful, that had her eyes and her voice, and a suggestion of her in many little ways; but it was a different being, and the child of old times might have been a ghost indeed, as he had once believed, for anything she had in common with this girl. Yet something must be said, and he plunged at the matter.

"Linda!"

She looked round at him quickly. "Yes," she said.

"I'm so awfully glad that—that you've been able to go with us there. I mean that I——"

"Oh, it's been glorious! I can feel the swing of the carriage now, even while I'm walking. And it's been such a lovely day! Of course, it would have been better if Mr. Carlaw hadn't dropped down upon us; but it was very nice as it was."

"It—it wouldn't have been half so nice if—if you hadn't been there," ventured Comethup, trembling. "I mean that I—oh, I haven't had a chance of saying how glad I was to find that you—that you remembered me, and—and liked me; you know I had all the messages you sent me while I was at school; I haven't forgotten one of them; I couldn't forget them."

"Oh, yes; the captain always asked me if I had any message for you, and so—and so of course I sent them."

"But you—you didn't mind sending them; I mean you liked sending them," said Comethup, hurriedly.

"Why, of course; we had been such good friends, and I——"

"Yes, that's it," said Comethup, eagerly. "We were always good friends, weren't we?—and although I've been away so long, still that doesn't make any difference, does it? What I wanted to say was that—that I hope you won't forget me when I've gone to London; that I shall be able to see you sometimes. You won't forget me, will you, Linda?"

They had reached the gate leading into her father's garden, and they passed in together. She looked round at him for a moment and smiled, and held out her hand quite frankly, with much of the girlish bashfulness gone. "No, I sha'n't forget you, Comethup," she said. "I sha'n't forget that you were my first friend. Do you remember the night, long ago, when you found me here in this garden? And then afterward you brought the captain to me. How could I forget?"

He took the hand, and held it in both his own. "I was quite sure you wouldn't, Linda," he said, gladly. "I never forgot you all the years I was at school, although I couldn't see you. But I'll see you often now; I shall be coming down from London to see the captain, I expect."

"London?" she said, absently. "Every one seems to go to London. Brian has gone there."

There came again that little chill feeling at his heart to curb his gladness. "Yes," he said, slowly, "I suppose you've seen a great deal of Brian?"

"Oh, there was no one else to see, except the captain. Brian and I have always been good friends; I think he was quite sorry to go away from me."

Comethup stirred the leaves impatiently with his foot. "I suppose—I suppose you're very—very fond of Brian?"

She laughed gayly, and twisted herself so that her skirt twirled about her. "Oh, yes," she said, "we got on very well together. He was always getting into trouble, poor boy, and then he used to

come to me for advice. You see, I'd known him always; we met each other every day."

Comethup found himself making a rough calculation of what eight times three hundred and sixty-five would be, but checked himself in the midst of it to ask, "I suppose—you're ever so much fonder of him than you are of me?"

She laughed again, and took a step or two toward the house, then came back to him. "I didn't say so," she said, softly. "Besides, what does it matter?"

"Oh, nothing," said Comethup. "Only I should like you—I should like you to be fond of me; I should like——"

"I *am* fond of you, Comethup," she said; and laughed again, in that provoking fashion she had. He laughed too, then, and held out his hand sheepishly.

"Good-night, 'Linda," he said.

She slipped her fingers round his, and drew nearer to him. "Don't be cross," she said, in a whisper. "I love all my friends. You may kiss me if you like."

She turned one cheek toward him, and he bent forward reverently and touched it with his lips. Then, waving her hand to him, she sped away between the trees toward the house. He stood for some moments looking after her, and then turned and walked back to the captain's cottage, with his head in a whirl. He was quite certain of two things: that 'Linda was the most beautiful woman in the world, and that he was desperately in love with her and would be prepared to face all things for her sake, and perform prodigies of valour for her, and go out, if need be, a lonely exile, carrying a broken heart in his bosom and a stern yet gentle face to his fellows—all of which he knew was the proper thing to do, from the manly standpoint, in the present state of his feelings.

He saw 'Linda almost every day during his stay in the old town; they walked and drove with the captain, and came, toward the end of the week, to renew something of the old happy familiarity of their childhood. Comethup suffered all the tortures and all the ecstasies of a boy in his condition; was set walking upon air by a word from her, or a pressure of her fingers; or was plunged into the depths of misery by a rebuff, however slight or meaningless. But, being young and wonderfully healthy, he slept well and did not lose his appetite; and the matter, serious as he thought it, had no great effect upon him.

The day came when he was to start for London to join his aunt. He had decided to drive to Deal, as she had done, and there take a train for London; the fly was to come for him and his belongings immediately after breakfast. 'Linda breakfasted with them that morning, and seemed, Comethup thought miserably, brighter and happier than usual. For himself, he wondered what he should say to her, or what she would have to say to him, when the moment for parting came.

When the fly drew up at the door, he shook hands with the captain and then turned toward the girl. With downcast eyes she offered him her cheek and gave him her hand; but the captain cried: "Lips, you rogue; the boy's not kissing his grandmother!"

Blushingly she turned her face, and their lips met; and Comethup stumbled somehow out of the house. As he was getting into the fly she ran out of the garden and came close to him.

"Comethup!" she whispered.

He turned, and leaned toward her. "Yes, 'Linda; what is it?"

"You're going to London; you may meet—may see Brian; oh, please carry my—my good wishes to him, and say I want to know what he is doing and if he is prospering. You will, won't you, Comethup?"

He looked at her eager face and nodded slowly and solemnly. "Yes," he said, "I'll tell him. We shall be sure to meet, you know; I'll certainly tell him. Good-bye!"

She smiled gratefully, and kissed her hand to him. He carried the remembrance of those last words of hers on the journey to London, and turned them over and over as he went.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### COMETHUP PRACTISES DECEPTION.

Miss Charlotte Carlaw was awaiting the arrival of her nephew in the drawing room. "I'd have driven down, my dear boy, but I find I don't get any lighter as time goes on, and I thought you could possess your soul in patience until you saw me. Come here, giant. Lord! what a long time it seems since you first came into this house, a scrap of humanity I had to stoop to! And now you're so big as to make me feel uncomfortable; and your voice is deeper, and you've finished your school days. There, come and kiss a foolish old woman; I'm devilish proud of you, and I hear nothing but good reports of you. I've never said so before, but I say it now; it was the best day's work I ever did when I found you and brought you to London."

"A good day for me, aunt," said Comethup, gratefully.

"That's as it may be. I knew you'd got the right stuff in you, although if it hadn't been for the captain I should probably have ruined you. And how is the captain?"

Comethup assured her that the captain was well, and wished to be held in remembrance by the best woman in the world.

"So that's what he says of me, is it?" said Miss Charlotte Carlaw, laughing, and rocking herself over the head of her stick "You might have told him I was the happiest woman, if that's got anything to do with it. Well, did you meet any one else down in Sleepy Hollow?"

"Yes," said Comethup slowly, as if labouring under deep thought, "I met my old playfellow, 'Linda."

"Oho! And what's our old playfellow like by this time? Grown old and ugly—eh?"

"Oh, no," replied Comethup, with a short laugh. "I think—the captain thinks—she's rather pretty."

"Oh, the captain thinks so, does he? And what does Prince Charming think? There, you needn't be afraid to tell me anything; you wouldn't be a boy, and you wouldn't be your mother's son, if you didn't fall over head and ears in love with some one. And I suppose you've said all sorts of pretty things to each other, and she's given you a ribbon or a flower, or something or other, and you—"

"No, indeed," said Comethup. "She hasn't given me anything."

"Then you're both of you devilish backward for your ages, that's all I can say. Did you kiss her?"

"Y—yes," said Comethup slowly.

"Ah, that's better. Well, I won't ask any more questions; I suppose it isn't fair. Now sit down and tell me all about the end of your school days—all you haven't told in your letters—beautiful letters they were, too, Prince Charming, and I had only one grievance about them: that some one else should have to read them to me. However, that can't be helped. Now tell me what they said to you when you left, and whether they were sorry, and whether they cheered you, or if there were any speeches. Oh, I had a mind to come down and walk with my dear boy among the people who looked up to him and loved him; I've been mighty jealous of you, and mighty proud. Eight years ago, or more, I struck a bargain with you, and you've held to it more faithfully than many a man could have done. I wasn't mistaken in you, Comethup, and some day perhaps you'll know how you've changed my life and what you've really done for me. Now tell me everything. Lunch will be ready directly."

Comethup entered into a long recital of his doings, sharply questioned at intervals by Miss Carlaw as to the number of runs he had made here and the number of wickets he had taken there; she appeared to know all the technicalities of everything that had concerned him by heart. The recital lasted well into the middle of lunch, and she heard it through to the bitter end with complete and smiling satisfaction. Then, after sitting silent for some minutes, she turned abruptly to him, and felt for his hand upon the table and covered it with her own.

"Now, my dear boy," she said, "you've been away from me, for the most part, for eight years. I am a lonely old woman and one who has but one love in her life, and that's you. I've missed you and longed for you dreadfully; but I knew it was all for the best, and you were growing to be a brave and clever lad, and so I put up with it. Now, it's no good blinking facts; I'm getting old, and, at the best, I haven't got so many years of life before me. I've thought of all sorts of things for you—professions into which I might put you; I've thought of sending you to one of the universities. But these years have taught me a lesson. I can't spare you. After all, there are plenty of poor devils in this world who have got to earn their living, and I don't see why you, who have plenty, should stand in the way of any one of them. I know you'd beat 'em hollow, whatever you took up, if you once started; but I'm not going to let you try. As I've said, I'm a lonely old woman, and I'm devilish tired of my own company. If you can put up with me, and are not ashamed of me—no, no, boy, I ought not to have said that; forgive me—I think we might manage, for a year or two, to run about the world together and have a good time. I've never travelled yet, for travel simply means inconvenience; but you shall be my eyes, and we'll educate you in our own fashion. You shall see all that this good old earth has to show you, and you shall tell me all about it and give me your own impressions; and I shall be happy, and we'll both be happy. I don't want to make a vagabond of you; but there's a good idleness as well as a bad idleness, and we'll see if we can't find the first. What do you think of it?"

"I think it would be splendid," said Comethup. "There are lots of places I've heard of that I should like to see, and if you think—"

"I don't think about it; I've made up my mind. There are people who'll say that a blind old creature, such as I am, ought not to hang like a millstone round a boy's neck; but I think we shall manage to rub along together—eh, Comethup? At the same time"—she held up a warning forefinger—"if you feel any doubts about the matter, or have any other purpose in your mind, out with it. Let's have plain sailing to begin with, and we sha'n't make blunders afterward. I don't want you to be reckless; but you shall have plenty of money, and we can afford to travel in the best style and to go to the best places. I shall trust to you so completely that I intend to put the management of everything in your hands; you shall draw upon me for what you want, and I sha'n't ask you questions. Now what's it to be, Yes or No?"

"Yes, with all my heart," replied Comethup.

"That's good; we'll call it settled. I purpose starting almost immediately, and we shall probably be away for three or four years; but that will depend upon how things turn out. Now let's talk about something else. Did you meet any one else when you were staying with the captain?"

"Yes, we met Uncle Bob one day."

"What! Robert Carlaw? What did *he* want?"

"I don't think he wanted anything," replied Comethup. "He came to a picnic with us—we didn't invite him, but he came—and was very nice."

"No, Bob wouldn't want any inviting. It's my honest belief that that man will manage to get into heaven one day by sheer bounce; I don't see how they're to keep him out. So he was very nice, was he?"

"Yes, very. He suggested he might be coming to London."

Miss Carlaw nodded her head a great many times. "Oh, I dare say. Well, I'm not going to coerce you, or to control your actions in any way, but I wish you to have nothing to do with that man, or with his son. It may be prejudice, and I dare say it's very wrong; but I don't like him, and I never shall, and they won't do you any good. What's the boy doing?"

"I believe he's in London," said Comethup. "I know he came to London to make his fortune."

"Make his fiddlesticks! That boy'll never make his fortune unless he makes it out of somebody else. I don't want to be uncharitable, Comethup, but he's like his father, and his father shuffles. If you take my advice you'll have nothing to do with either of them. I dare say people would accuse me of injustice, and would say that I ought to have put that boy in the place you occupy. But, in the first place, he's had a father to look after him, and you hadn't; and, in the second place, I'm devilish glad I wasn't such a fool. No, Comethup, I'm quite satisfied with my bargain, and you and I will make the best of life together and have a good time. I look upon you as a man now, although you're young, and shall expect you to behave as a man. Now, I suppose you've spent all your money—there, I don't want to hear details—and want some more? You've left your school days behind now, and I suppose we must treat you differently. Come with me, and we'll see if we can find a cheque for you."

He conducted his aunt to a little room where she wrote her letters and transacted her business generally. He had often seen her write, and had been astonished at the ease and accuracy with which she did it—writing on a curious board, with slips of metal, having notches in them, stretched across it; with the aid of this she carried on quite a large correspondence in a clear, neat hand. So used had she become to it that she quite easily fitted in a cheque, seeming to take rapid measurements on it with her fingers, filled it up, signed it, and handed it to him.

"There," she said, "that's for fifty pounds. As I've told you, I don't want you to be reckless, but you can have more when you want it. You know where the bank is, and you can drive there whenever you like and cash it. There's only one thing I want you clearly to understand: I want you to be a man and to learn your way about; and I want you to keep a clear and open face to the world and to me. Do that always, and we sha'n't quarrel."

He commenced a halting form of thanks, but she checked him and waved him away, explaining that she had business to attend to, and smilingly adding that she couldn't be bothered with him. But the business proved to be of short duration. The proud old woman soon came bustling up to the boy's sitting room in search of him, and suggested a drive. The carriage was ordered, and they selected as their route, at Miss Carlaw's command, the most public and fashionable ways.

"We shall be away from London for a long time," said Miss Carlaw soon after they had started, "and London won't have a chance of seeing my boy. So we'll give 'em a chance now; we'll let 'em see that the Prince Charming they knew has grown a man indeed. Do they look at you? Do they stare? Lord! it's at this time I want my eyes most; I never felt the want of 'em until you came. But I mustn't grumble; I shall have a judgment on me if I grumble after all my blessings."

Jealousy and envy racked her foolish old heart as much as they had ever done. Amid all her joy at his return, she fell very often into a despondent mood; strove, in a strange, pitiful fashion that was almost grotesque, to make herself pleasing to the boy; was anxious to be seen about with him, and yet fearful lest she should weary him, or he should long for some other companion. The joy that his presence meant to her was sometimes more than swallowed up by her jealous fears concerning him. Had she but known, no such fear need ever have troubled her life, for Comethup had a genuine and deep affection for her, born of his gratitude for her many generousities, and, in greater measure, of his respect for her strength and force of character. But it was, of course, impossible for him adequately to express that, and so her fears never really left her.

With that promptitude which marked all her actions when her mind was once firmly made up, Miss Carlaw arranged to close her house and to depart for the Continent in less than a week. It was a busy week, for clothing had to be bought, and arrangements made as to their route, and many other things settled to which only Miss Carlaw could attend. Comethup went about with his aunt a great deal, but was often left to his own devices; and on one of those occasions he made up his mind that he would go down to the bank and cash the cheque which his aunt had given him. The matter had completely slipped his memory before, for there was little need for him to spend money, and he still had some in his pockets. He had been with his aunt to the bank once or twice in earlier years, and remembered well where it was situated. At the sudden recollection of the large amount of money he was soon to have in actual cash in his pocket, he hailed a hansom, immediately after leaving his aunt's house, and prepared to drive down in state. It seemed much better fun to the boy's mind to be able to take a cab, and pay for it, than to order the carriage, as he could have done at any time.

His foot was on the step of the vehicle when a hand was clapped on his shoulder, and he heard a familiar voice ejaculating his name. He turned quickly, and saw the smiling face of Brian Carlaw.

He could not help noticing, even in that first brief glance, that Brian had changed in some indefinable fashion, although it was comparatively but a few days since they had met outside the school. London seemed to have put its stamp upon the handsome, reckless face, and in the bold eyes, and not to their improvement. Brian's dress had always been careless, but now there was a sheer untidiness about it that seemed to belong to the change of face.

"Well, this is lucky," exclaimed Brian, gripping his cousin's hand. "I was just strolling up toward your place. I don't think I'd have ventured to go in, after my recollections of our worthy aunt, but I thought I might get a glimpse of you. And so we flaunt it in hansoms, do we?" He laughed good-humouredly, and slipped his arm affectionately through Comethup's. "In with you. I've nothing to claim me at the moment; I'll go wherever you're going, and you can drop me when I'm likely to be in the way. By Jove! you're a lucky youngster; and yet I don't think I'd change places with you. Where are you going?"

"I'm going to the bank," said Comethup, hastily, standing up to give the direction to the driver. As he settled into his place beside Brian he added: "I'm awfully glad to see you; I've been thinking a great deal about you, and wondering what you were doing."

"Boy, I'm living—that's what I'm doing. To-day, perhaps with a few shillings in my pocket; to-morrow with nothing. No gilded luxury for me; I've taken Fate by the throat, and I'm going to choke something out of her. I'm only a boy—not nineteen yet—a boy, at least, in years; but I've read there have been glorious boys who started as I have done and took the world by storm. Oh, don't think I'm boasting, don't think I'm mad. The days in Sleepy Hollow are done with; I stayed there too long as it was. In London here—well, a man may starve, or walk with broken boots, but everything about him lives—*lives*, I say; every face of man or woman bears the stamp of a history; every sound, even if it be the sound of an oath, has life in it. I tell you, it's glorious; one has only to gird up one's loins, as it were, and join in the race, and the excitement keeps you going; it must."

"But what are you doing?" asked Comethup.

"Doing? Everything that's worth doing. Working, seeing people, dreaming. You've heard of Chatterton? He, poor devil, came from Bristol to this wonderful city when he was about as young as I am; he poisoned himself in a garret. I promise you I won't do that; life's too strong in me; and if it comes, as it will, to a rough and tumble with the world, the world goes down. But I'm working as he worked—writing. You'll all be proud of me some day. I've met men already in these few days who have begun to encourage me and tell me what I can do and how to do it. I've been stringing rhymes for years—ever since I was a boy; now I'm stringing rhymes in good earnest. I've had introductions here, introductions there; this one has promised to take me up, that one to see that I'm not forgotten. There's a trick in this as there is in everything else—the trick of making people believe in you, making people like you. You've got to show yourself a very fine fellow, and to declare that you *are* a very fine fellow; if you're loud enough about it, people will believe you. Here's your bank, you millionaire. Shall I wait for you, or come in?"

"Oh, come in, if you like," said Comethup.

Brian Carlaw was close at his elbow when he presented the cheque; even laughed easily when Comethup hesitated a moment as to how he should take the money. "Take it how you will, so that you get it," he suggested. And when the boy had folded the notes and thrust them into his pocket, his cousin linked arms with him again and drew him out of the bank.

"Where are you going?" asked Comethup, as they reached the pavement.

"Going?" said Brian laughingly. "Well, I'm going to keep you in sight, youngster; you have no right to be wandering at large in this dreadful city with all that money in your pockets. Frankly, I'm going to have lunch with you. My breakfast this morning was a small affair, and I was casting about in my mind as to how to obtain a lunch when I met you. Genius always has to do that kind of thing, you know; it's one of its penalties. You shall give me the best lunch in town."

Comethup could not well refuse; but he was torn between the thought of this reckless, penniless, hungry cousin of his, and the remembrance of a certain blind old woman, to whom he owed everything, sitting in her solitary dining room and lunching alone and anxiously awaiting his return. However, before he had time to think about the matter with any clearness Brian had thrust him into the waiting cab and had instructed the driver in a loud voice to drive them somewhere where they could lunch. "The best place in London," he added, "and look sharp."

"So this is the way she treats you," said Brian, looking round at the boy with a smile. "Fifty pounds at one fell swoop! Why, ye gods! it'd keep me for a year. Not that I envy you—envy isn't in my nature—only it's a queer, topsy-turvy world when one man, who doesn't mean to do anything in particular, has more than he wants, and another, who wants to set the world ringing, can scarcely get a crust. There, that's sheer green envy, isn't it? But what *are* you going to do? Or have you made up your mind to live at ease and do nothing?"

"Well, in a couple of days I'm going abroad with my aunt—for three years, I believe. We're going to travel about."

Brian Carlaw's face grew grave, and, without making any reply, he sat for some time almost in moody silence. Poor Comethup began to feel guilty; drew a mental picture, as he was in the habit of doing, of himself travelling in state and luxury through all the fair places of the earth, while this clever cousin, who was bound to become a great man and who craved only fifty pounds for a whole year, struggled along, in hungry fashion, alone in London. He counted himself the usurper; wondered, in all modesty, what his aunt could have found in him to like so much better than this

brilliant youth, who would surely some day shed glory on her name. In a cumbrous, boyish, ineffectual way, he strove to think how he might help this cousin, who was himself so helpless.

The cabman knew his London, and drove them to a place noted for its cookery and its cellar. Brian quite naturally led the way, and they found a table in a corner and seated themselves. "Perhaps you'd better leave the ordering of things to me," he said to Comethup; and the boy willingly did so.

At the finish of the meal, when Brian had lighted a cigarette, he leaned across the table to Comethup and spoke confidentially. The eyes that Comethup thought were always so beautiful looked with the friendliest, frankest expression into those of the boy, and his voice had in it that soft ring of tenderness which made it almost like the voice—except that it was deeper and stronger—of a woman.

"Dear old chap," he began, "I talked like a blackguard to you just now; you're a dear, fine fellow, and I had no right—no earthly right—to envy you your good luck. We've always been good friends ever since we were little fellows, and we sha'n't be the worse friends because one is rich and the other poor. You and I don't count friendship in that way, do we?"

For answer Comethup, unwilling to trust his voice, stretched his hand across the table; it was immediately gripped by the hand of the other.

"I knew what your answer would be," said Brian. "I don't want you to think—oh, I don't know quite how to express it—but I don't want you to think that I'm afraid of the future; I'll make as good a fight of it as any one, perhaps better. Only there's an element in me that isn't quite—well, not quite a manly one—something of the feminine, I mean; it makes me long for sympathy and a friend's face and what-not. And that was why, although you're only a boy, I was somehow rather looking forward to your being in London; we might have seen something of each other occasionally; at all events, it would have been good to know that you were near at hand. However, you've got your own life to live, and you're going to have a good time—and so am I, for the matter of that." He threw back his head, crossed his hands behind it, and laughed softly. "It's only this cursed want of money—There, I'm behaving like a blackguard again, so we'll change the subject. Let's talk—oh, of anything else."

The flimsy banknotes in Comethup's pocket seemed to weigh heavier than lead; he thought miserably of all the luxury with which he was surrounded, of the bowing servants, the costly furniture, the carriages, everything that was his for the raising of a finger. And it seemed harder than ever that Brian—so gentle, so cheerful, so willing to take the rough with the smooth—should have presently to go out into the world and fight desperately for actual food. He plunged his hand into his pocket and pulled out the bundle of notes, and spoke in a choking voice, "Brian—I—I say—Brian—"

Brian, who had been gazing meditatively at the ceiling, looked across at him, suddenly leaned forward, with his elbows on the table and his chin on his palms, and spoke in a surprised tone. "Why, Comethup, what's the matter, boy?"

"Look here, Brian"—he sunk his voice to a whisper and looked round apprehensively—"I can't take—take all this money, and know that you—that you haven't a penny, or scarcely a penny, in the world. You see, Brian, anything might happen to you. Why, you might actually starve! It would be horrible. You know I have a great deal more—lots more than I can possibly want. No one would know anything about it, I promise you. Won't you take them?" He thrust the notes across the table and pushed them against Brian's sleeve.

Brian changed the position of his head, lowering it so that his face was hidden by his hands. Comethup saw emotion in the attitude, and pressed the notes harder upon him. If he could have seen behind the hand, he would have known that Brian's dark eyes had suddenly lighted up with satisfaction, and that his mouth was working suspiciously, almost as though he were trying to repress a smile. When, however, after a moment or two he took his hand from his face and looked across at the boy, his expression was grave enough, and his mouth was firm with determination. He shook his head solemnly.

"No, old chap, it's impossible. Remember, I owe you money already. But for you, I should have starved days ago. No, I've got to make a fight for it, and I shall manage to fall on my feet. I know you can afford it, and I'm awfully grateful, but it isn't fair, and I'm not going to do it." He pushed the notes back again across the table.

"But, Brian," urged Comethup, "just think for a moment. I shall be away three years at the least, and I shall have plenty of money—oh, I'm not boasting about it, but you know I shall have plenty—and I can't bear to think that you may be in straits while I'm having a good time. You say this'll keep you for a year; by that time you will probably be doing big things. If you don't like to take it, let it be a loan; if you want to pay me back, you can—when you're rich and famous."

That point was apparently one which had escaped Brian. He pondered for a moment, half started forward, and drew back again, and finally stretched out his hand with a smile. "You're the finest fellow in the world, Comethup," he cried, "and, by Jove! I'll dedicate my first book to you. You're the only friend I've really got. Yes, I'll take the money—or stay, you'd better keep a fiver of it to pay for the lunch and to keep you swimming till you get another cheque. You don't know how happy you've made me, old boy." He was busily engaged with the notes, detaching one for five pounds and tossing it across to Comethup, while he pocketed the others in businesslike fashion. "I shall go home singing like a lark. By Jove! I'll be able to work now. The fear of getting up each morning without the prospect of a meal before you doesn't sharpen your wits, in spite of what



people may say. Look here, I'll give you my address. You must write to me, dear old chap; and I'll write to you and let you know all that I'm doing. Besides, I may want to send you this money back; it won't be long before I repay it, I promise you. Keep me informed of your movements when you change from one place to another, and I'll write to you regularly."

Comethup paid the bill, and they went out together. He had quite forgotten about the cab, and it was still waiting; Brian thrust him in, and stood on the pavement to say good-bye.

"I won't try and thank you, old boy," he said, "because such a thing as this is too great for thanks. If ever you're desperately hard up, you'll know what I feel like at this moment. You've got my address; don't forget to write to me. Good-bye!"

They gripped hands, and Brian walked rapidly away, with that curious half-swagger which was so like his father's step. Comethup drove home, beginning to wonder a little as to how he should account to his aunt for the disappearance of the money in the event of her questioning him.

He remembered how fixed was her dislike to Brian, and that, although, as she had said, she had no wish to control his actions in regard to his cousin, she would probably not be pleased to know that he had regarded even her suggestion so lightly. Somewhat quakingly, therefore, he sought her presence on his return to the house.

"Well, you rascal," she said, smiling, as she heard his step in the room, "I suppose you have been running about town, throwing your money about, eh?"

The shaft struck home, although she had only spoken in jest, and Comethup winced. "Well, not exactly throwing it about, aunt," he began; but she checked him.

"There, there, I don't want to know anything about it. I gave you the money to spend, and I expect you to do as you like with it. I don't want you to indulge in wanton waste—that would be absurd; and I don't think you're likely to do it. But you needn't stint yourself. And let me know when you want any more. By the way, as to-morrow is our last real day in town, and there'll be a good many things to attend to, I think we'll go to the theatre to-night—something bright, with music in it. Would you like to do so?"

"Very much, aunt," he replied.

"Very well, then; you'd better go and see if you can get a box—a box is always more comfortable. Now I want you to learn to please yourself, and to choose for yourself, and then you'll please me. Just look down this morning's paper and see what piece you think we should both like, and then take a hansom—I heard you drive up in one just now; I'm glad to see you're finding your way about—take a hansom, and drive off to the theatre and get a box for to-night. If you can't get it at one place, get it at another; you've got money enough. Get a big box, near the stage."

Comethup tremblingly began to fumble in his pockets. He had no very distinct idea of what a box would cost, but he knew it was an expensive matter, and the gold coins in his pocket were remarkably few. He coughed and hesitated, and Miss Carlaw began to show signs of impatience.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Don't you want to go? For Heaven's sake, boy, don't stand there in that fashion! Comethup, is anything the matter?" Her voice had changed in a moment, and she came rapidly across the room to him. "Comethup, something has happened. What is it?"

"If you please, aunt—I—I'm dreadfully sorry, but how much does a box cost?"

"What the devil's that got to do with it? Anything from two and a half to three guineas, if it's a good one. What *is* the matter with you?"

"Well," said Comethup, slowly, "I'm afraid I haven't got money enough."

She stood quite still for a moment, as if not fully understanding what he said. "Not money enough?" she echoed at last. "But, my dear boy, haven't you cashed the cheque I gave you—the fifty pounds, you know?"

"Yes, aunt, I cashed it. But—I'm dreadfully sorry—there isn't much of it left—not enough for that."

Miss Charlotte Carlaw whistled softly, and looked grave. "My dear boy," she said, "I told you you might spend that money just as you liked, and I'm not going back on my word. But you're a youngster at this game, evidently, and perhaps I was foolish to give you such a sum all at once. Fifty pounds is a good deal of money, and, although I'm very rich, you mustn't let it slip quite so quickly as that, Prince Charming. I don't want you to tell me anything unless you wish, but, in God's name, boy, what have you done with it? What have you spent it on? I told you to do as you liked with it, but for the life of me I can't think what you've done with that money in a matter of two days unless you've lost it. Have you lost it, Comethup?"

"No," said Comethup, slowly, "I haven't lost it. I know it seems—seems awfully strange, especially as I only cashed it to-day; I really didn't want it then."

"There's some mystery here," said Miss Carlaw, "and I think I ought, for your sake, to get at the bottom of it. Devil take the money! I don't care a pin about it. But what have you done with it? Come, you don't mind telling me?"

"No," said Comethup. He had made up his mind that some explanation must be given. "I didn't want to tell you, but I gave it away, or lent it."

"Well, go on," replied Miss Carlaw.

"I gave it—lent it, I mean—to—to an old friend. He was hard up, and he really didn't want to take

it. But he said it would keep him for a year——”

“Poor devil!” ejaculated Miss Carlaw under her breath.

“And I wanted to help him, so I made him take it. I didn’t want to tell you; you know I never have anything to spend money on, and I thought I should be able to get along with what I had for a long time.”

Miss Carlaw turned away abruptly and pulled out her purse. Twisting round toward him again, she held it out, even shook it at him. “Here, take this. Oh, my dear boy, I’m an old fool, and you’re probably a young one; but, upon my word, I think you’re making me love you more every day. It was a lot of money to give any one, but you’re quite right, and I hope I should have done the same myself. Here, take this, and go and see about the box. There’s money enough there.”

“No, I’d rather not take any more money, aunt, thank you; not yet, at least. I don’t want it, and I can just as well wait a bit.”

“Will you take it? Don’t talk nonsense.”

“No, thank you, I’d rather not,” said Comethup.

She laughed, very well pleased, and came nearer to him. “Here, take it,” she urged gently, “and pay for the box and your cab, at least. Lord! I love your obstinacy.”

Comethup took the purse and kissed her, feeling very guilty, and went out to do her bidding.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### COMETHUP IS SHADOWED.

Comethup, sitting in solemn state with his aunt in a great box which would comfortably have held six, could not quite get rid of that guilty feeling he had of having deceived her. It was certainly the first time, but, despite the difference in their ages and dispositions, and despite the relationship existing between them, they had hitherto been in all things friends; there was a fine comradeship between the old woman and the boy—a comradeship which had demanded complete confidence on his part and equal trust on hers. Having nothing to conceal, his life had been like an open book to her, and she had read the book eagerly and with satisfaction. Now, for the first time, it had become necessary that he should deceive her; that, however justly, he should use her money for a purpose of which she would not have approved.

On the other hand, he thought with very genuine sympathy and affection of Brian, the boy who seemed destined to make so much more of life than Comethup could hope to do; who was in every sense, he thought, made of better and finer stuff. He remembered how he had said that fifty pounds would keep him beyond the reach of want for a year in London, and trembled a little to think how small a sum fifty pounds really meant; he found himself doing disturbing sums in division in his head, and figuring out how much lay between Brian and starvation every week.

In an interval between the acts, when the lights were turned fully on in the theatre, he leaned out over the edge of the box and carelessly looked at the people below. Not a few glasses were levelled at him, and not a few whispers went round concerning the identity of the handsome boy who sat in the big box with the old woman with the closed eyes. Gazing beneath him at the rows of stalls, he suddenly caught his breath and drew back; then leaned over again in some amazement. Beneath him, seated beside a lady in evening dress, was Brian Carlaw.

Comethup’s exclamation had not been unnoticed by his aunt. “Some one you know?” she inquired.

“I—I’m not quite sure,” said Comethup. “I think I’ll go round and see, if you don’t mind.”

“By all means,” said Miss Carlaw. “If it’s anybody nice, bring ’em here; if you think they’ll bore me, don’t.”

Comethup made his way down to the stalls, and came face to face with Brian, who was coming out. Brian looked confused for a moment, and then extended his hand. “My dear old boy, this is delightful. Twice in one day; there’s a fate in it. I dare say you’re surprised to see me here; but, as a matter of fact, it’s a piece of speculation. There’s a woman”—he jerked his head to indicate the lady whose side he had quitted—“who’s very good fun, and very useful. She’s taken rather a fancy to this budding versifier, and I think it’s probable that she may be able to do something for me. At all events, she’s a useful person to know. So you see, as it’s no use hoping to do anything in this world without taking risks, your money enabled me to secure a couple of stalls to-night; to bring her down here in style—in a word, to make a good impression. My dear boy, it’ll pay; depend upon it, it’ll pay well. I told you this morning that I was learning the trick of the whole business; it’s as easy as winking when you know it, and I think it’ll carry me through anything. You may sit and write and starve in your garret forever, and do not a ha’porth of good; you’ve got to come out of your garret and cut a good figure if people are to believe you. I’m beginning to like the game; I am, indeed. Come and have a cigarette.”

Comethup hastily declined, murmured something about how glad he was to see Brian again, and went back to his aunt’s box. He hoped, and indeed believed, that it was all right; but a little curious feeling of doubt in regard to Brian came into his mind, and would not be dispelled. He

watched his cousin and the lady who was with him during the evening; noticed that Brian sat very close to her and whispered; observed that she talked in loud tones and laughed somewhat immoderately, and made considerable play with a huge feather fan. He had, too, to begin a new calculation in regard to the money with which he had supplied Brian; found it necessary to deduct from it the price of two stalls and an approximate amount for cabs, and then to redivide the sum remaining by fifty-two; Brian's income for a year looked meagre indeed. Miss Charlotte Carlaw made inquiries concerning his friend, but Comethup put her off with an evasive reply.

On the following day the final arrangements were made, and they started for the Continent. Miss Charlotte Carlaw had carried the whole matter through with such energy, and in so short a space of time, that there had been no time to inform the captain, but Comethup wrote him a long letter from Paris, on the first day of their arrival there, breaking to him, as gently as possible, the intelligence that they would not be likely to meet for at least three years. The boy thought sometimes, in those early days, that he would have been glad to get back again to the old-fashioned town in which he had been born, and to narrow down his world—which had widened so much recently, and was widening every day—to the captain and 'Linda and the few others who had known and loved him as a child. But he blamed himself the next instant for his ingratitude.

They spent quite a long time in Paris—nearly two months—and at the end of the first month a surprising event occurred.

He was passing one day through the large hall of the hotel at which they were stopping, with his aunt's hand resting on his arm, when he observed a young man, whose back was toward him, making some inquiries of a servant. The attitude and gestures seemed familiar. As he passed with his aunt toward the staircase he glanced back over his shoulder and saw that the young man had turned and was looking hesitatingly at him. It was his cousin, Brian Carlaw.

Brian made a half-movement toward him, and then looked at the unconscious Charlotte Carlaw, made a comical grimace, and shook his head. As Comethup went on up the stairs, still looking back at the other in perplexity, Brian stepped forward softly and motioned to him to come down again and join him there. Comethup nodded, and continued his way upstairs. He conducted his aunt to her room, and then hurried down again to Brian. That young man received him rapturously, and airily plunged into an explanation.

"Dear old boy, you know you wrote to me, like the good fellow you are, and told me where you were staying. I don't mind confessing that at first I was wild with envy. Thought I, 'Paris is the place for inspiration, for beauty, the very home of a poet.' And then I thought: 'No, my boy; you've got your work to do, and, gray skies or blue, sunshine or rain, you must do it.' And I do assure you, old fellow, that I went at it hammer and tongs; I did indeed. Can't we go into the smoking room or somewhere and have a chat?"

Comethup led the way into a corner of the room and they sat down. He began to be a little frightened at the business—a little afraid of this harlequin cousin, who was forever springing upon him, and whose presence he must keep secret.

"But then, while I worked," pursued Brian, "and I give you my word I *did* work, away went the money. You've no idea what it is in London; you've had some one to provide everything for you—I had to provide for myself. And then I found that the days of genius out-at-elbows are gone past; genius must be well dressed now, and make something of a figure, or he'll be mistaken for a beggar. It would take too long to explain, but the thing has to be done; it's absolutely necessary. And so"—with a smile and a shrug of his shoulder—"the money went."

"All of it?" asked Comethup, in a low voice.

"Most of it. I know it seems a lot, but there it is—or rather there it isn't. Dear old boy"—he leaned affectionately nearer to Comethup—"I suppose we poor devils who live by our wits don't take life quite in the same way as a more sober citizen might do. I can't account for it, but if you look back, as I have done, over the histories of any men who've made anything of a stir in the world, you'll find they were improvident, thriftless rascals, who never ought to have been trusted with a penny. They ought to have been given two suits of clothes a year, without any pockets, and fed by the state. It's a horrible condition of things, that a man who's doing work that he hopes will live should have to fight and beg for bread and butter. There, it's no use moralizing; that's what I told myself two days ago in London, when I'd come down to the last five-pound note. 'I'll go to Comethup,' said I; 'Comethup is a dear good chap, with plenty of money and nothing to do with it; Comethup knows what I'm going to do, and how I'm working, and all my hopes and plans; Comethup won't see me fall to the ground.' So here I am."

Poor Comethup sat for a moment in silence. He felt the delicacy and yet at the same time the falseness of the position in which he stood. With that feeling which was always strongest in him—the desire not to wound any one's feelings—he was prompted now to put the matter as gently as possible; but an explanation must be given, and given firmly. After a moment's silence, he looked round at Brian with a troubled face; Brian, for his part, was smiling and quite at ease.

"You see, Brian," he began, "I want to help you very much; I should really feel much happier if you had the money altogether. But then my aunt—*our* aunt, I should say—has been very good to me, and has never denied me anything. The money I lent you before was hers, and as she—well, as she doesn't—"

"Doesn't like me, you mean," broke in Brian, with a laugh. "Oh, I know that quite well; and I can assure you I haven't the least respect for *her*. What were you going to say?"

"Well, as she doesn't like you, I couldn't, of course, tell her exactly where the money had gone,

although she wanted to know. I didn't tell her quite the truth about it, and it made me feel frightfully mean. You know, if the money were my own, you should have as much as you wanted at any time; as it isn't, it doesn't seem quite fair to her, does it?"

"Nonsense! I don't see it in that light at all," replied Brian. "She'll give you anything you like to ask, and she's got plenty, and you have the satisfaction of knowing that you're helping a poor devil to fame and fortune. My dear boy, it'll all be paid back some day, every penny of it; there's not the least doubt about that. I've got my chance now, but I shall lose it, as sure as fate, if I can't get some money. Hang it all, old chap, you wouldn't leave me stranded in Paris without a penny while you live on the fat of the land and drive about in a carriage? You couldn't do it, Comethup; you're not that sort of a fellow."

"But it isn't my money," said Comethup with a groan. "Don't you understand that? I think she ought to know."

"Tell her, then," said Brian, with a short laugh, "and see what'll happen. You know perfectly well that she'll refuse to allow you to give me another penny; you admit she doesn't like me, and she doesn't care whether I go to the dogs or not. What's the use of talking such nonsense as that?"

"I suppose you're right," said Comethup, "and of course I can't let you go about without any money, especially in a strange city. But I haven't very much with me—only about twenty pounds—and I—"

"My dear boy, twenty pounds means more to me than you can understand; it's a fortune. Twenty pounds will positively save me. You've been used to such a lot that it doesn't seem much to you, but to me—ye gods! twenty pounds banishes dull care and puts me on the high road to fortune. And let me tell you this: I mean to be careful this time; I'm working, as I've told you, and, until I see the results of my work, I ask no more assistance from you or any one; to that I pledge my word."

Comethup handed over the money, and Brian gripped the hand that gave it to him fervently for a moment. "Some day," he said, in a voice of emotion, "some day you will understand more fully what you have done. I don't know how to thank you, old chap."

"Oh, please don't say anything about that," replied Comethup hastily. "Are you going back to London?"

"Oh, I shall stay in Paris for a day or two; it's just a good chance to have a look round, and see what the wonderful place is like; I shall do it cheaply, never fear. By the way," he added, as he rose from his seat, "did I tell you that dad is over here? Followed me to London, and we had an affecting reconciliation—tears and all that sort of business. So as I was coming over here he said he'd come too; couldn't bear to be parted from me. I suppose"—this with a laugh—"I suppose I treated the dear old chap rather badly, and I'm glad to be friends with him again; he's not a bad sort, take him altogether. Perhaps you'd better not tell your aunt that we're here; she doesn't love either of us. Good-bye. I won't ask you to save me again, old chap. Write and let me know where you go, and when; the old address in London will find me. Good-bye."

Comethup, in his bed that night, after much anxious thought came to a resolution. He fully and firmly made up his mind not to write to Brian again. Had the matter rested solely with himself, he could not have formed such a resolve; but he thought of his aunt, and knowing that it was impossible to tell her anything of the matter, he saw clearly that his duty to her was to keep away from Brian. Boy though he was, and great though his admiration was for his cousin, he yet saw clearly enough into the matter to know that Brian would light-heartedly come to him again and again without any thought of the future. It was with a great sense of relief that he heard his aunt next morning declare that they would leave Paris within a few days.

But his troubles were not at an end. Miss Charlotte Carlaw complained that he was moody and silent, and strove in her own kindly fashion to discover what was the matter. "I can see what it is," she said abruptly one morning; "I'm the wrong sort of companion for you. I ought to have known it; I should have been wiser than to tie you to the apron strings of a blind old woman in this fashion. It's been a mistake, and you must forgive me, boy. While I've been wanting to have you near me, I've lost sight of the fact that you, being young and strong, would probably want to be capering about the city alone and having a good time. Well, I warned you what it would be before we started, and you see I was right."

"No, indeed, aunt," said Comethup eagerly, "you are quite mistaken. I'm sorry if I have seemed to be bothered about anything; but I'm not, really, and you sha'n't have to complain again. I'm quite sure no one could have a better time than I am having."

"Well, I'm not quite satisfied, and I'm afraid I've really been very selfish about the matter. For Heaven's sake, boy, if there's anything you want, or want to do, within reason, say what it is! Or if anything is troubling you, you're surely not afraid of an old woman who's tried to be your friend and who would give a great deal to save you any sorrow?"

"Why, of course not," replied the boy quickly; "I'll tell you in a moment if there's anything I want or—or if there's anything troubling me. I'm glad you're going away from Paris, because I've got just a little tired of it."

"We'll be off to-morrow," said Miss Carlaw, with decision. "Now, just to please me, forget for an hour or two that I exist at all; off with you where you will, and don't get into mischief. In fact, I'll give you the day to yourself, and if you come near me at all I shall be very angry. I can contrive to amuse myself alone for once. Here's money for you; lunch well, dine well, do what you like. Off with you; I don't want to hear your voice till nightfall."

Comethup somewhat reluctantly set off into the city. But it was a fine day, and the brightness of everything about him—the moving people, the life and animation of the city—all had their effect upon him. He was quite glad to be alone for once; he seated himself on a bench in some gardens in the sunshine and folded his arms and sat looking out at the world before him through half-closed eyelids and with a smile about his mouth, for he was very young, and the world seemed very fair.

He began to dream lazily about his old friends: wondered what the captain was doing at that hour, and almost pictured him strolling across the sandy wastes with 'Linda by his side. He was glad to think of 'Linda; glad to remember her as he had seen her last, a pretty girlish figure, at the gate of the captain's garden. With all the bustle and noise of Paris about him, with strange tongues chattering and strange figures moving past him, he seemed to see, in a vision, the old place of his childhood in another atmosphere and another light; held it, as it were, in a sacred and secret place in his remembrance—a thing apart.

One of the figures that flitted vaguely before him stopped and appeared to draw back a pace and then to advance. Comethup opened his eyes fully and stared up at the figure. A familiar voice greeted him.

"My dear, dear nephew! How I have longed and hoped to see you! What has my cry been these past days, since I learned that you were in Paris? 'Comethup,' and yet again 'Comethup.—Show me Comethup,' I said, 'and let me look into his eyes, and I am a happy man!' And now my wish is granted; more than all, I find you alone. My dear boy!" He grasped Comethup fervently by the hand and sank upon the bench beside him.

"I heard you were in Paris," said Comethup; "Brian told me."

"Ah, that misguided boy! But still I love him. Who could help loving him? We have had our differences; we have even used harsh words to each other. But all that, I trust, is forgotten and forgiven. When I heard that he was coming to Paris, and coming, above all things, to see you, I said at once that I would go with him; my place was by his side, and, as I have told you, I longed to see my nephew. Boy"—he looked with affectionate sternness at Comethup—"you're not looking well."

"I—I'm very well, thank you; only a little tired."

Mr. Robert Carlaw shook his head plaintively. "Ah, the weight of wealth, the responsibility of it! I am sometimes glad in my heart that Providence saw fit to make me poor; I have known my sorrows, but I have known my joys also. Wealth is a great responsibility. My dear sister is well, I trust?"

"Oh, yes, she's quite well," said Comethup.

There was an awkward pause for some moments, and then Mr. Carlaw, with something of an effort, turned toward his nephew. "My dear Comethup," he said, prefacing his speech with a hastily suppressed sigh, "Fortune has been very good to you and has made you, if one may say so, her favourite child; has taken you from an obscurity (which I am sure was quite unmerited) and has placed you in affluence. If I did not think you were wise beyond your years I should not speak to you as I do now; but I know that Fortune has not blunted your sympathies, and that you are still the generous-hearted boy I knew in years gone by. Comethup, look well upon me"—he stuck his hands in the breast of his frock coat and looked gloomily at the boy—"and tell me what I am."

Comethup looked at him in some amazement. "You—you're my Uncle Robert, of course," he said.

"Call me Bob," said Mr. Carlaw, with some emotion. "My friends have always called me Bob; had they called me by any other name it might have been better for me. But Bob was a good fellow; Bob had his hand in his pocket for a friend; Bob hadn't the slightest notion of that simple word 'no'; in short, Bob, in the world's eyes, has been going straight to the devil since he was breeched. Boy"—he laid his hand on Comethup's arm, and Comethup felt that he trembled with agitation—"boy, your Uncle Bob has finished his course; your Uncle Bob is a bankrupt and an outlaw."

For a few moments Comethup was too much shocked to say anything; he sat still, staring helplessly at his uncle, whose head was bowed in a forlorn fashion. He murmured something at last about being very sorry, and Mr. Carlaw felt for his hand and pressed it without looking at him or speaking. Rallying a little presently, the forlorn one raised his head and endeavoured to smile, and looked out hopefully upon the prospect.

"Sunshine—and sympathy; what can a man want more? You're young, Comethup, in the ways of the world—I had almost said simple; the world will try to take advantage of you; will rob you with one hand while it fawns upon you with the other. Beware of it; take your own path straight through life, and trouble not about what any man may say. It's the only way," he added gloomily; "would that I had remembered it in time! For myself, although they have made me a beggar, I care nothing; a crust of bread and a cup of water are all that I ask of any man, and they will probably deny me those. But, my boy, I have responsibilities—I have a son." Here his emotion appeared quite to overmaster him for an instant, and Comethup felt very sorry for him indeed. After a few moments he slapped his breast firmly and coughed, blinked his eyelids, and looked upon the boy with a ghostly smile.

"I think Brian will make his way—will get on, I mean," said Comethup, in the hope of encouraging him.

"Make his way! Get on! You are right; you are very right. The time will surely come when his

name will be echoed to the skies; when that which is pent in his father and has found no proper outlet will appear in the son, and gladden the father's heart. It is there; I have proudly watched the beginnings of it; I have, in my poor way, fostered the first trembling attempts. But what is the case—how do we stand? Again comes in the damnable thought of money—money, without which we can do nothing. Like those of commoner clay, we must live—we must eat—we must have fire to warm us—a roof to shelter us. And here, at the very outset of my son's career, I find myself a beggar."

He beat his foot restlessly upon the ground, and turned away his head and bit his lip in the struggle to hide his feelings. Comethup in a dim way began to be pretty certain what was coming, but he was desperately sorry for the man, nevertheless.

"Now and then, in our dreary way through a horrible world, we come upon one human soul that has sympathy—nay, that has a heart of gold; it's rare, but still we find it. There is one such heart of gold in this city to-day. Listen: my son came here practically penniless; we looked into each other's eyes; we were big with hope, but still we were penniless. Suddenly my son returns to me with money—with what is, to us, a large sum. Delicacy forbids my asking whence it came; my son informs me that a friend—I repeat the word with emphasis—a friend has insisted upon helping him. His delicacy is as great as mine; he refuses to say more, and I—well, I do not press him. But in my heart I know—oh, my dear boy, let us drop parables; let me thank you as one man may thank another. I am broken, friendless, an outcast; yet my heart is still strong and true; my feelings, pray God, are those of a gentleman. I may tramp the highways to-morrow without a crust, but still I trust men may turn to look at me and say, "There goes a gentleman.'"

He said it with an air, even with something of the old flourish, and Comethup was considerably impressed. After some silence, Mr. Robert Carlaw got up, with a sigh, and turned toward his nephew and held out his hand.

"This has done me good," he said. "I come into your fresh, buoyant, rich young life; I touch again the things that might have been; I renew, as it were, my youth. Our paths lie in different directions; you sweep along the broad highway, and the dust—yes, the dust—of your chariot wheels shall be flung over me as I walk. That is fate, that is life. Good-bye!"

He took his nephew's hand in both his own for a moment, sighed heavily, and turned away. In less than a minute he was back again. There was hesitation in his manner and he shifted his feet uneasily, yet he spoke with a desperate boldness.

"My dear friend, I—I have put off what I have to say—put it off in the hope that I might not have to say it. My courage deserts me; it is not easy for a man who has carried his head high before his fellows to lower it and to beg. Do not misunderstand me," he added hastily, "'tis not for myself; if it were for myself the petition should never be urged. It is for another—it is for my son. Comethup, it is necessary, in order that we may get our affairs somewhat straight, that we should leave this city. My son has money, but he needs it for his work—he may even need it for food. Can I go to him and say to him—can I, his father, say it to him, 'Brian, I am penniless; I have not sufficient money to bear me to my native land'? This may seem a mere matter of cowardice; but, broken and outcast though I am, I would still carry myself well in the eyes of my son; I would still have him say, 'This is my father, of whom I am proud, and who has never shamed me yet.' It is, I think, a natural thought, a natural wish. Frankly, as man to man, will you help me to do that?"

Comethup felt that, under the circumstances, there was but one thing to be done. He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out the money his aunt had given him. "How much would you want, sir?" he asked slowly.

"Well, to be businesslike, may I say ten pounds?"

Comethup was rather glad he wanted no more, because the loss of that sum would still leave something in his own pockets so that it might not be necessary for him to apply to his aunt. He handed Mr. Robert Carlaw the amount specified, and Mr. Carlaw shook hands with him many times and blessed him, and finally walked away with a jaunty step.

Comethup dined sparingly, and wandered about the city for the greater part of the day. He returned to the hotel in the evening, and found his aunt sitting alone; he was informed that she had asked if he had returned several times during the day.

"Well, young scapegrace!" she exclaimed as he entered, "I don't mind confessing I've missed you horribly; and I suppose you've been tearing round the city and flinging your money about, and making people wonder who the young English gentleman is, and where he gets his money from, and what he's doing alone in a wicked city, eh? Oh, you've been doing the thing royally, I'll be bound."

Comethup thought of the modest dinner he had eaten in a small *café*, and of how for the rest he had wandered about the streets in lonely fashion for many hours; but there was a fiction to be kept up, and he laughed and said he was afraid he had spent a great deal of money.

"Well, never mind; it won't do any harm, once in a way. You're inclined to be a bit reckless, Prince Charming, but I suppose that's my fault. Most of the money gone, eh?"

"I'm afraid so," said Comethup. He saw that this was the clearest and best fashion to get out of the difficulty—to take to himself a character for extravagance which he did not possess; it would save the necessity for any explanation.

"Well, so that you've had a good time, I don't mind. I must find you some more to-morrow; I only want you to enjoy yourself and to be straightforward, and keep nothing from me."

Comethup awoke with a lighter heart the next morning—lighter, perhaps, because Paris was to be left behind. He was glad to think that he had got well over his difficulties; almost glad, too, to think that he had seen the last of Mr. Robert Carlaw. Of his feelings toward Brian he was not quite so certain; he pitied him very much, and hoped earnestly that Fortune and Fame were indeed holding out their hands to him. But he was but a boy, who had lived his simple life hitherto simply and straightforwardly and well, with nothing to conceal. Now, for the first time, with however good a purpose, he was deceiving one whom he knew to be his greatest and most loyal friend—one but for whose loyal assistance life could never have been to him the full and splendid thing it had been.

But he had not seen the last of his uncle by any means. As he went down the steps of the hotel, with his aunt leaning on his arm, toward the vehicle which waited to take them to the station, a figure suddenly sprang forward and thrust aside the servant who held the door. As the unconscious Miss Carlaw stepped into the carriage her brother bent his head reverently, appeared almost to be silently blessing her. The wonderful Robert was evidently possessed with a deep gratitude for which Comethup would scarcely have given him credit. It was, of course, impossible for the boy to speak; he could only look entreatingly at the man and beg him by signs to go away.

But Uncle Robert knew better than that. While the luggage was being piled upon the vehicle he flung himself eagerly into the most menial offices—the lifting of boxes and the final closing of the carriage door; then, when all was completed, he actually climbed upon the box seat beside the driver, folded his arms, and accompanied them to the station.

At the station it was just as bad. Poor Comethup lived in torments until the train actually steamed away, for Mr. Robert Carlaw got in the way of porters and assisted them, to their astonishment, in disposing of the luggage, and was altogether a very elegant and ridiculous millstone round the boy's neck. Finally, as the train departed, he stood in an attitude of deep dejection, with his hat in his hand, watching them as they moved out of his sight.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE BEGINNINGS OF A GENIUS.

The three years of wandering had stretched into four, and thence into five. It would have been under ordinary circumstances a happy, irresponsible time enough, for they took their journeyings haphazard, staying in a place for months at a time if it pleased them, or but a few days if they did not like it; they had every luxury and comfort and convenience that money could purchase; they stayed always in the best places and travelled in the best manner. Yet throughout it all there had hung, floating before him wherever he went, an ever-growing cloud of deceit and trickery about Comethup. Dread seemed to mark the most cloudless day, and he never entered a strange city or village without looking with anxious eyes at every passing tourist.

Throughout those five years it is safe to say that Comethup had never been wholly free from the presence of Robert Carlaw and his son. First the one and then the other; then both together; then the one, with a piteous tale of the other's deceit; and the other, with a story of how badly the one had treated him. Comethup never quite knew whether they travelled in company or whether they merely kept touch with each other's movements and met at intervals; at all events, they seemed to know pretty clearly the route taken by Comethup and his aunt, and the dates of their departure from various places. Indeed, Miss Carlaw and her nephew were easy of identification, for they travelled in state; and each was a noticeable figure and attracted attention in different ways. The blind old woman, travelling through beautiful places for pleasure, was a subject for sympathy; the handsome youth who was her constant attendant, and who carried his grave face through so many different scenes, and who appeared always so devoted to her, won the admiration of many people whose names he never knew and to whom he scarcely spoke.

Once or twice Comethup had felt with growing relief that the Carlaws, father and son, were gone; a month or two would pass and nothing be seen of them. And then one morning, in a strange city, the horizon would be darkened to him by the swing of Uncle Robert's coat-tails; or his day would be changed and troubled by the sudden appearance of Brian, alert and eager and full of wild hopes as ever. The daring and resource of Mr. Robert Carlaw knew no bounds. On more than one occasion, in crowded streets, he actually walked on the farther side of his sister, bending forward to glance at Comethup and to smile and nod to him as though to assure the boy of his protection. On such occasions Miss Carlaw would embarrassingly let fall some remark, perhaps even touching Robert himself, all unconscious of the figure that stalked beside her. With that air of protection large upon him, he turned up in the most unexpected places, and his errand was always the same.

As degrading things degrade a man, so Robert Carlaw lost something of the old, reckless swagger—the fine air with which he had carried himself before the world. He did not come less boldly on that account when he made his shameful plea again and again to Comethup; but he came to make it, in time, more as a matter of course—a something to which he had the right. He must have had some small money of his own, or must have begged and borrowed elsewhere during those years; all that he squeezed out of Comethup could not have enabled him to travel as he did or live in the style he did.

Once or twice, as has been said, father and son presented themselves together; they had made up their differences and henceforth nothing was to separate them; their interests went hand in hand, as did their hopes and ambitions. On such occasions Mr. Robert Carlaw would announce, not without emotion, that life held new purposes for him. Comethup even saw him once turn up the sleeve of his coat and mutter something about work. Brian would laugh and clap his father on the shoulder, and cry that he was a good fellow and that they'd stand or fall together.

But in a day or two one or the other would make his appearance alone; would tell his tale of the desertion of that being who should have held to him, if only for the ties of blood; would plead that the deserter, in a moment of forgetfulness or duplicity, had taken the available capital, and would beg for further help. In one case it would be the father whom Brian in a sudden fit of petulance had deserted; in another case Brian would cry out upon his unnatural parent who had, theoretically at least, cursed him, and left him to starve.

So the game had gone merrily on until Comethup had grown quite used to it, and was only glad that he could keep the thing so successfully from his aunt's knowledge. During those years Brian had not been altogether idle; he had produced two slim books of verse, which had found considerable favour with a certain section of the public, and which had got him pretty considerably talked about, if no more. He declared to Comethup that from a monetary standpoint the things were valueless; that they brought him fame, but that he had discovered that a year or two must elapse before he could really hope to live by his work.

"Unless," he added, "I make a sudden hit; that, of course, would make a difference—would fling me to the top of the tree at a bound. Then, old fellow, my first duty would be to repay every penny—oh, I've made a careful calculation, and have got it all jotted down somewhere—every penny I owe you. As a matter of fact, I may see something to-morrow which will give me just the right thought—may write the thing red hot, as it were—and make my fortune. And you'll have the satisfaction, dear old boy, of knowing that—indirectly, of course—you've brought it about."

But, although the books were produced, and although they were well spoken of, and although Brian paid one or two flying visits to London "to stir up the publishers," as he expressed it, it all seemed to make no difference to the position of affairs so far as Comethup was concerned, and that position remained unaltered. It practically amounted to this: that Comethup was certain that within a given time one of them or both would smilingly or tearfully appear in a strange city without funds and dependent on his bounty. Under those circumstances it became, of course, impossible to turn a deaf ear to their entreaties, and they had to be relieved.

Comethup gained a reputation for reckless extravagance that he did not in the least deserve. Personally, Miss Charlotte Carlaw was not displeased, although she was sometimes puzzled to understand how he spent his money, but she adhered to her principle and trusted him absolutely, never questioning him upon anything about which he seemed disinclined to speak. She had had her dearest wish realized in gaining the love of this boy; he was devoted to her, and had been more than a mere companion; he had been, as she had once suggested, eyes to her—had made her darkened journey something so full of colour and brightness that it became under his young influence more wonderful than any journey she had ever taken before.

During those years Comethup had kept up something of a correspondence with the old captain; had filled his own letters with glowing accounts of the places he visited, and his impressions of them; and had received from the captain, in return, such small news as he had to communicate about his simple and uneventful life. In one of the letters, soon after they had started for the Continent, the captain had corroborated Mr. Robert Carlaw's account of his bankruptcy; had told—perhaps with something of grim satisfaction—of the selling of all the beautiful things contained in the house which Comethup had visited as a boy, together with a full description of how Mr. Carlaw had stood outside the house during the progress of the sale in an utterly dejected attitude; and of how the poor gentleman had received a vast amount of respectful sympathy on account of his ruin. Comethup, in reply to the letter, had very properly expressed his sorrow; but in no subsequent letter did he tell the captain of his frequent meetings with the father and the son. He felt that it would be wiser to maintain absolute silence in regard to the matter.

So nearly five years had slipped away, and Comethup, looking back as over a crowded page across the track of their wanderings, could find it in his heart to be very grateful for all that had happened; very grateful, too, in his simple, unselfish fashion, that he had been able, after all, to help the two who had so often pleaded to him. True, he was a little frightened at the remembrance that Miss Charlotte Carlaw's bounty had enabled four people to run about the Continent for some years, instead of only two, as she had imagined. But that was done with now, and he had already started with his aunt on the homeward journey, and the two he pitied so much, and yet dreaded so much to see, were left behind.

Instructions had been given, and all arrangements made, so that their house was perfectly in order for their return. It seemed quite a lifetime to Comethup Willis since he had left that house behind and set out, a mere boy, on his travels with his aunt. Yet, despite all the sunny places he had visited, it was good to get back to the gray old city again; good to know that he was in sober England and within a short journey of the old place where the captain lived, and where all the hallowed associations of his own boyhood were gathered together.

There was much to be done in the first week of their return—friends to visit, and many matters which required attention after so long an absence. But at the end of the week Miss Carlaw called Comethup to her one evening, when they were alone after dinner, and bade him sit down near her. For quite a long time, while she rocked herself softly over the head of her stick in the old fashion, she was silent; at last she raised her head and turned her face toward him. He thought,



as he looked at her, how little change the years had wrought in her; save for a few added lines, the face was the same strong, kindly one that he had seen first as a little child.

"My boy," she began, "you know that to-morrow is an eventful day, don't you? Or have you forgotten?"

Comethup laughed and blushed, and assured her that he had not forgotten.

"To-morrow you put aside boyish things—I think you did that some years ago, but I am speaking in the legal sense—and you reach years of discretion. I think you did *that* also a few years since; I'm quite sure you did. However, speaking by the text, you're a man to-morrow, and can do as you like. You've done pretty much as you liked, you dear rascal, for some considerable time, but I love you the better for that. For the future I have no hold over you in any sense but that of the affection which links us, and I think that is a strong tie. For the rest, you have a right to go your own way. I have brought you up to no profession, for reasons which I have explained before; you have a smattering of several languages, and you know more of the world, I think, and have certainly seen more of it, than most men of twice your age. And I think that you've had rather a good time during the past five years, eh?"

"Such a good time," replied Comethup, "that it all seems to have gone by like a beautiful dream. When I was a little chap I remember the captain used to tell me about all the wonderful places there were on the earth, but I never thought that I should see them. I sha'n't be likely to forget that but for you I should be a poor and shabby fellow, who had never had the chance of putting his legs outside the little town in which he was born. I don't forget that."

She put out her hand to stop him. "There, never mind all that; I've been repaid a hundredfold. We won't talk of the past; that's done with. What we have to consider is the future. Now, you know, Comethup, you're just a little bit inclined to be extravagant—don't interrupt me, and don't think that I'm blaming you—but I think you are extravagant, just a *little* bit. Probably the fault has been mine because I followed a ridiculous practice of giving you large sums of money just whenever it occurred to me that you wanted them. Of course, you were only a boy, and the temptation to spend was a natural one. Now I think we'll follow a different plan. I want you to be quite free and independent; I want you to have money actually of your own, that you may use for your own purposes. Therefore I've decided to put a sum in the bank for you, and to give you your own cheque book, and let you look after your own affairs. I trust you so completely that I think it is quite the best thing to do. You know, or you ought to know by this time, that I'm a very rich woman, and some day you'll have means. Live your own life and please yourself, and you'll please me. Now kiss me and say good-night; you'll wake up a man in the morning. Prince Charming goes upstairs for the last time to-night."

He put his arm about her and kissed her gently. "Not for the last time, dear aunt," he said; "the years have not changed me so much as that, I hope."

She put up her hand and softly patted the hand that lay on her shoulder. "No, no; God knows they have not! You're a good fellow, Comethup; and, if I'm not in the way, I think I want to live a few more years yet, old though I am, to find out whether you verify all my hopes of you. Good-night; sleep well."

The next day Comethup entered into possession of all his new dignities: interviewed the manager at his aunt's bank, and was solemnly congratulated by that gentleman; cashed his first cheque, and felt somehow that the coins were different from any that had jingled in his pockets before. It was good, too, to feel that perfect new sense of freedom which the mere turn of a day had given him; to breathe that larger air of manhood which he felt was his to have and to hold. There was quite a large dinner party that evening, for it was necessary, in his aunt's opinion, that he should be shown, now that he had reached manhood's estate, just as he had been shown when he first came into her life.

A few days after, he timidly informed his aunt one morning that he should like to visit the captain. "You know it's years since I have seen him, and I——"

"My dear boy," said his aunt, "you're breaking through our compact. Didn't I tell you you were to go where you liked, and when you liked, and do what you liked? Go and see the captain, by all means. But I think I'd write to him first; the sight of you—giant that you are—would be too great a shock to him if you swept down on him unexpectedly. Write to-day and go to-morrow; never hesitate about these matters."

Comethup, in his impatience, sent a telegram instead, and started off early the next morning, feeling more than ever the sense of that glorious freedom which had come into his life. He had merely informed the captain that he should arrive in the morning, and had not mentioned the train. Finding, when half his journey was completed, that he would have to wait some considerable time at an out-of-the-way station before catching a train which would take him to his native place, he went on, as he had done before, to Deal, and there ordered a carriage and went the rest of the way by road.

It was a delightful feeling to lounge back in the carriage, on a perfect summer day, with all the country spread in its glory about him, and to know that this life—so rich and full and splendid, so surrounded with every luxury and care and forethought—was to go on and on, through all the years, with no pain or sorrow, with nothing left to hope for beyond what he had secured. His wanderings abroad had already taught him the width and wonder of the world, the pleasant places that were in it, the happy people who laugh along its sunlit ways. Altogether it was a bright and healthy and hopeful prospect that stretched before him, and it was a bright and

healthy and hopeful youngster who looked upon the prospect.

The captain's cottage stood among its roses as of old; seemed only a little smaller even than on the last occasion—a little more as though it had sunk gently down, like a tired old man, and was unable to hold itself quite so erect as before. Comethup walked up the path and stood for a moment in the open doorway of the cottage, and there was the captain.

He was standing in the middle of the little room, and he looked at the young man for a long moment in silence; then, on an impulse, each took a step forward and they clasped hands. Comethup noticed that the captain, like the house, had sunk a little, that his shoulders were bowed ever so slightly, and that his hands seemed thinner. But the touch of the hand was as warm and firm as ever.

"My dear boy," he said slowly, "it's such a delight to see you! I suppose the years seem longer when one is growing old; they would have seemed longer still but for your letters. It's good of you to have remembered an old man, and to have come down to see him."

"I'd have come before, only I couldn't very well get away," said Comethup. "It's just as good to me to be back in the old place again; no other place seems really like home."

The captain gave his hands a parting squeeze and let them go. "I suppose," he said, in a more ordinary tone, "I suppose you'll be content with your old room here?"

"Of course," said Comethup, laughing. "Why not? You wouldn't have me go to the inn, would you?"

"Of course not," said the captain.

The portmanteau was brought in and the carriage dismissed. Lunch was laid in the old simple fashion by Homer, with whom Comethup warmly shook hands; and the young man chatted ceaselessly throughout the meal. There were many things about which the captain was curious—things which he had forgotten to mention in his short letters: as to the standing and apparent strength of foreign armies, and their methods of life and discipline. He nodded with supreme satisfaction on being told that some of the foreign soldiers Comethup had seen were very small and insignificant and very youthful.

"That's as it should be," replied the old man. "It's very evident that in these things the foreigner is absolutely incapable of improving himself. He may cook well, and he may know how to swing off his hat and make a bow which is much too elaborate to have anything of sincerity in it, but he can't breed fighting men; the thing is simply not to be done. I'm glad to hear you bear out the impression I have so long had concerning that matter. Now that one is—well, is not quite so strong as in more lusty years; now that one finds the years creeping on, it is easier to sleep calmly in one's bed when one knows that foreign legions—taken in the lump—are as you describe them. Oh, we must never forget, as I have before pointed out to you, my dear Comethup, that we lie remarkably near the coast. You remember all the plans we used to make, boy," he added less seriously, "when you were a little chap?"

"Yes, I remember well. I was a very little chap then."

"Yes, indeed. And now you tower above me, and your voice is deeper, and your laugh stronger, and—well, I suppose we must expect changes. And yet there's not much difference in you, Comethup," he added, looking at him critically. "You've the same eyes, the same smile. And I'll be bound you've the same heart. Yet it's a long time since you used to trot by my side and get under my cloak on wet days."

They sat for some moments in silence, musing over those old times, and then Comethup said quickly, with a flush on his face: "By the way, sir, I am a selfish brute—I've never even asked how 'Linda is. You remember little 'Linda?"

The captain smiled and shook his head. "Little 'Linda no longer," he said. "The years don't fly on with you, boy, and stand still for every one else. 'Linda is a woman."

"She was almost that when I was here before," replied Comethup. "And does she—does she still live at the old house?"

The captain nodded gravely. "Yes," he said. "Her father's dead, you know; I don't think I've mentioned that in writing to you. He was found dead in bed one morning. He was a strange man. I only saw him once—let me see, you were with me, Comethup?"

Comethup remembered the occasion on which he had seen the strong, hard face of Dr. Vernier in the little circle of light among the books and papers. "Yes, the night you carried 'Linda home; I remember it well. But who looks after her now?"

"She lives there, in the care of the woman who has been her governess so long; you remember that the woman came there almost immediately after you found 'Linda in the garden. She seems devoted to the girl. I think 'Linda has a little money, and the house is her own. I expect you'll see her; she has grown into a very beautiful woman."

"I felt sure she would do that," said Comethup, and found himself blushing the next moment at having expressed such an opinion.

"I think I told you in one of my letters that your Uncle Robert had left here. Did you see anything of him or of Brian while you were in London or after you'd gone abroad?"

"Once or twice," said Comethup, carelessly. "You know Brian has published some poems; very good they were, too; some people made an awful fuss about them. Brian is growing quite

famous.”

“Glad to hear it,” replied the captain, grimly. “He’s the sort of fellow who would write poems; I’m told his father tried his hand at that sort of thing once or twice. You know that your uncle ran through every penny he possessed, don’t you?”

“But he didn’t have very much, did he?” said Comethup.

“He did, though; his fortune was very little short of that possessed by your aunt. But he ran through the lot, married more, and settled down here; and now he’s got through that too. Oh, he’s a bright fellow!”

They found much to talk about all that afternoon; but though Comethup listened to the captain and delighted the captain’s heart by his close and clear descriptions of foreign places and foreign peoples, yet, if the truth must be told, he spoke and listened almost mechanically. Once or twice, while he talked, the very room in which he sat, and the quiet figure of the captain, seemed to vanish completely, and in their places was a dark and lonely garden, filled with the dead leaves of a year before, and seeming in its desolation the very haunt of every cheerless wind that blew nowhere else, and in the garden the figure of a child. Heaven knows through how many places he had carried that remembrance, in how many hours he had seen himself, a little child again, creeping tremblingly into the garden in search for the ghost. The later remembrance of the girl, as he had seen her when he left school, seemed to have vanished; it was, in any case, far more hazy when he tried to think of it than that earlier vision. Coming back after his wanderings to the old town had only made the recollection a stronger one. All the intervening years seemed to be swept aside, and his heart was melted with pity for the lonely child.

Yet, strangely enough, the knowledge—forced upon him in spite of his dreams—that she was a woman made him hesitate to speak of her to the captain; still less to go and see her, as he might have done years before. So he let the afternoon wear away, and the dusk of evening was creeping over the town before he finally announced, with what carelessness he could summon, that he thought he would take a walk. The captain must have looked a little below the carelessness, for, with a fine tact, for which he can not be sufficiently praised, he suggested that he felt tired, and would sit by the window and smoke.

Coming to the entrance of the old garden, Comethup noticed that nothing seemed changed. The gate, which had long ago fallen, was hidden a little more deeply in the grasses and weeds, but for the rest it might have been an enchanted castle, over which a spell had been thrown and upon which the sunlight must never shine. Even on that warm summer evening the place struck a chill upon him as he picked his way across the fallen gate and went up the avenue. But here at last, as he reached the house, there was a change. Lights gleamed from a window which he always remembered to have seen shuttered; and presently, as he stood, scarcely knowing whether to go up to the house or indeed what to do, one of the long windows which opened on to a narrow balcony was pushed open and a figure came through and stood, clearly outlined against the light behind, above him.

He knew in a moment that it must be Linda, although her face was in shadow. He made a half-movement toward her, and she started forward and came to the edge of the balcony and leaned over.

“Who’s down there?” she called in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

He went forward a little, so that the light from the room behind her might fall upon his face; she peered down at him anxiously.

“Don’t you know me?” he asked.

She did not reply, but turned and moved quickly to the end of the balcony and ran lightly down a little flight of iron steps which led to the ground. She came toward him, still without speaking, and with her hands clasped. Coming quite close, she looked into his face. “Why, it’s Comethup!” she said, and let her hands fall to her side.

There was something in the tone in which she spoke which chilled Comethup almost as much as the desolation of the place had done a few minutes before; and yet he could scarcely have said what it was that chilled him. There seemed, in her words and in her change of attitude, some disappointment; she might almost have been expecting to find another in the garden, and to have been unable altogether to conceal her regret at finding her hope unfulfilled. But, even while that thought was leaping through his mind, she had changed again, and was smiling into his face and clasping his hand, so that he almost felt that he had been mistaken and had misjudged her.

“Oh, how glad I am to see you!” she said quite naturally. “I’ve heard from the captain about you often; you know he’s never tired of talking of you. And you know we haven’t really met—you and I—since we were children, for when you came here five years ago we only saw each other for a day or two, and I scarcely remember what you were like, or what we said to each other.”

“That’s just the thought I have of you,” said Comethup. “I seem to have known, somehow, just what you would look like as a woman; but it’s the little ghost in the garden—this garden—I remember best. Do you remember that?”

She seemed to shudder a little as she looked about her. “Ah, the ghost!” she said. “Yes, I remember that; I remember how you came into the garden to find me. What a frightened baby I was then, to be sure—what a frightened, desolate baby!” She linked her hand in his arm and drew him with her along the path in between the trees. “Come,” she said, “walk with me here, as you did when we were little mites. Oh, it’s good to see you again; it’s good to look upon the face

of a friend." Something in her tones struck him to the quick; she seemed almost on the verge of tears. "Have you no friends, then?" he asked gently.

She looked up at him with a faint smile. "Well, the captain—and—and Mrs. Dawson—my governess, you know. I think that's all. You've been all over the world, haven't you?" she added suddenly.

"Not quite all of it," he replied, "but a great deal. It makes me feel—well, like a blackguard, when I think that you've been here in this dull house all this time—five years, isn't it?—while I've been running about and having a good time. It doesn't seem fair, does it?"

She looked round at him again with a smile. "That's nice of you," she said. "But, you know, we can't all have the good things in this world—can we? Still, I must confess it's been rather dull; one sees the same houses and the same faces, and one does the same things day after day, summer and winter, for years. I'm only glad to take things as they come, and not to think. But I think sometimes—of course, I don't know—I'd rather be desperately unhappy with some real sorrow than just exist like this. If one had a real sorrow one could fight it and live it down and do all sorts of things; but here"—she made a little despairing gesture with her hand—"there's simply nothing to fight, nothing to do."

"I'm dreadfully sorry," said Comethup. "You know," he added lamely, "I've been wanting to come and see you, wanting to know something about you, for a long time; only we've never been anywhere near England. But now I shall be able to see a great deal of you, I hope; I shall be coming down often to—to see the captain."

Her eyes flashed at him for a moment and then were turned away. "Yes, to see the captain," she responded.

Some one appeared on the little balcony, and a voice summoned the girl. Linda drew Comethup toward the house; at the foot of the steps leading to the balcony she turned toward him. "I should be grateful if you would come in, just for a little while. There's only Mrs. Dawson there, and she's sure to remember you." She spoke almost in a tone of humility; her eyes entreated him.

He followed her up the steps and into the room. The woman of whom she had spoken was standing a little way from the window, and looked at him keenly for a moment as he passed in. Linda stopped and laughingly called Comethup to her remembrance, and the woman gave him her hand—a little distrustfully, he thought. The room was very meanly furnished, and a lamp stood on a table, with a work-basket—with half its contents tumbled out—beside the lamp. Mrs. Dawson sat down and took up some work and began to ply her needle industriously. Linda drew a chair to the open window and signed to Comethup to sit near her.

They talked in low tones of many things, she questioning him eagerly about his travels and the places he had seen, nodding with quick sympathy when he described some scene which had caught his fancy, and interposing a little sigh sometimes as she glanced about the room or across to the silent figure sewing. "Here has been my world," she said softly, "this and the garden; yet I have dreamed some dreams here too."

They were silent for some time, and Comethup, glancing up, suddenly met the keen glance of Mrs. Dawson. She dropped her eyes in a moment, but he had an uneasy feeling afterward that she constantly watched him. She went from the room a few moments before he took his departure.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked as he held the girl's hand.

"I suppose you're staying with the captain? Well, I shall be there every day, I've no doubt; you'll see far too much of me."

He laughingly assured her that that was impossible, ran down the steps and waved his hand to her where she stood leaning over the balcony, and went rapidly down the avenue. To reach the gate he had to take a sharp turn, which drew him out of sight of the house; when within a few yards of it a woman's figure came swiftly from among the trees, and Mrs. Dawson, bareheaded and white-faced, confronted him.

He was on the point of holding out his hand and bidding her good-night, when he saw that she had come there of set and serious purpose; she was actually trembling in her eagerness to speak. He looked at her in some astonishment, not knowing what to say or do; she stood resolutely between him and the gate.

"Why do you come here like a thief, to whisper with her in the darkness?" she asked. Her voice was suppressed and she glanced uneasily in the direction of the house, as though fearful of being overheard.

"I don't come like a thief," said Comethup indignantly. "Why, I came here to-night for the first time for five years, just to see her, and she saw me from the balcony and came down."

"The first time for five years! Why do you lie to me? There are things I can't tell you, but my eyes are keener for her, my hearing stronger, all my senses more alive, than for any one else. That's because—because I love her. Why do you lie to me? Do you think I haven't seen you creep into the garden and call softly to her and whisper with her in the shadows, and then creep away again—yes, like a thief, I say? I've seen her sit by that window night after night listening to catch the faintest sound; I've seen the light in her eyes after you've left her. Tell me—in God's name, tell me!—what would you do with her?" She came at him fiercely, with her hands held straight at her sides and clinched, and with her head thrust forward at him.

"Look here, Mrs. Dawson," said Comethup helplessly, "you're making some horrible mistake. I swear to you I haven't set foot in this town for five years; I've been travelling all over Europe. I came down by the train from London this morning, and walked round here to see her to-night. You're making a mistake."

She came still nearer to him and looked into his eyes; perhaps she read the truth there. She looked at him in perplexity for a moment, and then, muttering something to herself, turned swiftly and began to make her way back to the house. But Comethup sprang after her and caught her arm.

"Stop!" he said. "You mustn't go like that. There's something here I don't understand."

She tried to free herself from his grasp. "Oh, it doesn't matter. I—I suppose I have made a mistake," she said uneasily.

"But it *does* matter," said Comethup. "You say that some one meets 'Linda; oh, you must have been making a mistake."

"You will not tell her?" asked the woman eagerly. "She would be angry with me; she would not understand. You will not tell her?"

"No, of course I won't say anything," said Comethup doubtfully, "but I'm quite sure you've made a mistake."

"Good-night," said Mrs. Dawson, and set off at a rapid pace for the house.

Comethup, walking home under the stars, remembered that 'Linda had seemed, when first he saw her that night, to be expecting some one else. He linked that remembrance and the words he had just heard together, and was troubled.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### AUNT CHARLOTTE IS SYMPATHETIC.

Comethup almost forgot his distrust and his fears during the few days which followed, for 'Linda came to the captain's cottage in quite the old fashion and accompanied them on their excursions, and seemed, in heart and soul, but little removed from the child of old times. She danced and flitted as gaily as ever among the roses, and was in all things so tenderly, earnestly grateful to Comethup for the excursions he planned and the holidays he gave her that he was more than rewarded, and began to find that no day was quite complete in which he did not see her, no night a time of serene and happy dreams in which he did not carry to his pillow some tender word she had spoken, or the remembrance of some glance she had given him. In that growing love for her which filled him he began—as lovers will—to read into her words, even of the most commonplace order, a new meaning; to give them a new gentleness, as addressed to himself. He was in danger of forgetting his duties in London altogether had not the captain delicately reminded him of his aunt one morning while they sat at breakfast. Comethup flushed with contrition, and determined to go to town at once.

He promised 'Linda on taking leave of her that he would come down again soon, and he kept his word. To such effect did he keep it that Miss Charlotte Carlaw, regarding his absences from London with some anxiety, touched at last upon the matter in her own characteristic way.

"You're rather fond of the captain, aren't you?" she said to him one day, when he had carelessly suggested to her that he thought he would run down to see the old man on the morrow.

"Yes," said Comethup slowly. "We've always been—been very good friends."

"So I should imagine," said Miss Carlaw, with a short laugh. "Are you aware, my dear boy, that you've been down to see the captain five times in about seven weeks?"

"I—I didn't think it was quite so many as that," said Comethup. He felt grateful that his aunt could not see his face. "But you see—well, the captain's always glad to see me—and I—"

"Yes, yes, I perfectly understand, Comethup. Now look here, boy, I'm an old woman and I've had a good deal to do with men and women, young and old. Boy, you're keeping something from me, and it isn't fair; I thought we were too good comrades for that. Come, I don't want you to tell me anything that you'd rather keep to yourself, but you won't humbug me into believing that you fly down to that sleepy hollow whenever you can find time for the sake of seeing the captain. Now, then, is she dark or fair?"

Comethup hesitated for a moment, then laughingly said, "Well, she's dark."

"Of course I don't know the difference between one and the other," pursued Miss Carlaw. "I only know that it makes a difference in the character. Well, I suppose you've sworn eternal vows, and have fully made up your minds—both of you—to die at once if anything should separate you, eh?"

"Not quite that," said Comethup. "In fact, I haven't—haven't really said anything to her."

"What? You don't mean to tell me that you've been rushing backward and forward all this time and are just where you were when you started? Lord! things were different in my time. I must say you've been devilish slow, Comethup. Well, tell me all about it. Of course I know she's beautiful; we'll take that for granted. But is she nice? Is she a lady?"

"She's everything that's nice, and of course she's a lady," said Comethup. "You remember when I was quite a little fellow and you brought me to London? Do you remember also that I mentioned a child of whom I was very fond—'Linda?"

Miss Carlaw nodded. "Yes, I remember very well. And I suppose she's grown up, and has wrought havoc with your young affections all over again? Well, you're just the sort of fellow to fall in love very desperately and be tremendously in earnest. I'm sure I wish you luck. Only don't break your heart if you lose; there isn't a woman in the world that a man need break his heart over; you'll find that out some day."

"Ah! but she's different from all other women; there couldn't be anybody like her," said Comethup.

"Exactly; we take that for granted. Most women are stamped by some man or other at some moment of their lives with that hall-mark which sets them above every one of their sisters; the ugliest and the commonest of them may claim that privilege, in most cases at least, if only for an hour or two. But what about this girl? Does she know anything about you? Does she know you're rich?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Comethup a little indignantly. "But it wouldn't make any difference to her if she knew it."

"Of course not; how should it?" said Miss Carlaw dryly. "Riches never make any difference in this world, do they, my dreamer? There, I won't laugh at you; go on with your wooing, and prosper in it. Do her parents, or whoever looks after her, know anything about the matter?"

"She has no parents," said Comethup; "they're dead, both of them." And forthwith he proceeded to give his aunt some account of 'Linda and her history, so far as he knew; of how he had first found her, and her friendship for the captain, with many details of her loveliness and her charm which must have wearied the excellent old lady very much. However, she expressed deep interest in the matter, and listened with the utmost attention. Presently she got up from her chair and began to walk up and down the room, with her hand on his arm, in silence. After some minutes she broke the silence and spoke almost as though she were alone.

"Yes, it's the one thing worth having, the one thing worth holding—I'm not sure that it isn't the one thing worth dying for. Ah! that sounds foolish, perhaps, from the lips of an old woman to whom God never gave anything to attract a man—except perhaps a sharp tongue, and that sometimes drives 'em away. But you mustn't think, Comethup, that you're the only one on this earth that's ever been in love. I know you think that no one ever had it quite so badly as you've got it; that all the others have been quite ordinary affairs compared to yours. But the best and the worst of us, the lowest and the highest, may all chance to have a touch of that fever in their passage from the cradle to the grave. It's a beautiful fever, and I think the delirium of it takes us precious near heaven."

She stopped again for some moments and appeared very thoughtful; finally shook her head, laughed a little, sighed, and squeezed his arm more tightly.

"I had it once—that fever; I had it very badly. No one ever knew it, thank Heaven! I speak of it now for the first time, yet I would not willingly forget it. What a long, long time ago it seems! What a mad business it was—and ye gods! what I suffered! I can afford to laugh at it now, boy; but it wasn't a laughing matter then, I can assure you. It was just that sort of crazy business that a man or a woman drifts into without knowing it, and then wakes up suddenly, with a start, to a new life, as it were. I—poor fool that I was—fell in love with a man's voice—the sweetest voice and the most honest, I think, I've ever heard. He liked to talk to me; was good enough sometimes, when I was lonely and out of sorts, to come and read to me. Lord! the music of it all is in my ears now. A woman grows more lovely—even if she be plain she grows quite passable—but she grows more lovely in her own estimation just in proportion as a man seems to think her lovely, or seems to rate her above other women. I thought that—and had my awakening. He came to me one day and took my hand—God! what brutes men can be without knowing it!—and said he knew that I was his friend, and he wanted me to help him. He was in love with some one else; opposition had been placed in his way, and I, curiously enough, had influence. He wanted me to help him. Well, I did. I saw them married. I made a speech—a damned ridiculous speech—at their wedding, and sent everybody into fits of laughter. And all the time my heart was aching as I never thought anybody's heart could ache. So you see I know what it is, Comethup."

She paced about for some time longer and then sat down and resumed her natural manner. Comethup, who had been on the point of offering some sort of consolation, was so disarmed by the ease with which she threw aside any touch of emotion she had displayed that he said nothing.

"Well, boy, I want you to be happy; I'm quite sure you deserve to be. And I don't know the girl who could help falling in love with you if you set about it in the right way. But do your wooing in your own fashion; I don't want to interfere."

Comethup paid another visit to the captain on the following day, announcing his coming by telegraph about an hour or so before he actually arrived. The worthy captain was, of course, delighted to see him, although probably he had his own suspicions concerning the real object of the visit. The young man, emboldened by his conversation with his aunt, and filled with a desperate longing to see 'Linda, left the captain soon after dinner and set off to find her. The captain seemed to understand the matter perfectly, and when Comethup would have offered some excuse for his departure merely clapped him on the shoulder and gently thrust him out of the house.

It was a clear and calm autumn evening, with just that faintest chill in the air which seemed to whisper of a coming winter—a chill so slight that it only quickened the blood, made the air seem purer, and caused one unconsciously to quicken one's step. As Comethup went along the road which led to the old garden, the sun was setting out beyond the wastes of land behind the town, and the old-fashioned red roofs and the square tower of the Norman church were bathed in the warm light, and all their edges softened by it. He thought he had never seen the old place looking so peaceful before.

As he reached the gates he saw, with a sudden leaping of his pulses, that 'Linda was standing against the one which still hung on its hinges, and was looking out into the road. She sprang forward with a little cry of pleasure as he came near her, and took his hand and drew him quickly into the garden.

"I did not hope to see you so soon again," she said softly, looking up at him. "When did you arrive?"

"To-day," said Comethup, holding her hand in both his own and looking into her eyes.

"Only to-day? And you came at once to see me. That was good of you. So many other people would not have troubled, or would have waited until to-morrow. But you came at once."

There was a new tenderness in her voice, a new light in her eyes—or so he thought—that was not born of mere gratitude. She almost seemed, with her warm fingers twined about his, to be clinging to him; he thought with regret of the desperate loneliness that must have been hers, through the days since last he had seen her; of the weary evenings through which, perhaps, she had stood at the gate, looking out along the road while he was far away.

"I could not have waited until to-morrow," he said; "I don't think I should have slept. 'Linda, you don't know how much, how tremendously I wanted to see you. Dear, I always want to see you more than any one else in the world."

She was silent, looking up at him and smiling gravely into his face. The trees about them seemed almost to have hushed their whispering and their rustling, to hear what the two had to say.

"Do you remember," he went on almost in a whisper, "how I found you here first, and how you—you kissed me when I left you?"

She shook her head and laughed. "No, I surely didn't do that. And if I did—well, we were very young—mere babies, you know."

"Linda, don't laugh at me. We're not children any longer; but I've never ceased to think of you, never ceased to—to love you. I think—in fact, I know—that I came here to-night to tell you that; I think I've tried—tried very hard—to tell you several times before. Only I was afraid that you wouldn't listen to me."

She lifted the hands she held and laid them for a moment against her cheek, then looked up at him. "Why should I not listen?" she asked gently.

"Oh, because I didn't think it was possible that you would care anything for me. You see I'm only a big, rough fellow; I'm not even clever, or anything of that kind, but I——"

She slipped one hand from his grasp and laid it quickly on his lips. "Hush! you are the best fellow in the world," she said. "I think I've always seemed to turn to you and think of you most naturally when I wanted help or consolation; in the dullest and the weariest hours I think you've seemed to smile at me and make me stronger. Oh, are you sure you love me?" She laid the hand that had touched his lips upon his shoulder and looked up into his eyes; her lips were quivering.

"Dear," he said, "I'm quite sure; I love you with all my heart and soul. I know I'm young, but I've never seemed to think about anybody else; there has never been any one else. It's always been little 'Linda in the garden; I've always felt your arms about my neck, just as you put them when we were children."

She slipped them round his neck now. "See, they are there again," she whispered. "But, oh, are you sure, *quite* sure, that you will never change; that you will love me always?"

"Always," he replied simply. "I couldn't change." He bent his head and kissed her; and she clung to him, sighing a little and glancing behind her at the shadows among the trees. "You're frightened, dear," he said. "What is it?"

"No, not frightened. Only this place weighs upon me a little, and the years have seemed so long while I have been waiting. How good you are to me!"

"I'll try to be, dear love," he said. "I'll bring such sunshine into your life, it shall be such a time of happy holidays that you shall forget all the weariness, all the waiting; I'll make you forget it."

"Yes," she said, looking round the garden again, "yes, I'll try to forget it—hark! what was that?"

She drew away from him suddenly and stood with her hands clasped on her breast, looking toward the gate they had left. A faint light shone beyond it in the road, but all was still and quiet.

"I hear nothing," said Comethup.

She stood listening for a moment, and then laughed and came back to him. "I thought I heard some one come into the garden," she said with a smile. "But it was only fancy. When one has wandered long in a desolate place like this, and has had no companion but one's own thoughts, one is full of fears and fancies." She threw her arms suddenly about him, and hid her face upon his breast. "Take me away soon, dear," she whispered; "let me forget everything. You don't know,

can't guess, how bitterly, bitterly tired I am of it all."

He soothed her with gentle words, and presently led her toward the house. Beneath the little balcony she stopped and put her hands upon his breast and thrust him gently away.

"Don't come in," she whispered. "I am very tired, and shall go straight to my room. I'll see you tomorrow, and many other to-morrows," she added, smiling.

"Good-night, dear love," he replied. "Do you remember the night I came here first, after my return, and saw you on the balcony up there, and you ran down to me?"

"Y—yes," she replied, "I remember. Good-night!" She kissed him swiftly and slipped out of his arms and ran up the steps, paused on the balcony for a moment to blow a kiss to him, and was gone.

He lingered about the garden quite a long time, until the lights had disappeared one by one and the house stood up black against the sky. Then, carrying his hat in his hand, as though the very place in which she had walked were hallowed, he went out of the garden and back to the captain.

He found that gentleman conning a newspaper in his little parlour with the aid of a reading glass. The captain scorned spectacles, although they were really necessary in his case; he considered them effeminate. A reading glass was a graceful compromise. He looked up as Comethup entered, and laid down the glass and carefully folded the paper. "Well, boy," he said, "I suppose you found her?"

"Yes," said Comethup, "I found her."

Something in his tone, in the large-hearted joyousness of it, struck the captain; he got up and stood with one hand resting on the table, looking across the shaded lamp at Comethup, who towered hugely at the other side of the room. For a moment or two nothing was said; then the captain made the half-circuit of the table, and they looked into each other's eyes and their hands met.

"You don't mean——" began the captain.

Comethup nodded and beamed upon him. "Yes," he replied, "she's going to be my wife. I've loved her—oh, a long time—ever since I was a little chap. Isn't it splendid?"

The captain gave Comethup's hand a final grip and let it go. "She's the best woman in the world," he said with great emphasis, and went back to his chair.

In the few days that followed before Comethup returned to London the captain endeavoured to frame various excuses for keeping out of the young people's way. To-day he would be too tired; on another occasion there would be letters to write, or something which needed immediate attention in the garden. But Comethup and the girl laughingly insisted on his accompanying them, declaring that they could not possibly expect to be thoroughly happy if they left him at home. So, with some misgivings, he continued to be their companion as of old.

'Linda proved on that nearer, more delightfully intimate acquaintanceship with her to be the strangest creature of moods and caprices that could well be imagined. There seemed always a passionate desire in her heart to be all, in tenderness and gentleness, that her lover could wish; to show him how deep and sincere her love and gratitude were. Yet, though she succeeded in part in that desire, there were hours when she showed him only petulance; when the beautiful face was turned to him almost with careless indifference to meet his caress; when the words he uttered seemed to fall on unheeding ears. Again and again he left her at night with the miserable feeling that he had failed in some way to please her; blaming himself always, in that he was a rough and uncouth fellow, and that her delicacy and sweetness were things he could not properly meet.

She was always filled with the deepest contrition afterward; was always a thousand times kinder and gentler to him than she had been before, so that the misery he had suffered was more than atoned for. On one memorable occasion, when nothing that he did or said seemed to please her all day, and when she had scarcely responded to his caress when they parted under the balcony, she came running after him while he was sadly walking down the avenue, and cried his name, caught his arm, and fell breathless upon his breast, weeping. He feared that something had occurred to startle her, and was beginning eagerly and anxiously to question her, when she stopped him and poured out all that was in her self-accusing heart.

"Oh, my dear, my love, don't go from me like this! Why are you always so kind and good and gentle to me? Why don't you strike me, or laugh at me, or call me harsh names—anything that should teach me how bad I am and how shamefully I treat you? Dear heart, I've been horrid to you all day—won't you tell me that I've been horrid?" She looked up into his face and gently shook him.

He looked down at her, held her close, and laughed happily. "No, I couldn't tell you that," he said slowly, "because it wouldn't be true, 'Linda dear. We can't always be alike, you know, and if the world doesn't go right with you sometimes—well, I suppose that isn't your fault. You're always a great deal too good to me, much more than I deserve, and I wouldn't have you different for all the world. Whether you're glad or sorry, or whether you say the sweetest things to me to tease me, you're just 'Linda, and that's all I want. You mustn't fret, dear; you've done nothing that I should call you harsh names for; there's nothing you could do—now or at any time—that could possibly be wrong. Don't you understand that? It's just because I love you, and think there's no one like you in the world, that I think everything you do is right. I don't seem to be able to say exactly what's in my heart, but I think you know."



"If you knew sometimes how miserable I feel after I've behaved badly to you—how I cry myself to sleep sometimes, thinking about it—you wouldn't think so badly of me," she said.

"But, my darling, I don't think badly of you. Don't I tell you that everything you do is right?"

"Oh, if you will only always think that; if you will be content with me just as I am; if you will remember only all my good days and forget all the bad ones!"

"But there are no bad days," he replied generously. "Indeed, I have nothing to forgive or to forget. How could I have? Why, it just shows what a wonderful little woman you are, that you could run out here again to-night and say all this to me just because you thought that you'd been unkind to me. And you hadn't been unkind at all. There, good-night, and don't cry yourself to sleep, will you?"

They parted happily enough, and he watched her as she ran back to the house. Turning slowly at last, with lingering feet he passed out of the garden. As he reached the road a man brushed close against him and glanced up sharply into his face in the darkness, then passed on. Comethup, with a muttered word of apology, went his way.

In a few moments, however, he had an uncomfortable sensation that the man was following him—keeping well out of sight in the shadows of doorways, but still doggedly following. The young man stopped once or twice, and the man immediately stopped too and disappeared; when Comethup went on again the man's step could be distinctly heard behind. At last, with a growing feeling of anger, Comethup swung round and quickly retraced his steps; the movement was so sudden that the man was taken by surprise and stopped falteringly, evidently not quite knowing what to do. He was an old man, much bent about the shoulders—apparently not from age, but rather as a result of heavy labour of some kind.

Comethup stared at him for a moment, and then, as the man glanced up again at him and made a movement to get past him, Comethup knew him; it was old Medmer Theed. His anger died away, and he held out his hand to the old man. "Why, Theed," he exclaimed, "I couldn't make out who on earth was dodging along behind me; I had no idea it was you. How are you?"

"I am well, I thank you," replied the old man a little distrustfully. "You are out late, sir."

"Oh, we don't call this late in London," said Comethup with a laugh. "Besides, if I'm not mistaken, you know why I'm out late. Didn't I see you five minutes ago, as I came out from Miss Vernier's?"

"Yes, you did," said the old man, chopping his words off sharply.

"I'd just been to see her home, you know," said Comethup. "I suppose you don't see as much of her now—not as much as you used to do? Don't you remember how she used to sit on the bench beside you in your shop when she was quite a little thing?"

"Am I likely to forget it?" asked Theed, looking up at him out of his bright dark eyes. "Don't I—a hundred times a day, when I'm at work—feel her close beside me? Don't I hear, in the air about me, the very sound of the childish songs she used to croon to me? Do I remember?" He made a step suddenly toward Comethup, and laid a hand on his arm. "You were but a child then, a baby like herself; have you forgotten? Can any one who has ever looked into her eyes forget her? They say you have travelled far—for many years in many lands; yet her eyes drew you back here again as surely as a load-stone. Could you resist them? Could you forget her?"

"Why, no," said Comethup. "I think you're quite right there: I'm quite sure no one could forget her who had once seen her."

"One and all, young and old, she draws them all back," went on the old man, speaking as if to himself. "The years go on and bring their changes; the snows come and the flowers bloom again; and still she calls them all back, still she draws them to her. I dreamed once that it might be possible to keep her a child always; to keep her close beside me, crooning her songs and playing with her doll, and knowing nothing of anything outside; never growing older, and never knowing any sorrows but such as may innocently touch a child. But the dream never came true."

"Why, you couldn't expect it to come true," said Comethup, looking at him wonderingly. "Linda was obliged to grow up, as we all grow; and now she's quite a beautiful woman."

"Yes, a woman—a beautiful woman," whispered the old man, passing his hand in a dazed way across his forehead. "There was another child—or was it this same child, after all?—a child who grew to be a woman, and then——" He came eagerly, almost threateningly, toward Comethup in the deserted street and looked up scowlingly at him. "Why do you come here at all? Why not leave her in peace? Why not leave her a child—in heart at least? The world is wide, and you have seen much of it; this is but a little corner of it, a place hidden away. Why not go out into your world and leave her in peace?"

Comethup looked at him in amazement for a moment—amazement not unmixed with awe, for the man appeared so desperately in earnest. "You don't understand," he said at last. "But since you think of her so much, and because I know you were her friend when she was very young, let me tell you that I love her very dearly, and that she is to be my wife."

"Your wife! Ah! there was some one else who said that once. It is such an easy thing to say! Yet you look—yes, you seem honest. I remember I liked your face when you were a child. Will you swear it?"

"Why, of course, if you won't believe my bare word."

"Yes, but what will you swear by?" He glanced up at the starlit sky. "Not by the stars: there is no

firmness or strength about them; they glitter and shine to-night, and all the heavens blaze with them; to-morrow you shall not see one of them. No, there's no constancy about the stars."

"By the moon, then," said Comethup lightly, willing to humour him.

"No, not by the moon; that's lovers' nonsense—they all swear by that. But there—you need not swear. I can read men's faces like a book, and I have read yours. Only be good to her, be true to her—for her sake and your own. For the man who wrongs her"—he shook a trembling, knotted forefinger in the air—"the man who wrongs her deals first with me and afterward with his God. She came to me a mite of a child, sent straight by God to fill an ache in my heart; came to me with smiling eyes, just as another baby—or was it the same?—I always forget—just as another baby once came to me. She belongs to me, and no man shall harm her."

"You don't think that I shall harm her, do you?" asked Comethup gently.

"No, *you* will not; but others may. I can not rest for thoughts of her—dreams of her. I do not know which are the dreams and which the waking. But I have crept at night about her house to see that all was well with her; I have been like a faithful dog, to guard the place where she sleeps. For that is her power: she draws all to her who have seen her once. But she draws the good and the evil alike."

Muttering to himself he turned abruptly and went rapidly toward the centre of the town, where his own dwelling was. Comethup looked after him for a moment, and then went thoughtfully back to the captain's house. The captain had gone to bed, but had left a light burning in the little parlour for Comethup. On the table lay a packet addressed to him from London. On breaking the seal he found that the envelope contained two or three letters which had arrived for him in his absence, and had been forwarded by Miss Carlaw's housekeeper.

Two of the letters were unimportant, but a third was from his cousin Brian. He sat down and began to read it by the light of the lamp. It had been hurriedly scrawled, and he had some difficulty in deciphering it. Briefly and jauntily, with a delightful candour which under other circumstances would have been refreshing and even amusing, Brian informed his "best friend on earth" that he was in desperate straits, and near starvation point; that he had but one thing on which to congratulate himself, and that was that he was but treading in the footsteps of many men more illustrious than he could hope to be, who had travelled the same stony road before; but that the consolation demanded a large amount of philosophy to make it effective when it was remembered that actual food was not always to be obtained; that his landlady, who was a hopeless Philistine, refused to be comforted with promises, or with the possibility of seeing herself immortalized by reason of her businesslike connection with her impecunious lodger; that things were, in a word, at their worst. He implored his cousin to come to his rescue; this would absolutely be the last occasion on which such an appeal would be necessary, as his real prospects, from a sordid point of view, were growing brighter every day.

Comethup read the letter through carefully, smiling a little at some of the quaint phrases and sighing a little over the whole business. It happened that he had decided to go back to London on the morrow, and he was glad to think how much easier now it would be to help his cousin than before he had an income of his own. Whatever might occur, and whatever he might have to keep from his aunt, he would at least be spending that with which he had a right to be doing as he liked. Comforted by that thought, he thrust the letter into his pocket and went to bed.

Brian had given an address in the neighbourhood of the Euston Road—in a queer, shabby street of tall houses, every one of which, Comethup discovered as he traversed it, appeared eager to share its accommodation with single gentlemen, or indeed with any one who might care to apply. Comethup, with a mental picture before him of his cousin sitting in a cheerless room, with hollow cheeks and sunken eyes, craving food, had not hesitated a moment after reaching London, but had driven straight to Brian's lodging, with his portmanteau on the roof of the cab. His arrival caused something of a flutter; it was evident that he was regarded as a prospective lodger. But when he inquired for Mr. Brian Carlaw, the landlady herself appeared—a little thin, eager woman, with an anxious, watery smile upon her face. A look of relief seemed to come over her when she saw Comethup. Prosperity—a prosperity which was new to her—seemed to be about this well-dressed, elegant young man with the grave eyes. With something of timidity she begged that he would step for a moment into a room she indicated; she would like a word with him.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### GENIUS ASSERTS ITSELF.

The landlady followed him with a hesitating air and stood looking at him for a moment or two without speaking. Seeing that she trembled and nervously twisted the edge of a shabby black silk apron between her fingers, he began to imagine that something must be the matter—that something dreadful must have happened.

"I hope Mr. Carlaw is not ill?" he exclaimed anxiously.

The landlady shook her head. "No, sir," she began, and her voice was faded and thin and anxious like herself; "he ain't what you'd call ill—not by no means. Not, that is to say, in body; but I'm thinkin' 'is mind ain't quite what it ought to be—not for peacefulness."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Comethup gravely. "Hadn't I better see him? I think you said he was in."

"There's a word I'd like to say to you first, sir," she interrupted hastily. "Might I make so bold as to ask if you're a friend of Mr. Carlaw's, or perhaps a relation?"

"Yes," said Comethup, "I am his cousin. Why do you ask?"

The woman came a little nearer to him and mysteriously lowered her voice. "Sir, it's now a matter of nine weeks since Mr. Carlaw first entered this 'ouse. I won't deny it, as I was took with 'im; frank and free was 'e, an' 'earty, to the point o' bein' quite familiar. 'Is meals 'e's 'ad reg'lar, and always a kind word as to the cookin', and the quality of things in general. And I won't deny, sir, as we're proud of 'im. 'E give me one of 'is books, and though I couldn't—'avin' 'ad to work 'ard all my days, an' po'try bein' a thing, to my mind, as one must be eddicated up to—couldn't make much of it, still there it was, and the print, I must say, was like the 'Oly Bible for clearness. But proud we may be, and proud we may continue, and I won't deny as 'e gives the 'ouse wot one might call 'tone'; but neither pride nor tone never filled any one's stomach yet, if you'll forgive me mentionin' such things before a gentleman."

"I suppose," said Comethup slowly, "I suppose you mean my cousin has not—not been able to keep quite regular as regards his payments, eh?"

"Reg'lar ain't the word, sir, I do assure you. He ain't paid nothink yet; not even the week in advance as I asks for in general from all as comes to me. But 'e were that smilin' and 'appy and easy with me when 'e first set foot in the place, and such a way 'e 'ad with 'im, that it seemed like a insult to mention such a thing."

"Yes, I think I understand," said Comethup. "If, without hurting your feelings or—or disturbing your arrangements in any way, I might be permitted to be responsible for this bill, perhaps——"

She burst into tears; not with any violence, but rather with as near an approach to happiness as the dull routine of her hard life had left her capable of. She began to assure him, with a gratitude which was pitiful, that she saw what he was in his face directly she met him; mentioned, between her exclamations of relief, the exact sum to a halfpenny which was then due; and felt her small horizon cleared of clouds by the appearance of a banknote. The bill paid and duly receipted, she broke into extravagant praise of her lodger—of his manners, of his cleverness, of his wit. Comethup begged to be taken to him, and she led the way up the stairs with alacrity, and ushered him into Brian's room with smiles and ejaculations of respect which must have given the whole business away to the most innocent mind.

Brian Carlaw was lying on a sofa near the window, smoking a cigarette and reading. Books and papers were strewn in all directions—flung about, it would almost appear, with something of studied carelessness. The whole place was full of the reek of stale tobacco; the man on the sofa appeared, late though it was, to be but just out of bed, so carelessly dressed and so generally unkempt was he. He did not rise, but waved a hand toward Comethup by way of welcome. The landlady, with murmurs, had gone out and closed the door.

"My dear old chap, this is a surprise indeed. Somehow or other I've lost sight of you—couldn't find you anywhere. In moments of desperation I've even taken to hanging about outside that aristocratic town residence; of yours in the hope of seeing you, but I've only seen my afflicted aunt drive out alone. Where have you been, my young Cræsus?"

"Oh, I've been away. Your letter was sent on to me, and so, as I returned to-day, I came straight here. I'm sorry to hear that things have gone so badly with you."

"My dear boy, when did they ever go well? I was brought into this world first with a disposition to sit in the sunshine and play with flowers; and yet it seems to me that there's always a howling tempest as a sort of cheerful music to accompany me on my journey through life, and a snowstorm thrown in, just for luck. I was born for fair and pleasant things; I get only hard ones. I am the plaything of the gods, and the favourite game of the gods appears to be football. My very landlady looks at me with an expression which tells me I am little else than a robber of the widow and the fatherless; my sensitive soul will not permit me to meet her eye at meal times."

"Oh, I don't think I'd worry about her any more if I were you," said Comethup. "I took the liberty, in order to save you any trouble, of settling up with her. I hope you don't mind."

Brian Carlaw brought his legs down from the sofa, and sat upright. He shook his head playfully for a moment, then began to smile, then to laugh outright; finally he got up and came at Comethup in his pleasantest and most jovial fashion, and clapped both hands on his shoulders. "You dear old rascal," he said, and his eyes had a light of tenderness in them which was sufficient repayment, if any were needed, for anything that Comethup had done; "you dear old rascal, I knew that you'd put things right for me directly you came. You know, old boy, my nature—damn it, I can't help it; it was born in me—my nature is a proud and a sensitive one; and though I may carry a brave face to the world, and laugh and joke with these people who have for the moment to supply me with bread and butter and a roof to cover me, still my spirit rebels against the idea of owing them money. I don't like it; I don't want to feel that I owe this man or that woman, of however common clay they may be, so many pounds, shillings, and pence. I've got my work to think about, my hopes in life to realize; and these sordid things come up against me and hurt me, and leave their stain, as it were, upon the work I have to do. Don't you understand that? Now, my dear boy, I shall go on cheerfully. Like the immortal village blacksmith, I can look the whole world in the face again—well, not *quite* the whole world, because I'm already deeply in your debt; but all that shall be wiped off some day, and we'll start with a clean slate. Now, I sincerely hope

that that woman hasn't overcharged you."

"I shouldn't bother about that if I were you," said Comethup. "It's paid and done with, and you won't need to trouble about it. But how are you going on? What are you going to do?"

"My dear fellow, that's a question for the future; and the future, for good or ill, can always be depended upon to take care of itself. For the present—and that's the only really important thing—you have stepped in, like the splendid chap you are, and have put all my world right. I won't attempt to thank you: thanks between friends are always meaningless. Let us go out somewhere and look on the world, and be grateful, and sit in the sunshine."

"I'm afraid I can't do that," said Comethup. "You see, I've been away in the country for some time, and I must hurry back home. I only called here on my way from the station."

"Well, some other day, then, although I wish you could have made it to-day. I'm just in the mood for a holiday. So you've been in the country, have you? What part?"

"Oh, the old place, our old home, you know," replied Comethup.

"Indeed! the dear old spot! And I suppose you saw all the old people and all the familiar sights of our boyhood. Been staying there long?"

"Only about a week this time," said Comethup.

The other caught him up quickly. "*This* time! Do you often go down there, then?"

"Well, I've been down once or twice to—to see the captain. You remember the captain?"

"Oh, yes—queer, stiff old chap!—I remember him very well. I—I suppose the place hasn't changed much?" He had walked across to a table, had picked up a cigarette, and was lighting it.

"No, very little," replied Comethup. "People die, and get married, and live the same lives that other people did before them; nothing very exciting ever happens there."

"I suppose not. I've half a mind to run down there myself one of these days, just to dream among the old streets where I lived when I was a boy; it would be rather inspiring, I should think. Let me see: there was a little girl—what the deuce was her name?—used to live there in a house we thought was haunted. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember," said Comethup. "She lives there still; her father's dead, you know."

"Really, I don't think I ever met him. But I see you're impatient to be gone, so I won't detain you. By the way"—this as Comethup was moving toward the door—"I wish you would let me have—say a fiver. I hate to ask you; but, you know, I haven't a shilling to bless myself with, and although I get all I want here, still there are some additional things which—"

"I'm very sorry," said Comethup; "I never thought of that. Here you are. I'll come round and see you again. I suppose you're working pretty hard now?"

"Well, not what you would call working; as a matter of fact, I'm waiting for an idea. I can feel it coming. I know that at any moment of the night or day I may wake up with the whole thing complete in my mind, ready to put down on paper. But these things can't be forced—one has to wait for them."

"And the other books?" asked Comethup. "I suppose they're going well?"

"Very well," replied Brian. "From a point of view of fame, they're going very well indeed; people are talking about me, and I've even been preached at from some rather popular pulpits. Of course I get a little money from them, and that money will increase as time goes on. I don't mind confessing that I was in the depths of despair this morning. Now I shall go out, and look my fellow-man in the face, and enjoy the sunshine, and slap myself on the breast and say, 'Brian Carlaw, you are once again a free man!'"

Comethup left him and drove home. Miss Charlotte Carlaw, even in the midst of an affectionate greeting, expressed her surprise that he should not have telegraphed the hour of his arrival, in order that the carriage might meet him. He explained lamely that he had made up his mind quite suddenly to return, and that there had been no time for anything. Miss Carlaw sat in her accustomed chair, amid a curious silence, for some moments, evidently waiting for him to speak, feeling, probably, after the confidence he had before given her, that there would be something further to say. Delicacy urged her to be silent, but impatience and anxiety for him prompted her to speak, and at last she broke out, in characteristic fashion:

"Well, boy, how fares the wooing? Do you come back with a heart too big for your waistcoat to hold it, or has the jade proved fickle and sent you about your business? Come, I'm an old woman—perhaps an old fool—but I'm tingling to know if she has used you well, and if you're happy."

He crossed to her and stooped, and put an arm about her shoulders and kissed her. "Yes, dear," he said, with a little laugh; "I'm so happy that I can't express what I feel."

She put her hand up and softly stroked the hand that lay on her shoulder. "That's well, boy; that's well," she said. "And what did she say to you, and what did you say to her?"

"Lots of things that I can't remember—lots of beautiful things that I didn't think any one could ever say to me," he replied.

"Well, don't tell me; you've evidently got it pretty badly. I've never seen this girl, and know nothing about her; but I'm quite sure that she's all that's good and sweet and true, or you wouldn't have selected her from all other women. Just a word or two to you, my boy, although I

don't think you need it; but I'm a woman myself, and women are strange creatures to deal with. Don't forget that a girl is a thing of moods and whims and fancies—quite the best of them are that—and they've got to be humoured, just like spoiled children. The world has banded itself together for centuries past to spoil its womenkind—sometimes in the best sense, generally in the worst—and you can't blame the women if they've learned to take advantage of it. I think a woman wants to feel that a man is her master, but she wants him to be a gentle master, all the same. And there is no woman living will love a man, in the best and finest way that a man can be loved, unless she is first his friend and his comrade—unless, unerringly, in time of doubt or trouble, her thoughts fly to him. There! I've done preaching. Now tell me what you're going to do, or what's going to happen, or what you've determined on."

"Oh, I don't think we've determined on anything yet," said Comethup. "You see, it seems only just to have happened. I've only just found out, as it were, that she loves me."

"She'd be a fool if she didn't," ejaculated Miss Carlaw. "Well, I'm not going to interfere in your love-making. In your own good time I must make the girl's acquaintance. In this, as in everything else, I leave all to your own good judgment and common sense. Make your own plans, and I'll back you up; I can't say more than that. But remember that if at any time you want her to come to London or to see me, this house is open to her, and she may stay under my wing as long as she likes. Selfishly, I'm glad to hear she has no friends. Relatives are a nuisance—at least, mine have always been. But you know I don't include you in that, don't you?"

Comethup's visits to the old town became of necessity more frequent. It was splendid to think, as he started off from London on each occasion, that in the desolate garden would be waiting the woman who watched for his coming and listened for his footsteps through weary days when he could not reach her. Once or twice he had suggested that she should go to London as his aunt's guest, and see all the wonders of that wonderful city; but she had hung back shyly, pleading that there was plenty of time, or that she liked better to see him down there. Always she had some half-laughing excuse, so that he ceased at last to urge her, and was content to live in the happy present, and to leave the more formal questions of introduction and such like matters to the future. Always, too, she was the same petulant, impulsive, warm-hearted creature, quick to anger and as sudden in her repentance; wounding him deeply at times, and yet striving afterward to heal the wound with so much of love and tenderness and self-reproach that he would not willingly have been without the pain which revealed to him such depths of wonderful compassion in her. Each night, when he sought his bed, there was some faint bitterness in his heart; and yet, greater than the bitterness, the remembrance of some beautiful phrases she had used, some sudden, half-shy glance of her eyes, some wholly spontaneous caress. His love for her grew with the wonder of her; but she seemed always so intangible, so changeable, that he was never sure of her—was forever, after he had parted from her, on the verge of rushing back to crave her forgiveness for this, or her clearer understanding of that.

Once, when he parted from her at night under the balcony, she clung to him, held him for a moment after they had whispered their "Good-nights," and looked up into his eyes. He saw her own were swimming in tears. "Dear," she whispered, "I wish I were kinder to you; you deserve so much more than I can ever give you."

"No," he replied, "I don't deserve anything; you've given me already more than I ever hoped to gain. Why, you're the best woman in the whole world, and I——"

She put her hand quickly on his lips. "And you are the best man—better and more patient than any one else could be. Tell me"—she laid her head upon his breast, and he had to bend his own to catch the words—"tell me, what would you do if you found—if it were possible that I did not love you?"

His arms closed more tightly about her. "It isn't fair to jest about that," he said. "Why should you think about it at all? You do love me?"

"Yes, of course. But what would you do? Would it mean—oh, how serious you are!—would it mean so much to you? Think: I vex and trouble you a hundred times a day. I know I do, only you're too good to say anything about it. Wouldn't it be better if you loved some one—some one who loved you steadily and firmly, just as you deserve to be loved? Wouldn't it be better?"

"My dearest," he said, "you don't understand. I'm only a youngster, I know; but I'm quite sure I never could love any one else; that I want you just as you are, whether smiling or in tears, whether frowning—but that doesn't happen often—or laughing. Although we've been parted such a long time, you seem to be the 'Linda who has grown up with me; we've been waiting for each other all this time. Only you mustn't say such things as this, because you hurt me. I can not think what I should do without you now."

She looked up at him with a smile, and drew his face down and kissed him. "Rest content," she whispered. "Only be patient with me; I won't desert you."

Comethup walked home thoughtfully, holding that last whispered phrase of hers steadily before him, and striving to banish everything else. He found the captain standing leaning over his garden gate, smoking a cheroot, and looking up and down the road.

"There's a note for you inside," said the captain; "it was sent round from the Bell Inn an hour since."

Comethup, wondering a little, walked into the cottage, followed leisurely by the captain. The note lay on the little table, in the circle of light thrown by the lamp; the young man picked it and tore it open. It was from Brian Carlaw.

"DEAR FRIEND IN NEED: I am, so to speak, breathing my native air; but, although there is a popular belief to the effect that one's native air is beneficial, I find it is wholly insufficient to support existence. I am treated here with respect, not to say reverence; my fame (such as it is) has preceded me, even to this benighted spot, and the old place slaps itself upon the back approvingly because it gave me birth; at the present moment I wish it would give me something to eat. Providence, however, watches over the weakest of its creatures, and I hear, by accident, that you are staying within a hundred yards of me. Imagine my ridiculous position: I am spoken of with bated breath as a wonder, shedding lustre on all to whom I will deign to nod, yet I have not the wherewithal to pay my bill, and, moreover, I am burdened. Come and smile upon me—and see the Burden.

"Yours in distress,  
"BRIAN."

Comethup gave a little sigh as he folded up the note and thrust it in his pocket. "It's from my cousin," he said. "He's staying at the Bell; he wants me to go over and see him."

"Is he ill?" asked the captain, shortly.

"No, I don't think he is ill; he doesn't say so."

"Well, I should have thought he might have troubled himself to walk over here," said the captain, "without sending for you."

"Perhaps he wasn't quite sure of finding me in," said Comethup. "I think I'd better run over and see him; he wants to see me. I'm sorry to rush out again, sir, in this unceremonious fashion, but I won't be long."

"That's all right, my boy," replied the captain. "Only you know my prejudice against your cousin, and I'm not particularly glad to find that he's down here."

Comethup deemed it wiser to make no answer; he put on his hat and went off to the inn to find Brian. The little old-fashioned bar of the place seemed unusually full that night, and much animated talk was going on. As Comethup inquired for his cousin, a hush fell upon those in the place, and curious looks were directed toward him. It was evident that Brian's appearance had created something of the stir he had suggested.

Brian was in the most jovial humour, and came forward to greet him with a cry of delight. There stepped forward another figure also—Mr. Robert Carlaw—who grasped his hand warmly, and allowed a smile of relief to break over features which had before worn a look of anxiety. Comethup concluded that this must be the Burden referred to in the letter.

"My dear chap," began Brian boisterously, "I know you'll laugh when you hear everything; you'll split yourself with laughter at our expense. You know, another man in my position would see the grim side of it, the sordid side; I only see the humorous one. Look at my respected dad; saw you ever such a figure of melancholy? You must know that I made up my mind to come down to my native place—I think I hinted something of the sort when I saw you in London. I pined for old sights, and old sounds, and familiar faces; I heard again the babble of the brooks of my youth, the songs of the birds whose nests I robbed in boyhood's hour. Well, I was just preparing to start when my wonderful parent put in an appearance; we hadn't seen each other for a considerable period. 'Where are you going?' says he. 'To the home of my birth,' says I. Then, like the historic milkmaid, 'I'll go with you,' says he. And here we are."

"But, my son," interrupted Mr. Robert Carlaw gravely, "the worst has yet to be told."

"The worst? The best, you mean; quite the best.—You know, my dear Comethup, our preposterous fashion of taking life—a sort of childlike belief that the ravens, or some other well-disposed persons, will feed us. Well, you don't need to be told that my disgraceful parent and myself discovered, when we arrived here, that we hadn't a sovereign between us; and this, too, after we had, in the lightness of our hearts, secured the best rooms that the place could afford."

"You forget, my dear Brian," interrupted his father, "that that was *my* suggestion. I considered it necessary, for the sake of your reputation here."

"Yes, that's all very well," laughed Brian; "but we quite forgot, in the innocence of our hearts, that these people knew that you had met with disaster in the shape of bankruptcy. The consequence is that I see that most terrible thing—the greed of gold—beginning to glitter in their eyes. However, we're here, and we've got to make the best of it. I suppose we must be fed, and I suppose these good people must be paid. Therefore, as I say, Providence has been good to us and has sent us"—he bowed with charming frankness toward his cousin—"Comethup."

The humour of the thing began to appeal to Comethup also. Perhaps it was better that that side of the matter should strike him most clearly, for the rest had become so much a matter of course, that Brian should send to him when the slightest difficulty arose, that he had long since ceased to wonder at it or to be surprised. It was evident that both father and son regarded the thing not as a charity, but as their right; whatever might have been their first feelings, custom had blunted them. Comethup, for his part, could never quite divest his mind of the idea that he was giving an alms, and he tried, therefore, always to carry the business through as delicately. It was evident here that, in a place where Brian's reputation must at all hazards be first considered, there must be no thought of paying the bill directly; appearances must be kept up, and father and son must sail out of their difficulties with flying colours and in good attitudes. That was obviously a matter for Comethup to arrange; it was evident that they waited for him to set about the task.

"Do you intend to stay here long?" he began.

"About a week, I think," said Brian. "The truth is, I'm a little rusty, and, despite all the delights of town, I sigh for the simplicity of the country-side. Yes, I think about a week; by that time we shall both be bored to death, or shall have had a violent quarrel——"

"My dear Brian!" interrupted his father.

"And shall have mutually cursed each other and gone our separate ways, until the time arrives for another reconciliation. That's our gentle method of getting through life. At the present moment we are amiability itself; but how long it will last it is quite impossible to say. Do you think we can manage a week here, Comethup? It's not a very expensive place, and the wines, which are atrocious, are not at all dear. What do you say?"

"Well, that's for *you* to say," responded Comethup.

"Pardon me," interrupted his uncle, "it is for *you* to say. In our present embarrassed circumstances, we wait—I may say, with hopes which are certain to be realized—we wait on the word of one who has ever proved our friend. I say it not without emotion; I have recollections of many occasions on which——"

Brian broke in boisterously. "Here, for Heaven's sake, don't start a sermon, dad! Comethup doesn't want it, and it won't improve me; and you, for your part, don't mean a word of it. Comethup quite understands the circumstances—don't you, old chap?"

"Yes, yes," replied Comethup hurriedly. "I'm in rather—rather a hurry, and if you will let me know——"

"How much we want?" Brian finished the hesitating sentence airily, and Comethup was grateful to him. "Well, suppose you let us have—dad's an expensive chap to keep, and I don't want to be forever worrying you—suppose you let us have a hundred. I'll look after it myself, and be strictly economical; and long before it's all gone my new book will be out and I shall have made my fortune. This next volume will certainly make my fortune—in an indefinable fashion, I feel sure of it."

"Well, I haven't so much money with me, of course," said Comethup, "but I can give you a cheque, and they'll clear it for you at the local bank, if that will do."

"Excellently," exclaimed Brian. "What a wonderfully generous fellow you are! Any one would think you had been sent expressly into the world to come to my aid at stated intervals and lift all worry from my shoulders. That you should be down here at this very hour—that's the wonderful part of the business!"

Comethup wrote the cheque, and escaped as quickly as possible from their thanks. Mr. Robert Carlaw found it necessary to open the door for him, and even to accompany him down the stairs and through the bar, waving aside haughtily some common person who stood in the way. Outside, in the quiet moonlit street, he placed a hand on Comethup's shoulder and looked at him and sighed.

"My dear nephew," he said, "fortune has not been good to me. True, it has placed certain riches within my grasp; but Providence, on the other hand, has cursed me with a temperament which compels me to do all things greatly—on a large scale, as it were. I think I told you once that I felt I was meant to cut a figure—to loom large in the eye of the world. There are men cutting figures to-day who are but objects of contempt; they are not fitted, physically or mentally, for the parts they play. With me, it would have been different. I have, and I say it in all seriousness, tact, discernment, and a certain refinement, and—shall I say it?—delicacy, which all men do not possess. Yet I am a most unhappy man; I am growing old—no, do not attempt to contradict me; I feel that I am growing old—and I am compelled to seek my bread in the most precarious fashion—to be dependent even on the whim of my own son." He lowered his voice, and glanced toward the inn door. "This money you have been generous enough to place in his hands—no doubt he will spend it with what wisdom he can, but I—I shall see nothing of it. And you must be aware that there are services rendered to me daily—by servants and others in humble positions—for which a gentleman must pay, if he would keep clear that distinction which is necessary between class and mass. You grasp my meaning?"

Comethup nodded. "Forgive me," he said; "I had not thought of that. Will you permit me——"

"You are ever generous, my dear nephew," murmured Mr. Robert Carlaw as he thrust the flimsy banknotes into his waistcoat pocket. "Once more I can hold up my head before my fellows; once more I can feel that I am not wholly dependent on my son. Good-night, my dear friend; good-night!"

Comethup was halfway home when some curious feeling made him turn in the direction of Linda's house. The town was quiet, and no one was in sight in any of the streets through which he passed; he crept in through the garden and went and stood under the balcony, looking up at the house, which was in complete darkness. And as he looked there came back to him the words she had uttered; not the words of comfort he had tried so resolutely to hold before him, but those others which held a vague fear for him, "What would you do if you found I did not love you?"

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## CHAPTER XX.

## THE DESERTION OF A PARENT.

Comethup saw but little of his cousin during the week which followed. Once or twice he met him, riding wildly about in some of the country lanes on a horse he had hired, on which occasions he drew rein with a shout, and generally announced that he was having "a splendid time," and that he would be able to go back to work feeling much better for the holiday.

During that week, too, Comethup was left very much with the captain, for 'Linda, without warning, broke several engagements she had made to go out with them, pleading afterward that she had had headaches or that there had been work to be done. One evening, as Comethup, after waiting all day in the hope of seeing her, was making his way to her house he met his cousin Brian swinging out through the gates. They stopped, in mutual surprise, and then Brian linked his arm in that of the other and began to lead him away.

"What a lucky meeting!" he exclaimed. "I was just wondering what I was to do with myself all the evening, and how I was to pass the time until I could decently go to bed. Come along. What shall we do?"

"I'm afraid you must excuse me," said Comethup. "I can't join you to-night; I'm just going to see 'Linda."

"I've just seen her," said Brian, looking at him with a smile. "You didn't tell me, you rogue, anything about the business."

"What business?" asked Comethup, a little coldly.

"Why, your engagement, of course. Well, I congratulate you. Our little friend has certainly grown into a lovely woman, but she always gave promise of that. My dear boy, you come in for all the good things; what *have* you done to deserve them?"

"Yes, I suppose I'm very lucky," said Comethup. He hesitated for a moment, and then held out his hand. "Good-night!"

"Oh, but it's no use your going in now," said Brian; "she's gone to bed; got a headache or something of the kind. You won't be able to see her."

"Well, I'm going to the house at all events," said Comethup doggedly; "I can at least inquire how she is. Good-night!"

"Good-night," said Brian, and shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

Comethup went through the garden, and stood under the balcony. A light was burning in the room in which he had once sat with 'Linda, but the long French windows were closed. He climbed the steps and walked to the windows and looked in; Mrs. Dawson sat beside the table sewing. He knocked upon the pane, and then thrust open the window and walked in. She looked up quietly, letting her work rest under her hands in her lap. For a moment neither of them spoke.

"'Linda?" he asked at last. "Where is she?"

"She's gone to her room," replied the woman, looking at him in some surprise.

"But she can not have gone long, and I want to see her," said Comethup.

"She gave me strict instructions she was not to be disturbed."

"Ah! but she didn't know that I was coming to her. I must see her; I haven't seen her all day, although she promised to meet me."

The woman rose slowly from her seat and laid her work on the table; she came toward him, looking at him with a curious intentness. "You haven't seen her all day? Then who was with her in the garden just now, and why did she run in crying? I saw that, although she hid her face from me."

"I—I don't know," said Comethup, with a miserable pain beginning to gnaw at his heart. "I suspect—I know you're mistaken, as you were before, when you thought she met some one. But will you please go and tell her that I am here, and that I should like to see her?"

Without another word Mrs. Dawson went out of the room, and he heard her quick feet ascending the stairs. Within a few minutes she returned, and stood just within the doorway of the room, looking at him. "She says you must forgive her, but she can not see you to-night. She will see you to-morrow. And she sends you her love."

With that he had to be content, and he went away through the garden and through the streets back to the captain's cottage. All night long he lay wide awake, turning over the matter in his mind, seeing again Brian coming striding out of the garden, picturing in imagination an interview between him and the girl which ended in tears for her. But with the morning, just as he was thinking of getting up, came a little rattle of pebbles at his window; he scrambled out of bed and looked from behind the curtain. Below, in the garden, was 'Linda, smiling up at him, and with that smile all the troublous doubts and fears of the night were gone in a flash.

He nodded to her, and scampered through his dressing and ran down to join her. She was in her most playful and bewitching mood; she caught both his hands and danced round him like a happy child, and dragged him into the house and kissed him before he had recovered breath to greet her.

"There, see what a change the morning brings!" she cried, her eyes dancing. "Last night I hated all the world, and hated myself most of all; this morning the world is lovely, and I am lovely—*you*



might have said that, sir!—and I'm going to be good for evermore, and never, never give my dear boy the slightest cause for a heartache." Between laughter and tears she kissed him again, and clung to him.

"But you never have given me cause for that," he said. "When I feel your arms about me and your lips on mine—well, nothing that has happened can matter at all; you seem to sweep everything else away. I was a little disappointed yesterday that I did not see you, but this more than makes up for it."

"And you're quite sure that you forgive me—that this *does* make up for it? Oh, my dear, I want you always to think of these best moments of mine, and to forget all the bad ones. See, with this bright morning I'll begin over again; I'll be so good, so tender, so devoted to you that you shall never have cause to think badly of me; all my moments shall be best moments from this hour; everything else shall be forgotten. Here's the captain coming; kiss me again."

She was in the same mood during breakfast, and for all that long and happy day. She strove, in a hundred ways, to blot out the memory of pain she had caused him—strove, by her present tenderness, to cover up past moments of petulance or anger. Yet there was in it all such a striving, such a sense of trying to do that which should have come naturally, without any striving, that even the good captain, simple gentleman though he was, looked at her more than once in surprise, and wondered what Comethup thought. But Comethup was blissfully happy, and only found time to bitterly accuse himself more than once of having been unjust in his thoughts toward her.

A second completely happy day followed that first one, and at the end of it he walked home with her to her house, lingering with her until the last moment to put off their parting. As they walked slowly under the great trees toward the balcony, a man came strolling toward them, with the glow of the cigarette he was smoking making a little point of light in the darkness. The girl had had both hands locked on Comethup's arm; she took the hands quickly away when they came face to face with Brian. He stopped, pulled off his hat with a flourish, and laughed.

"I've been dreaming of romantic things," he said; "and lo and behold! I step suddenly—an intruder, I fear—into the very heart of romance itself. Happy lovers wandering in the starlight! Why, all the dreams I have dreamed and all the poor verses I have scribbled are as nothing to this; I have yet to learn the very first trick of my trade—love at first hand. And who shall teach me?" He glanced, with a sort of comical wistfulness, at the girl, who had drawn a little away from Comethup, and whose eyes were fixed on the ground.

"Oh, you'll find some one to teach you, I've no doubt," said Comethup, with a laugh. "What has brought you wandering here?"

"I came to see an old friend—'Linda," responded Brian. "Will she forgive me if I suggest that, in these rose-coloured days, she is apt to forget a poor fellow who was once her friend?"

The girl looked up quickly, with a flush on her face. "Indeed, I forget none of my old friends," she said. "Why should you think that?" Comethup, looking at her, saw in her eyes an appeal to the man, a look half of defiance and of a resolution to keep firmly to her promise of the previous day—half of a pity for him, and a fear of him or of what he might say.

"Well, perhaps I don't quite think that," said Brian carelessly. "Only it's been my experience through life to find that one is so easily forgotten, so easily thrust out of remembrance, when one is penniless and—helpless. You think that unjust, perhaps? There, I'm sorry. I'm in a wrong mood to-night, and I've waited so long in this infernal garden, on the chance of seeing an old friend, that I've got the horrors. Good-night, happy lovers!"

He turned on his heel, and went swinging away down the avenue, singing a song softly to himself as he went. The girl stood looking after him for a moment—stood quite still until Comethup touched her arm and recalled her to herself.

"Come, it's late," he said.

"Yes, it's late," she answered, almost mechanically. She did not put her hand again on his arm as they walked toward the house, and, at the foot of the steps leading to the balcony, when he would have drawn her into his arms, she put out her hands and held him gently away from her. "You have had kisses enough for one day," she said; "you will tire of me if I yield always so easily. Good-night!"

He looked at her wistfully for a moment, and then raised her hands to his lips and let her go. She ran up the steps and in through the window without once looking round at him.

A letter from Miss Charlotte Carlaw, written in the stiff round hand which the use of the writing frame demanded, awaited him at the captain's cottage. She was suddenly possessed by an idea, she wrote, to visit the old town and to make the acquaintance of 'Linda Vernier, quite in an informal fashion, for herself. But she wanted her boy's arm to lean upon, and she did not care to make the journey alone. Would he come to town to fetch her? If he could tear himself away from his sweetheart for so long, and would come to London the next day, he could sleep in town that night and they could go down together on the day following. She knew, she added, that the captain's house was a small one, and would be glad, therefore, if Comethup would take rooms for her at the best inn he could find.

Comethup, reproaching himself that he had of late left her so much alone, showed the letter to the captain, who immediately proposed to turn out of his own house for her accommodation. But Comethup laughingly assured him that his aunt would never consent to that; the only question

was about the choice of an inn. To take her to the Bell was clearly impossible, since Mr. Robert Carlaw and his son were apparently firmly established there. Finally, it was decided to engage rooms at a smaller place, the captain assuring the young man that the accommodation, although limited, was of the best. The next morning Comethup started for London.

Miss Charlotte Carlaw was filled with a pleasurable excitement at the prospect of meeting the girl—talked of nothing else, in fact, on the journey down. They came in the old fashion to Deal, and thence drove, arriving at the inn late in the afternoon. It had been arranged that Miss Carlaw, after tea and a rest, should proceed to the captain's house for dinner; on this point the captain had firmly insisted, and had spent two sleepless nights over a consideration of the courses. There Linda was to meet her. Comethup had posted a letter to her before leaving for London explaining his hurried departure, and begging that she would meet his aunt, as suggested, at the captain's house.

Miss Carlaw, who had asked a casual question as to why rooms had not been taken at the Bell, and had been informed that those she had formerly occupied were engaged, presented herself punctually at the hour appointed for dinner, supported by Comethup. The captain was in something of a flutter, and kept trotting in and out of the room and holding whispered consultations with Homer. Linda had not arrived, and Comethup glanced more than once anxiously at his watch. At last Miss Carlaw, seated in the chair of state and leaning her chin upon her stick, faced round upon him a little impatiently.

"Punctuality is a virtue, my dear boy," she exclaimed, "and that lady-love of yours is twenty minutes late. I can understand modesty and shyness and all that kind of thing, although I don't think I ever suffered with those complaints myself; but the captain's dinner is spoilt, and I'm ravenously hungry. I think you had better go and look for her."

Comethup gladly seized the opportunity. "Wouldn't it be better," he said, as he was going out of the room, "if you went on with dinner? Linda will only feel a thousand times more nervous if she thinks you have been waiting; whereas, if I bring her in quite in an ordinary way—well, she won't feel so embarrassed."

"Oh, these lovers!" ejaculated Miss Carlaw. "Well, I suppose you're right; so I'll ask the captain to have dinner in at once. And you're both young—just make her run for it."

Comethup ran at top speed to the house, and went plunging through the garden and up the steps to the balcony. Scarcely waiting to knock, he flung open the long window and stepped into the room. Mrs. Dawson was there, not sewing quietly as usual, but pacing up and down the room. She stopped in her walk for a moment and faced him.

"Linda!" he exclaimed. "Is she ready?"

"I have not seen her for some hours," replied the woman.

"Not seen her? But I——"

She took a note from the table and held it out to him. "I found this here just now; it is addressed to you. I had been out, and came back and found it here."

There seemed a dreadful silence about the house and in the room; the very noise of the ripping of the envelope seemed to hurt him. He pulled the letter out, and came forward to the light to read it. And this is what he read:

"MY DEAR, DEAR BOY: If I had not been a coward, if I had been, in anything, worthy of all your tenderness, your goodness, and your love for me, I might have faced you, and told you what you will here find written, and trusted to your mercy. I think now that if you were here, and held my hands and looked into my eyes with those deep, honest eyes of yours, I could not do what I must do—I could not leave you. God knows what a long and bitter fight it has been; how I have told myself, again and again, that you were the best man on earth, and that nothing should change my love for you. Believe that I meant that always; believe that I have tried, with prayers and tears, to shut everything else out. When first I met you, after we had grown to be man and woman, I carried something in my heart of which I dared not speak—the love of another man. On the first night that I ran down to meet you in the garden I thought he had come back to me. Now he has come back indeed, and all my world is changed, and I can cheat myself and you no longer. He is poor, and friendless, and helpless, but he will one day be a great man; and I, though I am but a poor, timid girl, can help him a little to his greatness as no one else can possibly do. If I am a coward, in running away and fearing to face you, forgive that, as you have forgiven so much else. We go to London this afternoon; we shall be married to-morrow. Something is tugging hard at my heart while I write this; you have been always so good to me that I seem to see you reading it. Forgive me; if you can find it in your big heart to do that, you will not quite forget—

"Your friend,

"LINDA."

He read it all through slowly, in a dazed fashion, and then quietly folded the paper, pleating it up small in his fingers and staring down at it. Mrs. Dawson had drawn nearer to him, and now laid her hand on his arm. He looked round at her like some great helpless animal that has been wounded, and can not understand why the blow should have been struck.

"Something is wrong. What has happened?" she asked, in a quick whisper.

"She—she's gone!" he said. Then came the quick instinct, the very dawning of a purpose he was to keep so clearly before him afterward, that she must be protected; that her good name must be held high and clear in all men's sight, that none might smirch it. He actually forced a laugh to his lips as he thrust the paper into his pocket. "There—there's nothing wrong, nothing wrong at all; you needn't look so frightened. It's only—only a little love story—a love story none of us guessed. Curious, isn't it? She tells me here as—as an old friend, that she's run away—there, don't cry out—she's run away to get married. That's all."

"To get married! But who is the man? Are you sure that he——"

A sterner light came into Comethup's eyes. "Yes," he said, "I am quite sure. They will be married at once. You must be very fond of her," he added gently, "to take the matter so much to heart. But I suppose any one could get fond of her quite easily. And you've been with her a number of years."

The woman looked at him with a forlorn expression of countenance, and clasped her hands and began to weep, not with any violence but in a hopeless, helpless way that was more terrible than anything else could possibly have been. The secret she had borne so long, the story of that shameful flight which she had been compelled at first to keep from her child, and later had kept for her own sake, seemed to weigh more heavily now than it could have done at any other time. She had seen the child grow to girlhood, and then to womanhood; had been content with what tenderness she could win from her, in her position as a tried and faithful friend, fearing to jeopardize even that small happiness by any avowal of the true relationship between them.

Comethup left her, and went slowly out through the garden again. He had forgotten everything but that one thought—that she was gone—forgotten that, within two hundred yards of him, his aunt and the captain awaited his arrival, and would look for an explanation. In quite an aimless way he got into the streets, and walked until he found himself outside the Bell Inn. Scarcely knowing what he did, he went up the stairs, turned the handle of the door, and walked into the room in which he had seen Brian and his father. Mr. Robert Carlaw was standing by the fireplace, looking into the glass; he turned round sharply as Comethup entered the room.

"Brian has gone, I hear?" said Comethup, in a low voice.

Mr. Robert Carlaw flung out his hands with a despairing gesture. "It is true, sir. With that base ingratitude which has ever been his chief characteristic he has deserted me in the hour of my need. More than all, he has taken with him the whole of the money you were generous enough to place in our hands, and which I was foolish enough to leave in his keeping."

"That's well," said Comethup half to himself. "I'm glad he's got some money."

"Glad, sir! And pray what is to become of *me*?" exclaimed Mr. Carlaw. "Have I lavished the tenderest care upon him for years past; have I sacrificed everything to him; have I raced, in my declining years, through strange and vile places of the earth, in order to be near him and to protect him; have I done all this to be deserted now, at the last, for a wretched jade——"

"Stop!" said Comethup quickly. "I'm afraid you don't quite understand the situation. There is no question of any 'wretched jade,' as you describe her. Brian has merely decided to marry the sweetest and best girl that there is in the world. I don't think you're quite wise to talk in that fashion, and I don't think I'd do it if I were in your place. I've no doubt you'll see Brian again shortly. At the present moment, as he has been, well, let us say compelled to take the money for necessary expenses, perhaps you will allow me to replace what you consider you have lost."

"You are very good, my dear nephew; you are always more than generous. Forgive me if I spoke in haste. But consider the position: my son, who is just entering, as I might say, into his kingdom, who has the ball, as it were, at his feet, to marry a girl like this, whom no one knows and who has never been heard of! Why, it's shocking—positively terrible! With his face, and his figure, and his talents he might easily have gone one better than his poor old father, and been snapped up by a duchess. Such things *have* occurred."

"I dare say," said Comethup wearily. "I just—just called here to see you. I only heard a little while ago that Brian had left."

"He left a note for me," said Mr. Carlaw, "informing me coolly that he purposed getting married to-morrow, and that, as he wanted money for current expenses, he'd taken what there was, and had no doubt that I should 'fall on my feet.' Fall on my feet, indeed!—a fine expression to use to a father! What did he think was going to become of me?"

"I suppose he remembered that I was still in the town," replied Comethup quietly. "When do you return to London?"

"Immediately; it is useless for me to stay here. I must discover my erring boy; I can not rest until I have effected a reconciliation with him."

Comethup was glad to bring the interview to an end. He left Mr. Robert Carlaw smilingly fingering a cheque, and came out into the cool night air. Even then he did not care to go back to the cottage; he wandered on, stumbling now and then like a man half asleep, and came back presently to the broken gates of the garden in which he had walked so often with her. In the darkness of it he almost fancied that there hovered the white figure of the child he had seen as a boy; he almost thought he heard the piteous, pleading, childish voice calling to him from among the trees. He laid his arms against one of the trees, and rested his head upon them, and remained there in the solitary place for quite a long time. He did not weep; the bitterness of the thing lay too deep for tears. Young though he was, he looked up at the stars that were peeping through the

branches, and wondered how he should live and what he should do, and how the world would go on, now that she had left it empty. He took the letter out of his pocket and put it to his lips, for she had written it, and there was some small consolation even in that.

How should he tell them? That was his next thought; how to get the miserable business explained, so that it might afterward be set aside and forgotten and done with. He waited for some time outside the captain's cottage, debating what to do, and finally crept in cautiously and stood just within the doorway of the room, and beckoned to the captain. His aunt sat with her back to him, and was quite unaware of his presence.

The captain stared at him for a moment as though he had been a ghost, then rose, and, with a muttered word of apology to Miss Carlaw, came out to him. Not a word was said until they stood outside in the little garden, with the cottage door closed and the two men looking into each other's eyes.

"She's gone!" said Comethup; and for the first time, with his old friend's hand in his, his fortitude gave way and he turned his head aside. "She's gone away, this afternoon, with the man she loves—gone to be married. You see, sir, I made a mistake—put her in a false position, as it were. But, of course, it is all right now—and she's gone to be married."

The captain stood perfectly still for nearly a minute without speaking; then he said slowly, "And the man—who is the man?"

"My cousin, Brian. I suppose I ought to have known from the very first that she must love him, and not me. You see, he's such a different sort of fellow——"

"Thank God for that!" murmured the captain, under his breath.

"And now all we have to think about is how to tell my aunt. You see, it's rather a foolish business: we've brought her down here under false pretences, as it were, and there'll be such a lot to explain, won't there? And I want, for a little time at least, to forget all about it, just as though it hadn't happened. Shall we go in and tell her?"

"Yes, I suppose we must," said the captain. "You know her better than I do; but I think she will understand, and will not trouble you with many questions."

They passed together into the cottage. Miss Charlotte Carlaw must have heard the sound of the voices outside, and must have recognised that something was wrong. She sat quite still, with her hands resting on her stick, but her face wore a curiously anxious expression. Comethup crossed to the window and stood there, at some distance from her, wondering how he should begin. She waited for some moments, and then turned piteously toward the captain, and from him to her nephew.

"Will no one speak? What has happened? Comethup, my dear boy——"

"There's been a mistake," said Comethup, speaking in slow, steady tones. "I suppose we all make mistakes some time or other in life, and I've read somewhere that a man makes them most of all when he's in love. So you see, aunt, I've made a mistake; have dreamed a poor, foolish dream; have pictured to myself something that didn't exist. The lady I—I thought I was in love with was all the time secretly in love with some one else, and to-day they've gone away to be married. Please don't speak to me; please let me explain. And I want you, first of all, to remember that it is not her fault, and never has been; the blunder has been mine, in cheating myself into the belief that she cared for me. It really isn't her fault, and I"—he gave a queer little laugh—"I'm quite happy, and I say, with all my heart, 'God bless her and her husband!'"

Miss Charlotte Carlaw's perception must have been keener even than the captain had imagined. At the first, when Comethup began his blundering explanation, she had shown signs of a rising indignation, but as the pitiful recital went on her face changed, and her head was bowed slowly over the top of her stick. The captain stole quietly from the room, and the old woman raised her head at last and held out her hand toward her nephew. "My dear boy," was all she said, but in the words was a sympathy so great that he could scarce restrain his tears. He did not feel strong enough to go near her yet, and so he said, with what lightness he could call into his voice:

"Shall we have dinner?"

"Is there nothing more you wish to say to me?" she asked. "Oh, my dear boy, is there nothing you wish to say? You speak as lightly as though——"

"And think as lightly, I hope," he replied. "I've made—made a blunder; that's all."

She dropped her stick, and stretched out both hands to him. He stepped forward then and took the hands and kissed her. "O Comethup!" she whispered, "I never wanted eyes so much as I want them to-night. I want to see your face!"

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### GENIUS AND THE DOMESTIC VIRTUES.

In all the time which followed, Miss Charlotte Carlaw never once alluded to the scene of that evening. That, with womanly instinct, she drew her own conclusions is certain; that, in her own

characteristically fierce fashion, she cursed the girl for a fool and a jilt is equally certain; but to Comethup she strove in every possible fashion to teach him to forget the mishap, to take his mind as much as possible from the sorry business. She could not cheat herself into the belief that she succeeded; her quick senses told her that the added tenderness in his voice and an additional gentleness in his manner were but the outcome of all that he suffered in silence.

They returned to town on the day following 'Linda's flight, and two days after that a letter was forwarded to Comethup by the captain—an impudent, paltry thing, which yet gave him some small satisfaction.

"MY DEAR YOUNG CRÆSUS: The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. I've no doubt that at the present moment you are thirsting for my blood, and pouring out threats against me; yet I should be glad, for the sake of our old friendship and because I am grateful for certain services you have rendered me, that we might still be friends. You can't have everything in this world; and once upon a time, when probably you didn't know any better, you stole my birthright. At the present moment I have stolen what was never yours. It was a mere girlish infatuation on her part, and one which you should have been wise enough never to take seriously. You wouldn't see that you were in the way, and you forced me to adopt the only course possible. I am convinced of one thing, and that is, that my new life with her will give me just that stimulus which has somehow been wanting in all my efforts. We were married on the day following our flight to London, so that you need not, in your innocence, blush for me or for her. We are going into the country for what is technically known as the honeymoon, and then we return to town and I start seriously to work. I will let you know my address.

"Yours sympathetically,  
"BRIAN CARLAW."

He tore the letter up and went about his daily life, determined, if possible, now that the matter was ended, to shut it all out of his mind. Miss Carlaw, with the same kindly object in view, proposed a flight to the Continent, and, believing that it would please her to go, he gladly fell in with the suggestion. They were absent nearly two months.

As they travelled with much the same state they had adopted on their former journeyings—putting up at the best hotels and staying in the largest cities—they were easily to be traced. This Comethup was soon to discover, for one night in Rome, after a solitary ramble through the streets, a note was handed him as he entered his hotel; he was informed that it had been left by a gentleman, who would return in half an hour. He tore it open, and discovered that it was written hurriedly in pencil and was signed by Robert Carlaw, that the writer begged for a few moments' conversation with him on a matter of emergency. Comethup hesitated for a moment, and then strolled out into the streets again, lingering about near the entrance of the hotel. He had no desire to meet his aunt, and then arouse her suspicions by leaving her again.

In a little while he saw Mr. Robert Carlaw approaching him, swinging along with something of the old jaunty step, and setting his hat a little more rakishly on his head as he approached his destination. Yet there was, with all his jauntiness, a certain lack of confidence about the man—in his movements and in his glances—which may have been inspired by the needy life he had led. Comethup stood watching him as he neared the hotel entrance, and saw that he did not turn boldly in, but lingered for a moment outside, looking in furtively. As Comethup walked toward him a look of relief stole over his face, and he went toward the young man with both hands outstretched. Comethup grasped one of the hands, and his own was immediately covered by the other and warmly pressed.

"My dear young friend," exclaimed Mr. Robert Carlaw, "how good it is to set eyes once again upon you! May I dare say that I have hungered for a sight of you? I trust you have not waited long here for me?"

"No," said Comethup. "But I thought that if you wished to see me we might talk here more easily than in the hotel."

"True—true," murmured his uncle; "you are ever considerate. And I, who am, and have been for a long time, nothing but a houseless wanderer, a wretch who dare not meet the eye of his tailor, to say nothing of his butcher and his baker, I seem to shun the lighted halls of luxury, and to choose, as befitting my own fallen fortunes, the darker ways of life. But enough of me." He made a dramatic gesture, sighed, and linked his arm in that of the young man and strolled on with him.

"You're in no fresh trouble, I hope," said Comethup. He longed to speak of 'Linda, to ask if she were happy, to be certain that all was well with her.

"*Fresh* trouble!" ejaculated Mr. Carlaw. "Would that any trouble which I suffered could, in any sense of the word, be termed 'fresh'! They are all too old and stale for that. I am buried to the neck in them, am forever struggling to the lips in a horrid sea of them, expecting to be drowned every moment. Once or twice a generous fellow, who shall be nameless"—he squeezed Comethup's arm—"has thrown, to carry the metaphor further, a life-line to me, and has drawn me ashore for a space. But ill fortune has thrust me back again in time, and each time I seem to sink deeper than ever. But enough of myself; I am the emissary of others." He said it with an air as though he felt it conferred a distinction upon him that he was not on this occasion personally begging.

"Of others?" inquired Comethup, looking round at him.

"Yes; it is not for myself I plead. I do not know, by the way, that I have ever really pleaded for myself; your generosity has merely anticipated my necessities. Mine is a nature which, foolishly enough from the world's point of view, places self last; it has ever been my way. But I have taken this journey, on the present occasion, because I can not see those who are dear to me—my flesh and blood, so to speak—perishing, while the world looks on with careless eyes. I am a father, and I feel the responsibilities more than might be imagined. I have watched my son's career; I have seen men prick their ears at the mention of his name and nod sagely; I have——"

Comethup was too impatient to hear more of the preamble. He seemed to scent disaster in the very air, and broke in upon the other's slow words impatiently. "Yes, yes; but tell me at once what you mean, why you are here, and what's happened. Of course, if Brian is in want, you know that I shall be only too glad to——"

"My dear nephew, you anticipate my meaning at once. It is only the truly generous soul that can see deep into the heart of distress, as it were, in a moment. I will not disguise from you the fact that these young people, who have rashly, but with a very beautiful confidence in Providence, I think, entered upon a union which naturally increases expenses—I will not disguise from you the fact that they are in want—that we all are in want. I—I have recently, from motives of economy, taken up my residence with them, and that close intimacy has enabled me to see clearly that which my son's natural pride has kept from my knowledge. Sir, I can bear it no longer. I said to myself, 'These young people shall not suffer before my eyes. I will sacrifice everything for them; I will humble my pride; I will approach our former benefactor.' And I am here."

"I'm dreadfully sorry to hear what you say," replied Comethup. "Of course I had no idea that Brian would be in such straits as you describe. I shall be returning to England within a few days; perhaps I shall be able to see him. In the meantime, perhaps you will allow me to give you—I beg your pardon, lend you—a sum of money, and you can then hasten back to them. I trust they are not—not in actual want?"

"Their credit, up to the moment, has, I rejoice to say, remained good; but even that is on the point of exhaustion, and after that—well, I tremble. So you see, when it came to a crisis I informed my son that I would seek you. With the natural hesitation of a proud man, he refused at first to listen to such a suggestion; but I prevailed, took sufficient for my journey, on the most economical principles, and, as I said before, here I am."

"I have only a little over thirty pounds with me," said Comethup, "but, as I shall be returning to London immediately, that will suffice for your present need. You return to England at once?"

"To-morrow morning," replied Mr. Robert Carlaw, thrusting the money into his breast pocket. "To-night I shall sleep soundly, for the first time for many weeks; I do not sleep soundly when I am troubled about those who are near and dear to me. Yes, I return to-morrow morning."

They parted, and Comethup went slowly back to the hotel. No mention had been made by his aunt about any probable date of return; they had merely wandered from city to city as the whim took them, Miss Carlaw having always in her mind the desire to teach him forgetfulness. Therefore, when he went to her that night and stated, with what carelessness he might, that he should like to return to London at once, she was naturally somewhat startled. Even while he was speaking and urging excuses for no longer remaining abroad she was casting about in her mind to discover the real reason of this step he contemplated; she began at last to fear that she understood the reason only too well.

"Come, my dear boy, what ails you? What's the reason of this sudden change of plan? There's nothing troubling you, is there? You've had no—no letters, no bad news, to worry you? Won't you tell me?"

To tell her was, of course, impossible. Even if he could have kept back that former story of all the money he had paid away, he could not now explain that this girl, who had left him for another, was in want, and that he, the man she had cast aside, was to relieve her. That, of course, could never be explained—would never be understood. Although his aunt had scarcely mentioned the matter to him, he felt, from something she had once said, that she knew the story of the marriage, and knew that Brian was 'Linda's husband. Probably the captain had told her. But Comethup saw clearly before him that there was but one course he could adopt—that of silence. He could not bear to think that any action of 'Linda's, or of those belonging to her, should be misunderstood.

"No, of course I have had no bad news. What should make you think that? Only I am a little tired of travelling, and you know London is always delightful; I've heard you say that. My dear aunt, I know you only undertook this journey because you thought I should like it. Won't you go back to please me also?"

"Ah! you're keeping something from me; there's something hidden away in your heart that you won't tell me. There! I'm not inquisitive—no more than the rest of my sex; but I'd like to give you a word of warning, boy. You've not been happy lately—oh, I know!—although you haven't said a word about it; I'm too fond of you not to notice every little sign. My dear boy, there's something I never meant to refer to; it's a story that's best left alone. Comethup, you're not—not hungering after her still, are you?"

"No," he replied.

"And you're not making this sudden journey to London after her? Remember, you must put that out of your mind; I say *must* advisedly, because there's no other word to use in the matter. You can't blink the thing away, my dear: she belongs to some one else, and you've done with her. If

you don't recognise that, it only means disaster for both of you. With a man and a woman in such a situation there are two things for the man to do: if he can't run away *with* her, then, by the Lord, he must run away *from* her!"

"But I am not going to London to see her," said Comethup. "I'm afraid you're magnifying the matter; she is married, happily married, and all the other is forgotten and done with. Won't you understand that?"

"Yes, if you tell me so. I am very glad, for your sake, to hear you say it. And, if it pleases you, we'll set off for London at once."

One thought was uppermost in Comethup's mind—that he must not see 'Linda. In the first place, he felt pretty certain that the fact of his having been appealed to on her own and her husband's behalf had not been revealed to her; and, in the second, he was not quite sure yet that he could bear to meet her. That she must, at all costs, be kept from want and suffering he had fully determined; all the bright hopes and dreams he had had, even from his boyhood, concerning her were swept aside and done with—things that never had been. The fortune that had been placed in his hands and which had seemed once so wonderful was now nothing, save that by its aid, in an indirect fashion and without her knowledge, he could benefit her; he was glad to think that he still possessed that power at least. For his wanderings had not changed him. Solitary for the most part, except for the companionship of the strange old woman who loved him and would have done so much to help him, he had seen, in every place he visited, the face of the girl always before him; had gone over, in imagination, words she had spoken to him; had lived again through scenes of those brief half-happy weeks in which he had thought she loved him.

Within an hour of reaching London he had set off for Brian's lodgings; he had found a brief note awaiting him, giving the address. He discovered it to be in a cheerless and shabby quarter of town; it was obvious, from the style of the house, that they had no real home of their own yet, but were living in furnished apartments. He wandered up and down the street, in the dusk of the evening, for a long time, wondering what he should do, or how it would be possible to meet Brian without also seeing 'Linda. He had almost made up his mind, in despair of anything better, to ring the bell and inquire for his cousin, when the door of the house he was watching opened and 'Linda came out. He was on the opposite side of the street, standing back in the shadow of a doorway, and he saw her distinctly—saw, with something of a stab at his heart, that she seemed thinner, and that some of the old elasticity of her step was gone.

He watched her hungrily till she had turned the corner, and then crossed the road and rang the bell. He was shown, by a weird-looking, tired-eyed little servant-maid, into a room on the first floor; it was empty, but in a few moments a door leading to a farther room was opened and Brian came in. There was none of the old frank, joyous fashion of greeting about him; he merely nodded, and thrust his hands into his pockets and walked across to the fireplace.

"Well," he said, "so you've found me out at last, have you? You've been long enough about it."

"I came to you as soon as I could," said Comethup. "You know I've been abroad, and I——"

"Abroad! What do you want to fling that in my face for? Here, some cursed fortune thrusts me, penniless, into a wretched London lodging-house in a slum, and you flaunt it in the best hotels all over Europe. Where's the justice of it? In God's name"—he swung round fiercely, and made a step toward the other—"how does the world expect me to work, why does it demand the best of me, under such circumstances?"

"Don't be unreasonable," said Comethup slowly. "I met your father in Rome, and sent him hurrying back to you."

"The damned old scoundrel! Do you know that I've never even seen him? When I could stand it no longer, I suggested he should go and find you, and he promised faithfully to come back the moment—well, the moment he got anything. How much did you give him?"

"A little over thirty pounds," said Comethup.

"And a fine time he's having with it, I'll be bound. Never trust your own flesh and blood, say I. Fancy your own father leaving you to starve!"

"Well, I shouldn't trouble about that now," said Comethup. He had been looking round the shabby room, with its absence of anything homelike, save for a few flowers in a cheap vase on a little table and some needlework in a little basket. He trembled at every footfall on the stairs, and was only anxious to get away before she returned. "You know I've always plenty of money, and if you will let me——"

"Oh! don't beat around the bush. What do you suppose I sent to you for? It's easy enough to come in, well fed and well dressed—I'll warrant you drove here in style——"

"I don't think I'd say that, if I were you," said Comethup quietly. His hands were gripped closely behind him, and one foot was beating restlessly on the carpet. "You know I've always been ready to—to lend you anything in my power. There's only one thing I'd like to say, and that is, I should be grateful if you wouldn't say anything about it to any one else—to 'Linda, for instance."

"You needn't fear that; I've got my pride—possibly more of it than you possess. There! I don't want to quarrel with you; only I suppose I've got a little soured when I could see no prospect of anything coming in. And money does go so devilish fast in London! Why, that hundred I had—you remember when I left poor old dad stranded without a halfpenny—it's all gone long since. Poetry is not a paying game, my boy, and these days people don't seem to believe in a poet who's hidden away in dingy rooms like this. You see, I can't ask any one to see me; the people I knew have lost

sight of me, and I am in daily dread of being shelved altogether. A poet must remember his social duties, like every one else. While I go on at this rate I shall never make a splash—never do anything.”

“Yes, you’ll do well enough in time,” said Comethup, glancing uneasily toward the door. “As you want me to put the thing bluntly,” he added with a little laugh, “perhaps I may say that I’ve brought some money with me, and that more shall be forthcoming when that’s gone—until, of course, you’ve been able to make your ‘splash,’ as you term it, and can repay it.”

“Oh! of course, that will be all right; it’s bound to come sooner or later. That’s just the point; the things are talked about enough, and if I could once thrust my head in at society’s door and talk about them myself, I should be a made man. How much can you spare me?”

“Well, I don’t spend much myself, and I thought perhaps—say two hundred?”

“By Jove, you’re a good fellow! Pass it over. I must trump up a story to ‘Linda about a sudden remittance from the publishers; women like to know the ins and outs of things.”

“Is—is she well?” asked Comethup carelessly, as he held out the notes to the other.

“Oh, yes, she’s well enough,” replied Brian. “Like most of her delightful sex, she’s possessed of a temper, and so am I, so that we don’t always pull together nicely in harness. But she’s very fond of me, and I—yes, I’m very fond of her. But, I say, you’d better be going, hadn’t you?”

“Yes, I think I’ll go,” replied Comethup. He picked up his hat, and looked for a moment round the room; he did not know when, if ever, he should see it again, and it was a wonderful place to him, poor though it was, because she lived there.

Brian went to the door, to ascertain if the coast was clear, and Comethup, shaking him hurriedly by the hand, ran downstairs and got into the street. Even then for a long time he could not leave the place, lingering unhappily up and down on the other side of the street, waiting to catch a glimpse of her again.

He saw her come back presently and enter the house, saw lights gleam in the room he had left, and a little later still saw them both come out and the girl link her arm in Brian’s, and watched them go off together in high spirits. Walking sadly a long way behind them, he saw Brian hail a cab at the end of the street and put her in and jump in himself; saw the cab drive away westward.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### A SECOND DESERTION.

Now that they were once again established in London, Miss Charlotte Carlaw made up her mind that they would entertain and be entertained; that the Prince Charming, who had burst, so to speak, upon her acquaintances as a mere child, should, now that his education and his travels were completed, appear before them as a man. She set about the business with characteristic energy. He was regarded, as he had always been, as the head of the house, and, although Miss Charlotte Carlaw very rarely went out, Comethup knew that it pleased her that he should accept invitations, even though his doing so must leave her alone. So it happened that he went about a great deal.

It was at a big house one night in the following year that he met ‘Linda. It was the house of a woman who liked to call about her every little shining light, in whatever particular sphere they might be, and make much of them for a while, and then drop them as hurriedly. Comethup had seen Brian at the end of one of the rooms, with a group about him; had had time to notice, as he passed unobserved, that Brian was talking at a great rate, and looking handsomer than ever. Several women were in the group, and he heard their bright laughter as he passed.

Quite alone in an alcove he stumbled suddenly upon the girl. It was the first time they had met since that night in the old garden, which now seemed so many miles away. She was very simply but very beautifully dressed. As she glanced up at him, with almost a frightened look, he overcame his momentary hesitation, held out his hand quite naturally, and smiled as she had seen him smile when a boy. He thought her glance changed almost to one of gratitude; he sat beside her and tried to get some natural phrase to his lips, and to still the heavy beating of his heart.

“I—I saw Brian—just now,” he said. “I had no idea you would be here, although I might have known.”

“You see, I’m not so lucky as Brian; he seems to know every one, or else they want to know him, and I get left a little out in the cold.”

“That’s a shame,” he replied. “I’m afraid we’re in the same boat; no one wants to have much to do with a dull fellow like me. So it’s rather lucky I came across you, isn’t it?”

She nodded slowly; her head was bowed a little, so that he could scarcely see her face. Presently, when she raised it and looked at him, it shook him to the depths to see that her eyes were full of tears. “Have you nothing to say to me?” she asked, in a low voice. “Oh! forgive me. I ought not to have said that; but it seems so hard to sit here and talk commonplaces, as though we had just been introduced—so hard, when I remember all that—all that has gone before. Wouldn’t it have



been kinder if you had walked past me just now, without knowing me? I should have deserved that; this hurts me a thousand times more."

"Why should I behave to you like that?" he asked, with a smile. "If we must go back to that old story, for Heaven's sake let us look on the best side of it! If any one is to blame about the matter, I am the sinner. I like best—you won't mind my saying this, I am sure!—I like best to think of all the splendid times we had, when we were little mites, with the captain, you know; and I like to think, if that will please you, that, when we got a little older—well, we played at love, as we played at so many things before, although the captain didn't help us there, did he?"

She looked up at him quickly, with the ghost of a smile flitting across her face, and made a movement as though she would have stretched out her hand to him. But she stopped, and he went on again more easily:

"So now, you see, the game is ended, as so many other games we played ended in their good time. Let that suffice. It's good to see you again, and to know that you are happy, and that all things are going well with you, little friend. Come, tell me about yourself."

Their eyes met, and held each other's for one long moment; then he turned his away. Perhaps in that look she understood, in a dim fashion, for the first time, all that this man had lost, all that she had snatched from him; perchance she saw something greater here than had before touched her life. But, moving to his mood, she began to talk quickly, almost gaily:

"Oh, yes, Brian is doing splendidly, and making heaps of money. You know we've left the first place in which we lived long ago, and have got a beautiful little house in Chelsea—you'll come and see us, won't you?—and a great many clever people come there to see him, and then we go out a great deal. Oh, you've no idea how different it all seems from the quiet old days before—before I was married. But I suspect you've heard how well Brian is getting on?"

He had heard it, indeed. Sitting beside her there, he wondered what she would have thought if she had known that the little house in Chelsea, the full, ever-varying life she led, the very dress that brushed against him, were all purchased with his money. He wondered what she would have thought had she known that this husband of hers swept gaily along the pathway of life which Comethup cleared for him, coming without the faintest hesitation, again and again, to his cousin when former supplies were exhausted, never stopping for an instant to consider the justice or the injustice of the matter, but taking everything as his right, almost without thanks; whining about his hard lot, or railing at Fate, according as the mood was with him, yet living always at the fullest pressure, with not even a passing thought for the morrow. For one brief moment, perhaps, a perfectly natural thought flashed into his mind to tell her, to let her see clearly the shame of the thing, to understand what this man she loved really was. But the thought was gone almost before it had entered his mind, and he felt himself flushing angrily that it should ever have been there at all. Instead, he looked round at her, and answered her question.

"Oh, yes, I've heard all about it, and I'm very glad for your sake. I suppose Brian is working very hard?"

"Not very hard just now. He tells me that in his profession he has to look out always for fresh ideas, that unless he meets a great many people and sees a great many different phases of life he can't expect to give expression to the best that's in him. That's what he says; I dare say you know what he means."

"Yes, I think I know what he means," said Comethup slowly. "I suppose one mustn't judge a poet by ordinary standards. You see, I'm such an idle dog, and I just manage to stroll through life in—in the sunshine, and so I don't quite understand what that other life—the life of a genius—means. By the way, I'm thinking of going down to see the captain; have you any message for him?"

Her face was turned away; she did not answer for a moment. "What does he think of me?" she asked at last, in a low voice.

"Nothing but the best, I can assure you," he replied. "You've always been, and always will be, his little 'Linda, the child he knew so many years ago. Why should he think badly of you?"

"If you're quite sure—well, give him my love; say that I think of him often and often; that in moments when I am alone I dream that I am in his garden again, among the roses; that I am still a little child, with my arms about him. And say—say that I am quite, quite happy. Will you remember that?"

"Every word," said Comethup. He felt he could not trust himself to say anything more, or even to look into her eyes again; he got up and said hurriedly and awkwardly that he supposed he should see her again, and so left her. The rooms were very full, and Brian was talking away to a new group as Comethup got out of the place and went into the street.

All the misery was back upon him in fullest strength; all the old unsatisfied longings, the dreams he had dreamed, the hopes he had cherished, had swept down upon him like a flood with the touch of her hand, the glance of her eyes. It had not seemed so bitter a thing when he had merely to think of her, to picture her in this situation or in that in a wholly intangible form; to see her face to face was a different matter, needing a stronger courage. He asked himself, again and again, that question which is inevitable in some men's lives: why Fate had given him so much, and yet stripped away from him that which was worth more than all he had received. Yet, through it all, she stood out as some one far above him; some one he had loved, in a foolish, vain fashion, in some far-off time, without any hope that she could love him in return. Whichever way his thoughts turned and returned, and swept hither and thither, there was not anywhere any blame for her.

He could not sleep that night; he paced his room hour after hour, turning old forgotten things over in his mind—things which would have been so much better left alone. He was roused after a little time by a light tap at the door, and Miss Charlotte Carlaw came in, a strange-looking figure, with a dressing-gown wrapped about her and a shawl thrown over her head. He stood still, and she came slowly across to him and fumbled for his hands and took them. "My boy, my boy," she said, "what has happened? what is wrong?"

He did not answer; he drew her arm through his, and they began to walk up and down the room together, she with one hand gently touching his arm as if to soothe him.

"Dreams, dreams, dreams!" he broke out at last. "Oh! if a man might sleep soundly and forget everything that's gone, forget words that were uttered, and the clasp of hands that have touched his, and—and other things besides!"

"I know, I know," she whispered. "But there's something, God or devil, I don't know which it is, that won't let us forget anything. The best and the worst of us, boy, have had to go through it, and I think we come in time to find that we're glad we can't forget, however bitter the remembrance may have been at first. The years soften things, dear, and show them in a better and a kindlier light, and we learn our difficult lesson with many tears and much smudging of the slate of life; but we learn it all the same, and we grow to laugh at the end, when the lessons are put away and the long day is finished. You haven't learned that yet, Comethup, and you don't think now you can; but you will, Heaven knows you will—Have you seen her again?"

"To-night," he muttered.

"Well, you talked with her, I suppose?"

"Yes. Oh, forgive me; it didn't seem to matter so much before, but now——"

"Is she happy?" asked the old woman.

"Yes, she seems very happy."

"That's well; that's better than I expected. Come, boy, I don't want to preach to you; I am something of a blundering old sinner myself—I'm the last person to preach to any one. But I know something of what life is, and I've learned the best way to get through it. I suppose you'll be bound to meet her sometimes; that's the sort of devilish game Fate plays with us. The things we most want to see are kept out of our sight, and those we would be glad to avoid are thrust under our very noses. But don't see her more than you can help, and try to think—it's a bit hard to do so, I admit—but try to think that the world holds something else than one woman, and something better than dreams and regrets. Face it, boy. Move about and see people and interest yourself in other matters. I won't do you the injustice to say that you will be able to forget; I'm afraid you won't do that. But at least you'll grow to look at the matter in a different way, and to think it wasn't so bad after all; I'm quite sure you will."

They paced up and down the room together for a little time longer, Miss Carlaw occasionally drawing his hand up to her lips or against her cheek, and sometimes softly crooning a few bars of an old song, as though to a child in pain or trouble. Presently, quite briskly, she took him by the shoulders, and drew his head down that she might kiss him, and felt her way out of the room. And, after a time, he crept to bed and slept more soundly than he had hoped to do.

A couple of days after that he went down to see the captain. It was his first visit since the night of Linda's flight, and he almost feared on his journey down that the captain might refer to the matter in some way and tear wider the old wound. But he might have known the little gentleman better, for no word was said on the subject during the whole of his stay, which lasted some days. With a melancholy desire, however to reopen the wound himself, Comethup let his feet stray one night, soon after his arrival in the old town, toward the neglected garden of the house in which she had lived—it seemed so much easier to think there, even to think calmly, than in any other place.

There seemed always to be dead and drifting leaves in that garden, at whatever time of the year; a different atmosphere was there from that found anywhere else. He walked all round the house, lingering among the trees, as he had lingered when a boy, almost thinking he saw sometimes the flutter of her childish frock going on before him. The place seemed deserted; not a light gleamed from any window.

At last he became conscious that there really was some one moving before him in the garden, flitting about among the trees, gliding into shadows, and keeping as much as possible out of sight. The place had seemed ghostly enough before, but now a little chill fear crept into his heart and stopped his feet; immediately the movement among the trees ceased also.

In some alarm Comethup, with a hasty glance behind him, called out hurriedly to know who was there. The movement began again, and a figure came slowly from between the trees and approached him in a sidelong, hesitating fashion. Comethup, summoning his courage, made a hasty step forward and was confronted by old Medmer Theed, the shoemaker.

"Why, how you startled me!" exclaimed the young man. "Why are you dodging and hiding among the trees like this?"

The old man came nearer to him and laid a thin, knotted hand on his arm. "To watch for her, to wait for her," he whispered. "See"—he waved his other hand toward the dark old house—"it's all silent and empty now, nothing to be seen. But she'll come back, she'll come back—just as the other child might have come; I wait for her as I waited for the other. But all my dreams have confused me. I don't know which is alive and which is dead, or whether both are alive or both

dead, or whether there was only one, after all. But she'll come back, and so I wait for her. Sometimes I dream that she has come back already, after I've gone to my bed; and I wake with a start, thinking I hear her knocking, knocking at the door. But there's no one there and the street is empty. But she'll come back here."

"But why should she come back?" asked Comethup sadly. "She is in London with her husband, happily married. Didn't you know that?"

The old man laughed a little scornfully. "Happily married!" he echoed. "Does a child weep when it is happy? are there tears in a woman's eyes when all is well with her?"

"Yes, of course, sometimes," replied Comethup. "But why do you ask?"

"Listen. She was sent to me as a tiny child, straight from the arms of God, to comfort me when—when all my dreams were wrong. I have watched her grow up; have seen the sunlight gladly follow her across the doorway and across the floor of my shop when she flitted in—brighter than any sunlight—and sat beside me. The time came when she came to me less and less often; when she would only flit in sometimes, bringing the sunlight, and put her arms about my neck and her cheek against mine, and whisper a word or two and run away again. But I loved her—she was sent to me, she belonged to me. Mine was the charge to watch over her, and I watched for a long, long time. I saw her grow to girlhood; I saw her become a woman—just as the other had grown; and then began the time when I must watch her indeed. I have lain here among the trees many and many a night, only that I might see the light burning calmly in her window. And then the time came when I saw something else."

"Go on," said Comethup in a low voice.

"I saw *him* come—come like a thief in the night, calling softly to her; whispering softly, with his arms about her. See"—he stretched out his arms and shook them stiff and hard before Comethup—"I am strong; much labour has made me strong. I wish now that I had caught him by his white throat and turned his smiling face up to the stars and held him so until he died."

"For shame!" cried Comethup. "Why should you kill him? She loved him, and they are married."

"Yes, it was because I thought she loved him that I hesitated," whispered the old man, dropping his hands to his sides. "And yet she came always as though with her love there was half a fear of him, as though he smiled and beckoned to her and drew her against her will. He didn't love her, and she will come back here; she will be glad to come back. And so I watch for her night after night."

Without any further words he slipped away again among the trees and was soon lost to sight. Comethup hesitated a moment, but feeling it would be useless to go after him or to argue further with him, he went out of the garden and took his way back to the captain's. Another thought had occurred to him in regard to the old house, and he mentioned the matter to the captain that night as they sat together.

"By the way, sir," he said, "do you remember a woman—a Mrs. Dawson, I think—who used to live with—with 'Linda at her father's old house! What has become of her? I noticed to-night," he added, with what carelessness he might, "that the place appears to be shut up and empty; I happened to pass that way."

The captain looked at him keenly and sympathetically for a moment. "She has gone away," he said at last. "She came to me immediately before leaving here; she seemed to know no one in the place except myself, and she had a vague idea that I had been kind to 'Linda in some way, and that it was necessary for her to thank me. In her agitation she let fall a remark which led me to question her; and I heard for the first time her melancholy history. As we are all interested, my dear boy, in anything that touches our little friend 'Linda, you might as well know it; although, for that matter, we are neither of us likely to see the woman again, and it will be better—in fact, it was her wish—that 'Linda should know nothing about it. It seems that this woman, who was known merely as Mrs. Dawson, was really 'Linda's mother."

"Her mother!" echoed Comethup. "But why was the matter kept secret, and why did she masquerade under another name and in the capacity of a dependent?"

"Soon after her marriage it appears that she fled with a lover, leaving the child behind. From what I once saw of Dr. Vernier, I am not very much disposed to lay any heavy sentence upon her; besides, God forbid that I should judge any human creature, especially a woman! However, the lover died, and the mother traced her husband out and begged that she might see her child. With a cruelty which one can scarcely understand, he permitted her to remain in the house with the child strictly on the understanding that her identity was not to be revealed. To that stipulation she seems loyally to have conformed. Of course, as you may readily suppose, when the girl had grown up and her father was dead, the wretched mother naturally shrank from telling her daughter the shameful story, and lived on as before. Now, of course, in a moment her child is swept away from her and she can do nothing. In fact, rightly or wrongly, I advised her for 'Linda's sake to say nothing. And where she has gone I really don't know."

"A pitiful story," said Comethup after a pause. "We have, as you say, to think of the girl and of her new position; she has gone out of this woman's life, and I suppose—well, it seems rather hard, doesn't it?"

"Not so hard as it might have been. She believes that her daughter is happily married, and——"

"Believes!" echoed Comethup.

"I beg your pardon; I should have said she knows she is happily married. And that is something of a comfort to her. I think she despaired long since of ever being able to reveal herself to her daughter. And you think that our little 'Linda is really happy?"

"Why, of course she is. She married the man she loved," said Comethup quietly.

"Well, I suppose she did," said the captain. "And Brian, I understand, is doing well?"

"Oh, yes, he's doing well enough," replied Comethup, turning away.

He wandered again in the garden of her old house the next night. Medmer Theed may have been lurking among the trees, but he did not see him. Coming out, when it was very late, into the street, he found the old captain pacing up and down before the gate, with his long military cloak about him, and his hands clasped under it behind his back. They walked on slowly down the road together. It seemed almost a natural thing that he should be there, and for some time Comethup said nothing. At last, looking round, he said slowly, "I suppose you think I'm a fool, sir?"

"God forbid!" said the old man, staring straight in front of him as he walked. "A man's got to fight this sort of thing out alone, and with what strength God may give him. Come home, boy; to-morrow—oh, it hurts me to part from you—but to-morrow you must go to London."

"Yes, I think you're right. All this place is full of memories of her; I hear her voice—as child or woman—wherever I turn; her light feet tread all the road beside me where I walk; the very moon shines as calmly down upon me as when we walked together—lovers. Don't think I'm saying anything against her; perhaps I've even been coward enough to hug my pain a little, because the pain has been so sweet. Give me your hand, old friend; I promise—there, I'll swear if you like—that I'll try to put it all aside. I can't forget it; that's quite another matter; but I'll put it away from me and be a little braver about it. There's my hand on it."

"That's well," said the captain, gripping his hand. "I'm sorry to send you away, but I think you know it's best, don't you?"

"Yes, you're right. I must find some work to do; I have been an idle dog too long. Come, let's go home."

Yet even in London he could not keep away from her; he thought of her when he woke in the morning, and breathed her name when he lay down to rest at night. He found his way one night to the little house they had taken in Chelsea; longed to go in, in a natural fashion, yet dared not trust himself. Once or twice he turned resolutely to go away, and then came back again, and lingered still. At last, when it was getting late, the door was opened and he saw, from his position on the opposite side of the street, his Uncle Robert Carlaw standing within the hall, lighting a cigar; saw him set his hat at the proper angle, and come swinging out into the street. Comethup had no particular wish to meet him, and only wondered a little, in his own mind, under what circumstances he had returned to his son's house. He was just walking away in good earnest, when Mr. Robert Carlaw crossed the street, recognised him, and came breathlessly after him. Comethup faced about and pretended not to notice the other's outstretched hand.

"Ah! my dear boy, I see we do not meet on the old cordial footing. Well, it has been my fate through life to be misjudged; to be met with scorn when I craved only sympathy; to have every action of mine misunderstood, every word misinterpreted. Don't turn away from me, I beg; let me explain, let me appeal to you."

Comethup had stopped, and stood looking at him coldly. "There certainly seems to be the need for some explanation," he said. "I suppose you will not deny that you deceived me; that the money I placed in your hands, at your request, to help Brian and—and his wife, never reached them?"

"My dear nephew, a moment; I crave only a moment. I left you that night in Rome, with the full intention of returning to them and flinging the whole before them and crying: 'See! the wolf is no longer at the door; your father has saved you!' That was my full intention. But alas! I was tempted; tempted not for my own sake, but for theirs. The money was but a small amount—you will admit it was small, my dear nephew—and I saw the opportunity to increase it. I turned aside on my journey at one of those gambling hells which should, if I had my way, be swept off the face of Europe to-morrow; I turned aside and staked that small sum for them. I felt that I might be able to take them perhaps ten times the amount. But, alas! I lost all."

"As you might have expected," said Comethup. "Fortunately for them, I returned within a day or two after you, and——"

"So I have heard, so I have heard," exclaimed Mr. Robert Carlaw. "Bless you, my young friend, bless you! For myself, how I contrived to reach London I scarcely know; but I *did* reach it, and after some weeks of fear and trembling I at last approached my son and threw myself upon his mercy. I—in fact, we are quite reconciled, and I have taken up my abode with him."

"So I observe," said Comethup.

"But to-night, sir, to-night even that must cease. The crowning piece of ingratitude has at last been reached; the son for whom I have done so much, sacrificed so much—the son of whom I have been, as I felt, justly proud—has deserted me."

"Deserted you?" cried Comethup, catching his arm. "What do you mean?"

"Gone, sir—fled! He has lulled me into a feeling of false security; led me to believe that I could end my days in the bosom of his family, surrounded by men of culture and refinement, who would naturally appeal to those finer instincts in me which have had so long to remain dormant, and

then in a moment he has gone and ruined my prospects."

"Why the devil don't you speak plainly?" cried Comethup, roused at last, and shaking him fiercely by the arm. "What do you mean? Do you mean that he has deserted his wife?"

"Not only has he deserted her, my dear nephew, but he has had the audacity to leave her to my care"—he struck himself on the breast—"to *my* care—an old man who has toiled for him through a long and cheerless life, and who might, but for the ingratitude of him and others, have been something of a figure in the world. But he has reckoned, sir, without knowing what I really am."

"What do you mean?" asked Comethup slowly.

"I mean, my dear nephew, that that is a game at which two can play. Does he think that a man of my position is to be left to starve with a mere chit of a girl? No, sir; he took this responsibility upon himself, and it has nothing to do with me. I absolutely refuse to accept it."

Comethup took him suddenly by the shoulders and looked steadily into his eyes; Mr. Robert Carlaw's eyes shifted a little before the steady gaze of the other. "Do you mean to say that you're going to desert her too, eh?" asked Comethup.

"My dear nephew, there's no question of desertion——"

"Answer me, yes or no. I didn't want to talk about it, but you may perhaps remember that you've depended upon me for some years past. Leave her now, and, as surely as there's a God above us, I'll leave you to starve! Now, how's it to be?"

"But, my dear nephew, think of the position."

"My dear uncle, I have thought of the position. When did Brian go, and where has he gone?"

"I believe he has gone to Paris, and, as generally happens in such cases, there's a woman in the matter."

Comethup nodded grimly and glanced across at the house which Mr. Robert Carlaw had just left; he seemed to mutter something between his teeth. "To Paris. Well, I dare say I can find him. In the meantime you go back and you stay with her. Does she know anything about this?"

"My dear boy, if there's one thing I dislike more than another, it's a scene with a woman—tears, and all that kind of thing. As that scapegrace son of mine had not seen fit to mention the matter, I thought it scarcely devolved upon me."

"Exactly," replied Comethup. "And so you were going to creep out and leave her there—alone in uncertainty—to starve, for aught that you cared! Now, go back to her. Tell her nothing about this, except that Brian has been called away on business; I dare say your conscience will stretch to the extent of that lie. As regards pecuniary matters, I think you know you may safely leave them with me; but about that you will say nothing to her. For the rest I pledge you my word that if I can find Brian he shall be back here within a week. Now, go back to her, and hold your tongue!"

Mr. Robert Carlaw commenced a protest, at first with something of bluster and then whiningly; but Comethup pointed sternly to the house, and at last, with a shrug of his shoulders, the uncle turned away and left the nephew standing looking after him. In a moment, however, he came rapidly back again. "My dear boy!" he exclaimed, "you won't leave us in the lurch? There are, of course, things to pay, and—and a position to be kept up, and I——"

"I won't leave you in the lurch; you may be sure of that. Go back to her."

He watched Mr. Robert Carlaw re-enter the house, and then turned away and walked homeward with a rapid step.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### COMETHUP DRIVES A BARGAIN.

It scarcely occurred to Comethup until after he had started on his chase what a mad business it all really was. He was in a mood more than once to turn back, to let this cousin take his own path; the feverish desire was upon him to be with 'Linda—even, perhaps, by reason of the other's desertion, to creep a little nearer into her life. But that thought was a blasphemy. After all, this man who had left her was the one man she loved, the one man she ever would love; if Comethup would play the part he had set himself, the part of loyal friend, he must bring that man back.

He had made a careless, half-jesting excuse to his aunt, and had stated that he would be back again within a few days. And now, in Paris, he wondered how he should set about his quest, or in what quarter of the city he should discover the runaway. He had no clew. Brian knew Paris well, and it was impossible to say where he would take up his abode, especially if, as his father had hinted, he had a companion. However, the search had to be made, and it was begun within an hour of Comethup's arrival in the city.

For two long days and nights he scarcely rested, going to every place of amusement, from the highest to the lowest; scanning the faces of people who passed him in the streets; standing at the doors of theatres and dancing-halls, and watching every one wherever the life of the city beat most thick and fast. And at last his patience was rewarded.

He was sitting in a *café* late on the afternoon of the third day, miserably turning over the matter in his mind and almost giving up the business as hopeless; he had a paper in his hand, but had not read a line of it. Suddenly, from the street where the lamps were beginning to gleam, Brian Carlaw came swinging in and took a seat near the door. Comethup raised the paper so as to hide his own face, and peered round it at his cousin. He was glad, for one thing, to find him alone; but he felt that it would be impossible to broach the subject in a public place, or even to confront him. For the present he must merely watch and be careful that his quarry did not again escape him.

Brian proved to be in a restless mood. After but a few minutes, and when he had only half consumed the refreshment he had ordered, he looked at his watch and got up and went out. Comethup dropped the paper, and followed him. Brian walked rapidly, evidently having a settled destination in view; at last he turned in at the door of a small hotel in a side street, and the door closed behind him.

Comethup waited for some moments and then followed him; discovered from the servant the number of Brian's room, and ran up the stairs. Without pause of any kind he knocked sharply at the door, turned the handle, and went in. His cousin had divested himself of his coat and waistcoat, and was evidently preparing to dress for the evening; he turned round quickly on hearing the movement at the door, and looked in astonishment at his visitor. Then gradually a smile stole over his face, and he cried out to Comethup with great cordiality:

"Why, my dear boy, what on earth does this mean? How did you discover me? I thought I was hidden from all the world."

"Yes," said Comethup, "I suppose you did. I have been searching for you for nearly three days. I followed you home just now."

Something in his voice caused Brian's face to change; the mirthful light went out of it, and his lips, so pleasantly smiling a moment before, became a hard, thin line. He advanced a little from the dressing table where he had been standing, and looked at the other with a frown. "What the devil should you follow me for? What do you want?"

Comethup backed away to the door, turned the key in the lock, and dropped the key in his pocket. His voice was very cool and steady when he spoke, only in his own ears it sounded as though some one else were speaking far away. "There's something I want to say to you—something that must be said now. Are you listening?"

"Damn your impudence!" cried the other. "You were always a crack-brained fellow. What's your game now, that you force your way into my room like this and lock me in? Do you want to murder me?"

"I am not quite sure," said Comethup, with a strange little laugh. "It might come to that, perhaps; it depends upon yourself—Come away from that bell"—for Brian had made a dash at the white electric button in the wall—"or, by God, I'll strangle you before any one can get this door open! And I'm a stronger man than you are; I've had a better training."

Brian came back to the dressing table in a sidelong, furtive fashion, watching Comethup narrowly. "Well, what do you wish? I don't want to have a scene, and I may tell you that I have no time to waste. I'm going out."

"Not yet," replied Comethup. "You've lots of time before we catch the night train."

"The night train!" echoed Brian. "What the devil do I want with the night train?"

"To take you back to London," said Comethup calmly. "I'm just going to explain, and it will be well for you to listen quietly. I know that it's quite useless to appeal to you; I've learned that long since. So now I'll put it more brutally, and tell you what you *must* do."

"Go on," said Brian sneeringly; "when one deals with a madman I suppose the best way is to humour him; at least I've always been told so."

"I don't want to say anything about myself; that would be rather out of place," began Comethup in his slow, soft voice. "But I want to speak of some one else—of your wife. I heard, quite by accident, that you had deserted her; left her, for aught that you cared, to starve; that you had come here after another woman. I suppose you won't—won't think it worth while to deny all that?"

"Why should I? You seem to have got the story pretty accurately. What's it to do with you?"

"Everything," replied Comethup. "That's what has brought me here. You don't suppose I'd be racing about Paris for two or three days after *you* for the pleasure of the thing, do you? I said I wasn't going to speak about myself, but I find I must. This girl, 'Linda, the sweetest and brightest it was ever a man's good fortune to win—this girl loves you; would give, I think, her immortal soul for you. Yet, at a whim, a caprice, you fling her aside, careless whether you break her heart, or—"

"Break her heart! Hearts are not so easily broken; even I can tell you that, although I am a poet. Besides, what the devil's her heart got to do with you?"

"More than you can understand. I think I'd give everything I have in the world to spare her any pain. I'm afraid you can't understand what that feeling is. I'd give my very soul to save her from tears or sorrow, to prevent any one of her ideals from being shattered. If I could die and know that in dying I gave her any greater happiness—well, my life wouldn't be worth an hour's purchase from this moment—Oh, I forgot; you don't understand all that. But there's one thing you

shall understand: you're going back with me to London to-night."

"Indeed? You seem to have made up your mind about that. If you take so deep an interest in Linda, why the devil don't you let me go my own way and—well, look after her yourself?"

The words were nothing; it was the horrible smile that played about Brian's lips—the sneering suggestion that he knew of the love in the other man's mind, and triumphed in the knowledge; it was all this that maddened Comethup. With a cry he threw himself upon the other and forced him to his knees, and kept a grip upon his throat sufficient to stifle the life out of him had he kept it there long. "You coward! I've bandied words with you too long; I've told you things that are as far from your ken as the knowledge of the stars. Get up"—he dragged him to his feet and flung him off—"and get on that coat! I'll waste no more time in talking. I won't lose sight of you until I see you in your own home."

"Well, and if I refuse?" said Brian sullenly, glaring at the other like a creature at bay.

Comethup laughed quietly and glanced round the room; buttoned his coat swiftly and came at his cousin slowly, steadily, without once taking his eyes from the eyes that shifted uneasily before his. "Why, if you refuse, I'll kill you! Don't think that's a threat merely; we're near the top of this house, and I can choke the life out of you long before any one breaks in this door, or even before you can give the alarm. Understand—I'm desperate; I've staked everything on this, and I won't hesitate. Now, as we stand man to man, I'll tell you what you may have guessed before. I love your wife; to me she's higher even than the angels. And my love has this quality—that life and death and heaven and hell are nothing, mere words, compared with my love for her, compared to what that love would make me do. It's a madness, isn't it, friend Brian, that a man may love a woman so well that he would kill another man rather than see her trust in that other betrayed? She thinks nothing of me. How should she? If I killed you, she would never cease to revile my memory and hold you up as a martyr; there's where the madness comes in. But that would be best for her, better than that she should find you out. Do you understand me?"

Brian looked at him curiously for a few moments and then began to laugh in a foolish, half-nervous fashion, as though he had suddenly been confronted with something he did not understand, and scarcely knew what attitude to take toward it. "Well, you're more mad than I thought you were," he said at last. "Suppose I go back to London, do you think I'm going to settle down in that dull house all my days? I tell you I'm made of different stuff. I want life, movement, music, laughter about me; a dull old dog like you can't understand that."

"You shall have them all," said Comethup eagerly. "Come, I'll make no one-sided bargain; let's understand one another. I've shown you my hand, shown you the reason for this thing I'm doing. Don't think I'm doing it for your sake; you needn't flatter yourself to that extent. In all these things I put her first—her happiness is the great thing. Now, if I ask you to take up again a life which you say is distasteful, I'll take upon myself to make it sweet. You shall have what money you want; I have a large income now, and when—God forgive the thought, but you force me to say it—when my aunt dies I shall be a very rich man. If you do this thing, I swear to you you shall never need money; that's all it's in my power to do, as a complete outsider, for the woman I love. She won't ever know it, and you—well, you can keep her happy."

"Oh, yes, I can do that," said the other easily. "You talk of your love for her; you know you might strive all your days, you poor beggar, and never come nearer her heart; might spend every farthing you have in the world on her, and she would scarcely feel grateful to you. That's where I've got the pull of you. She's grateful to me if she can win a smile from me at any hour of the day; she's so wrapped up in me that the simple words 'my dear,' flung carelessly to her, are more to her than the most impassioned love-speech could be from you or any one else. I don't know what it is"—he went on with a laugh, tossing his hair back from his forehead—"but I have that power over women; I may even flout and insult them, and, by God! I think they like me the better for it.—Well, I don't see the fun of risking starvation if it can be avoided, and, after all, you're pretty safe. I'll go back to London; but mind, I hold you to your word. If you care so much for her happiness, by the Lord, you shall pay for it!"

"I'll pay you what you like," said Comethup quietly. "But one word more: what brought you over here? Who's the woman?"

"What a dear old moralist you are!" exclaimed Brian, laughing. "I suppose you're afraid I may be deserting some one else, eh? Well, let me tell you for your comfort that she's rich; that she's taken a fancy to me, held up a beckoning finger, and I—well, I followed. I dare say she'd have dropped me in a month or two, when she found that her poet was like most other men, so perhaps it's as well that you've rescued me. And, when I come to think of it, it will be quite in keeping with my character that I should rush away at a moment's notice, without even an apology. You see, we poor devils are always supposed to do the most unexpected things—never anything proper or regular, you know. Upon my word, now I come to think of it, this will be better than dangling after her. She'll think all the more highly of me."

"Let us hope so," said Comethup. "Now, as I think we understand each other clearly, I'll leave you; I'll come to you in time for us to catch the train. I must get my things from the hotel." He moved toward the door, hesitated a moment, and then came back again. "On second thoughts, I *won't* leave you. Pack up your things and come with me now; we can dine together."

"I see, you don't trust me?" said Brian with a sneer.

"Frankly, I don't; you've scarcely given me reason to do so. And the game is too desperate for me to run any risks."

Brian shrugged his shoulders and began to get his things together. He stopped once or twice and glanced rebelliously at his cousin; but Comethup sat on the side of the bed, with his hands on his hips, looking steadily at him—a figure not to be reasoned with, or argued out of anything he had determined upon.

The dinner at Comethup's hotel passed in silence until almost the finish; then Brian, warmed by wine, looked up at the man opposite, and shook his head at him rallying, and spoke in his most charming and playful manner: "My dear old boy, when I'm dead you shall write my biography, the whole amazing business—'pon my word, you shall!"

"No," said Comethup, shaking his head; "I don't think—I'm quite sure I couldn't do that."

"Why not?"

"Well, you see," replied Comethup gravely, "you've done so many things I don't understand; I might—might misinterpret them. Employ some one who doesn't know you."

They crossed to England together and went on to London. Comethup left his own luggage at the London terminus and would have parted there with Brian; but the latter had a devilish scheme in his head—a well-contrived and carefully-thought-out piece of cruelty—the only revenge of which he was capable for his defeat. "I'm not going to leave you here," said Brian; "you've got to come on to the house with me, come in with me, and see your work concluded. By God! I'm not going to have the thing half done; you've undertaken it, and you shall see it through to the bitter end. Oh, yes, you shall see the touching reconciliation between husband and wife; you shall stand, figuratively, with uplifted hands to bless them."

"I—I'd rather not," said Comethup hastily. "Why not meet her in quite the usual fashion, and—and make what excuses you will for your absence?"

"Not a bit of it. I'm not going to let you off so easily. I shall say we met in Paris and travelled over together. I tell you you sha'n't get out of it."

"Do you insist?"

"I do. You shall find, friend Comethup, that you don't have things all your own way; we don't part until you leave me safely in the bosom of my family. You can't trust me, you know," he added sneeringly.

They drove together to the house. But for that hidden side of the picture the return of the prodigal would have been a matter for laughter. Mr. Robert Carlaw was in the hall, affected almost to tears; he haughtily brushed aside the servant who would have assisted with the luggage, and valorously staggered under its weight himself, murmuring between gasps, "My son, my beloved son!" Comethup would have made his escape, but Brian caught him by the arm and dragged him into the room where 'Linda was. She started up and ran to her husband; he took her with excessive tenderness into his arms, casting a side glance at his cousin.

"Why, my darling," he cried, "you hug me as though you feared you had lost me altogether. Surely you know my erratic behaviour by this time? I had to rush off to Paris on business—business that admitted of no delay.—Kiss me again, my love; why, you're almost crying!—and in Paris I met Comethup—dear old moral Comethup in Paris; think of it! So we travelled home together. Oh, you needn't be ashamed of your tears or your joy before Comethup; *he* doesn't mind—do you, old chap?"

With his arm about her he drew her down beside him on a settee, and looked past her at Comethup with a smile of triumph in his eyes; held her closer and closer yet, with little tender caresses for her hands and her hair, that each might be a stab for the man who stood looking on.

"And I have some good news for you, my sweetheart. In Paris I conducted my business so well that I made quite a lot of money; we'll be able to live in glorious style. We'll give up this stuffy house—what do you think of that, friend Comethup?—and we'll have a better one, and more servants; and, by Heaven! you shall drive a carriage. We'll give dinners, and go out, and mix with people; you shall be the best-dressed woman in London. What do you think of *that*, old Comethup?"

"Oh, but I don't want all those things," said 'Linda softly, nestling to him. "So that I have you it would not matter, even if we were poor."

"Nonsense, my darling! there's no talk of poverty; I tell you we're rich." He burst into a roar of laughter. "By 'Jove! I'd no idea that poetry could ever pay so well. But there, while we are spooning and thinking about ourselves, we're forgetting old Comethup. I dare say he'll want to be going?"

"Yes," said Comethup slowly, "I think I'll be going. Good-night, 'Linda, good-night!"

He was crossing the little hall when Brian dashed out of the room after him, closing the door behind him. He came up to Comethup with his face completely changed, with the hard look upon it which it had worn during their interview in the hotel at Paris.

"Look here, you know," he said quickly, "let's have no misunderstanding about this. A bargain's a bargain; I've fulfilled my part, now it's your turn."

"I'm not likely to forget," replied Comethup.

"Well, we want money at once. I'm going to take you at your word. You want to see this comedy played out, and, by Heaven! you'll have to pay for staging it. It's a fair bargain: you have the fun of looking on, and I've got to play. Did I play my part well to-night?"



Comethup looked at him for a moment and made a movement as though he would strike him; then let his hand fall and turned away. "Almost too well," he said.

"Ah, there I don't agree with you; one can't play a part too well.—So I shall expect to hear from you—say, to-morrow?"

"Yes, you shall hear from me to-morrow."

Mr. Robert Carlaw was hovering about near the hall door with a look of expectancy on his face, and a hand darting out to seize Comethup if possible. But Comethup was in no mood to be stopped; he thrust him aside and went out, and walked rapidly down the street. "'Linda, 'Linda, my poor 'Linda!" he whispered. "God grant he plays his part well to the end!"

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### UNCLE ROBERT HAS AN INSPIRATION.

The pretty comedy to which Brian had referred had been running with something of regularity for over six months; the staging of it had been a more costly matter than Comethup had believed possible. His own expenses were small enough—indeed, he cut them down to the lowest figure; but Brian had seen in him an inexhaustible mine, from which he could demand whatever he wanted at any moment, light-heartedly enough. To do Brian justice, he had no knowledge of what the actual sum was on which his cousin had to depend, nor, indeed, did he care. He held the younger man strictly to his bargain—even threatened desertion, at the slightest remonstrance on Comethup's part against reckless expenditure. 'Linda had no suspicion of the true state of affairs; she knew that there was always plenty of money, that they went out a great deal, that many well-known and clever people came to their house, that their doings when they went into the country or abroad were chronicled for all the world to read. Brian, *her* Brian, of whom she was so fond and so proud, had produced another book of verses, and the people she met talked to her about them, even quoted lines of them; they sometimes coupled her husband's name with the names of certain wondrous young poets of bygone days. It was a never-failing source of delight that he had, on an impulse, dedicated this last book "To the Woman who stands always most near to Me." She knew what that meant; she kissed the dear lines on the printed page again and again because she was so proud to think that all the world knew what it meant, and knew to whom the poet referred.

If, sometimes, at her own house or in the houses of others she met a tall, grave-faced man who said little to any one and who generally lounged in doorways or in out-of-the-way corners; if sometimes—indeed, very often—she glanced at him to find his eyes looking wistfully at her; if, in the dead of night, when she could not sleep sometimes, she had a sudden remembrance of him and of his loneliness, and of the old garden far away, where they had whispered together, it was all so fleeting—just a little breath of pain, as it were, across the perfect happiness of her days—that she forgot it at once and was glad to think that he must have left his sorrow behind him long ago, and have ceased to trouble about what could never be. In those months she was so supremely happy and her life was so crowded that she could not bear to think that any one else was unhappy through any mistake of hers, and so dismissed the matter at last, feeling sure that he too had dismissed it long since.

Of late, finding that he had but to ask to receive at once, Brian had carried the game on even more recklessly than before. He had long since demanded—almost immediately after the return from Paris—that an account should be opened in his name at a bank into which he could pay the sums received from Comethup; he felt, he said, that it looked so much better to write cheques for what was wanted. But a thousand pounds per annum will not stretch sufficiently to cover everything, and the moment arrived when Comethup was informed that his own account was considerably overdrawn. And there were still two months to wait before Miss Charlotte Carlaw would pay in anything more.

For himself it did not matter, although even he would be put to it for small personal expenses. But he sat in trembling fear that Brian might make a demand upon him any day, a demand which for the first time he would be unable to meet. While he was puzzling helplessly over the matter the demand arrived, borne by Mr. Robert Carlaw, who wore a troubled countenance. He had of late been the go-between of the cousins; he still lived in his son's house, and was chiefly useful in entertaining dull visitors and performing petty offices for which Brian had no time nor inclination.

His method when seeking Comethup was a simple one: he did not care to go near the house, but caught the first small boy on whom he could lay hands and gave him a few coppers to take a note to the house, addressed to Comethup. The note was invariably couched in the same pitiful strain, imploring his dear nephew to grant him an interview in the street, where he was humbly waiting with despair tugging heavily at his heart.

"My dear, dear boy," he exclaimed fervently on this occasion, "how can I thank you? If, like Brian, I were a poet I could compare you to the sun at midday, to the blessed rain from heaven upon a parched earth. Not being a poet, although I once had some pretensions in that direction, I am compelled to say 'Bless you, my dear boy, bless you!'"

"Well," said Comethup, as they paced slowly down a side street, "what's the matter?"

"My dear boy, we are on the verge of ruin," exclaimed Mr. Robert Carlaw. "Why should I disguise the fact from you? Why should I hide from you, who know the whole deplorable circumstances, the miserable truth? This morning a letter has arrived, threatening a distraint upon our goods unless a large sum of money be paid by to-morrow. Think of it, a distraint upon our goods! The horror, the disgrace of it!" he exclaimed, smiting his forehead with one hand and waving the other despairingly. "That is our cursed temperament—my son's and mine—that we can go on through the world like happy children, laughing in the sunshine, picking the brilliant flowers of life, heedless of everything; when a storm comes and the wind howls—you follow my metaphor?—we are lost, absolutely lost. Others were born to face the world and its trials, to make a stubborn fight of it if necessary; we are exotics, my son and I, under an open sky, and we perish miserably. In point of fact, we are on the eve of perishing miserably at this moment."

"I am sorry," replied Comethup slowly, "but on this occasion I can't help you."

Mr. Robert Carlaw stopped and touched his arm, and peered anxiously into his face, "Can't help us?" he cried, "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I have no money; that it's all gone, and that I sha'n't have any more for perhaps another two months. I've already drawn more than was due to me at the bank."

"But, my dear boy," whimpered his uncle, "what is to become of us, what is to become of *me*? Think of the position: you have taught me to be dependent upon you, to look to you for the supply of those little comforts—not to say luxuries—which are necessary to a man of my position. I have felt so—so safe! Fortune has not been good to me; Fortune has stripped me of everything; and then, at the last moment, melting a little toward me, has pointed to you and has said in effect: 'Go to Comethup; our dear Comethup will assist you.' And I have come to you accordingly. My dear nephew, what is to become of us?"

Comethup faced about and looked at him contemptuously. "Yes, I know, you've come to me for everything; have relied upon me for everything. I've had a thousand a year from my aunt, and, as God's my witness, I haven't spent fifty of it. It's all gone to feed you, and your son, and"—he paused, and a gentler expression came over his face—"yes, and Linda. Well, I suppose it's all right; you'd got to be fed and kept going somehow, and it was easier for me to do it than it would have been for any one else. But now, here's an end of it. I'd help you if I could—you know that but I simply can't. It's impossible for me to go to my aunt, even if I could bring myself to do it; she'd want to know where the money had gone, would want to know a thousand things I can't tell her. I tell you things have come to a deadlock; you've drained me—you and Brian—and you can drain me no further."

Mr. Robert Carlaw walked slowly up and down the street with his head sunk upon his breast in profound thought; Comethup paced slowly at his side. After a time the elder man raised his head and thumped his chest, and spoke in a tone of renewed hopefulness.

"In a crisis of this kind, my dear nephew, despair is useless; we see before us a certain situation, and that situation has to be faced. In this world we are beings of one of two orders—we are either men or mice. If we are mice we submit to be crushed"—he stamped his heel vigorously on the pavement—"while if we are men we face the situation boldly and rise superior to it. In this case we are men; we refuse to be crushed. For myself I would not care; ever the sport of fortune as I have been, I yet may cut a figure in the world, even though it be a ragged one; 'The Vagabond' has always been my favourite song. But my heart is torn at the thought of others. I dare not return and see them hold out empty hands to me and cry for bread and tell them I have but a stone. My dear boy, it is not to be done; vagabond I may be, but I am still, I trust, a gentleman, and my heart beats true to those of my own flesh and blood. Think, my boy, think of Brian and of his young wife, and then tell me, if you will, that I am to go back to them and bow my head before them and say, 'Behold me; I have failed!'"

"But, my dear uncle," exclaimed Comethup in despair, "what am I to do? Show me any way, and I'll adopt it gladly."

"My dear nephew," said Mr. Robert Carlaw, with his chin resting meditatively in his hand, "there *is* a way, and an easy one, for a man in your position. Come, let us face facts: you are your aunt's heir; if she died to-morrow—may Heaven spare her for many years!—you would have every penny she possesses. Such is your good fortune. Now, my dear nephew, it has been my most sorry fate to have to deal on occasion with the shady side of life; I have had, I may say, to get through it as best I could, and in the easiest possible fashion. Your path has been different; you have gone along in the sunshine, with some one else to clear the way for you; hence, you know nothing of these matters. But let me tell you this, my dear boy"—he tapped a persuasive forefinger on Comethup's arm—"that there are men in this city to-day, personally known to me, who would be willing at a moment's notice to advance any sum you might name within reason to a man with your prospects. Don't mistake me," he added hurriedly. "I am not urging that you should do anything dishonourable. Frankly, the thing amounts to this: you go to A. upon my introduction; A. says in effect: 'What! is this Mr. Willis, the favourite nephew of Miss Charlotte Carlaw? And he is in want of money, just to tide him over until such time as he may, in the indefinite future, come into his fortune? Nothing easier,' says A. 'How much does Mr. Willis want?' And there, my boy, the thing's done. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, I follow you," said Comethup slowly. "And so you want me to use her name, the name of a woman who's been the best friend ever a man had; you want me to look out so eagerly for dead men's shoes—or a dead woman's, it doesn't matter which—that I am to sell them before she's

finished wearing them? No, you've made a mistake, Uncle Bob; I don't intend to do it. You and Brian have been living at my expense at the rate of over a thousand a year; to put it plainly, you've had every penny, or nearly every penny, that I've ever possessed since I was a boy. I don't mind that, but the thing has got to stop. Beyond what I have I won't go; you've been welcome to all that, and I don't mind. But I'll go no further."

Mr. Robert Carlaw sighed and began to ponder the matter again; he was not quite certain of his cards, at least of those he could safely play; but he had a vague feeling that there was one trump card in his possession which might well be risked. The matter was desperate, and he resolved to play desperately.

"Well, you know best," he said. "Frankly, I honour you—honour you for the noble position you take up at such a moment. When I consider your simplicity, your clear and beautiful nature, I feel like a modern Mephistopheles whispering temptation into your ear. But in this, as in all other matters, a man must look at a thing from his own standpoint, or from the standpoint of those who most nearly concern him. Doubtless you are right; let us say no more about it. The crash has come, and we must meet it. I have met worse blows than this, and Brian, being the son of his most unfortunate father, must learn to meet them too; doubtless it will be a salutary lesson to him. Men have strong hands and, I trust, stout hearts; if it rested with Brian and myself alone I would not mind; but there is some one else to consider, some one weak and helpless who knows nothing of any tragedy which may be impending over her." He sighed again and shook his head with an air of deep dejection.

"You mean 'Linda?'" said Comethup, without looking at him.

"I refer to that sweet girl. I am a man of quick and strong imagination; a moment ago I seemed to have a sudden mental picture of that child when she first learned the position in which we stand, when she——"

"But she mustn't learn it," cried Comethup hurriedly.

Mr. Robert Carlaw shook his head again. "My dear young friend, a wife's place is by her husband; when the crash falls she will unhesitatingly—oh, I know the nobility of her character—she will, I say, unhesitatingly place her hand in that of her husband and will say, 'Together we have been prosperous, together we will bow our heads before the storm.' Poor child, poor child, that it should come to this!"

"I—I'm afraid I had lost sight of her," said Comethup. "Of course she doesn't understand, doesn't know any of the circumstances; I'd forgotten that. She's gone on, day by day, believing that all this money came from him; proud of him; glad that the world, as she thought, should shower its gold upon her clever husband, upon the man she loves. Yes, I'd forgotten all that." He spoke as if to himself, without noticing his companion. He saw in a moment that this thing he had built up for her sake was in danger of being swept away; that she might be left stripped and trembling in a desert, with all that had made her life perfect torn away from her. He thought of her proud and happy face when he had seen her but a little time since with her husband; saw again, far away from the street in which he walked, a little lonely child in a garden; heard himself, as a boy, tell the old captain that he meant to look after her. Comethup Willis was of the stuff of which the fabled knights might have been made—one who simply and earnestly and splendidly set before him a task to be done and did it without wavering or turning aside. His own pain, his own longing counted for nothing; the child of the old days seemed to be stretching out her hands to him and crying to him, as she had done years before when they had first met; the cry was not to be resisted.

He looked up with a start and found the eyes of Mr. Robert Carlaw fixed upon him. "You say that it is possible—honourably—to get an advance from some one?" he asked.

"The easiest thing in the world. Of course, there will be interest to be paid, and—and I've no doubt that the interest will be somewhat high; but that is a mere matter for arrangement. As I have said, the fact of your aunt's wealth is well known; the further fact that she has refused to have anything to do with any of her relatives but your fortunate self is equally well known. My dear nephew, in this world of ours if a man has anything substantial behind him it is the easiest thing in the world for him to get what he wants. I can take you to a man this very hour, if necessary, who will conduct the business for you. And, let me tell you another thing: for the future it is my fixed intention to insist upon it that there shall be no further extravagance. We must not run the risk of another crisis of this character. In a little time we shall be able to pull ourselves straight, to repay this money, and so—if I may suggest so much—put your conscience at rest. Whatever money is advanced can be paid back, and my good sister will know nothing of the transaction."

"You are sure there is no other way?" asked Comethup.

Mr. Robert Carlaw spread out his hands with an air of charming frankness. "Suggest one, my dear nephew, and I will instantly give you my opinion concerning it. Candidly, I can see no way so simple or so easy."

"Very well," said Comethup in a low voice. "Let's go at once and get it over."

They drove to an office in a quiet court in the city, and there Comethup was left in an outer room, where a solitary clerk was busily writing, while Mr. Robert Carlaw had a private interview with the accommodating gentleman who was so willing to lift other people's troubles away from them. "It will be best for me just to—to pave the way, as it were," he had said when they reached the place.

That necessary formality over, Comethup was shown in, and found a bland and smiling gentleman, of a somewhat pronounced type of features, anxious to shake him at once with much fervour by the hand. His uncle had, it appeared, with that consideration which characterized him, put the whole matter so fairly and clearly before this gentleman that the money was at Comethup's instant disposal; indeed, it seemed such an ordinary and simple piece of business that Comethup's mind was considerably lightened. There were papers to be signed, and it appeared that Mr. Robert Carlaw had suggested, in order to avoid troubling his dear nephew again, that the loan should be for a thousand pounds. The rate of interest, as he had said, was extremely high, but then the circumstances were peculiar; and in order that there might be no misunderstanding the interest for one year was deducted from the amount of the cheque, so that the cheque itself was very, very far short of the sum which had been named.

However, the thing was rapidly concluded, and uncle and nephew were ushered out of the office. When once the money had been placed in Mr. Robert Carlaw's hands Comethup laid a detaining hand on his shoulder. "Look here, you know," he said, with some sternness, "let us have no nonsense about this matter. I am sorry to refer to it, but on a former occasion—in Rome, you remember—when I put money into your hands it never reached its destination."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Carlaw, bridling, "do you imagine——"

"I imagine nothing," replied Comethup quietly; "I am merely speaking of what occurred. This is a different matter, and I think—yes, I'm quite sure—that I'd better go home with you."

Mr. Robert Carlaw shrugged his shoulders, but submitted to being thrust into a hansom with Comethup close at his elbow. At the corner of the street in which Brian lived the cab was dismissed, and they walked down the street together. Some fifty yards from the house Comethup stopped and nodded to his uncle to go on alone. That gentleman shook hands with him effusively, and went on and ran up the steps leading to the door, with a brisk air; waved a hand to his nephew, and disappeared. Comethup waited about for some time and finally went home.

Now, the mind of Mr. Robert Carlaw was divided between two sets of emotions during the next day or so. In the first place, he was honestly glad to have got so neatly out of an impending trouble; while, on the other hand, he fretted and chafed when he thought of the hand which had lifted the trouble from him. He had never ceased to think bitterly of the boy who had, as he considered, stepped into his son's place; had never ceased to occupy his mind with schemes, however wild and futile, which might turn the tables. And thus it happened that an idea came to him, so wild and daring that at first he rejected it; but it grew and grew, and shaped itself, until at last it seemed in all points and from every aspect so extremely beautiful that he wondered, almost in an awed fashion, what special providence could have guided him to it.

The theatrical nature of the man, glorying in big effects and surprises and flourishes, compelled him to carry out the business secretly; and then, when he had brought it to a successful issue, to declare the fact triumphantly. Accordingly he said nothing to Brian about the matter, but went out early and returned home late in the pursuit of his object. And that object was to gain a private interview with his sister, Miss Charlotte Carlaw.

The opportunity came at last. He had watched the house for some days in the hope of seeing Comethup leave it; had haunted corners and doorways, waiting for his chance. At last, one evening he saw the young man come out in evening dress and enter the waiting carriage and drive away alone. Mr. Carlaw readily conjectured that he was going to a dinner party, and after waiting for a few minutes longer he walked up to the house and rang the bell.

"Will you inform Miss Carlaw," he said in his sweetest manner to the servant, "that a gentleman wishes to see her on urgent private business? I will not give my name; Miss Carlaw knows me quite well. Oh, and say that I regret to trouble her at such an hour."

The man carried the message and presently returned to say that Miss Carlaw would see him. He was ushered into a room where she sat in solitary state at dinner. She turned her head inquiringly toward the door as he softly entered. There was no need for him to speak, for she knew him instantly. The frown on her face was not encouraging.

"Well, brother Bob, what do *you* want?" she asked sharply. "And what's the mystery, that you can't send up your name like an honest creature? Afraid I shouldn't see you, eh?"

"My dear Charlotte," replied Mr. Carlaw, "you always appear to do me an injustice in your thoughts. It is, perhaps, late in the day now to attempt to change your opinion of me; yet I venture to suggest that you will be surprised to learn that my errand to-night is undertaken—may I say it?—in pure unselfishness, and with the desire to do a fellow-creature a service."

"Yes, I should certainly be very much surprised to hear *that*, Bob," replied his sister with a shrewd smile. "You're not generally taken in that way; but it's never too late to mend, you know. You can sit down. I'm all alone, as you see; my boy has gone out."

Mr. Robert Carlaw sighed heavily and seated himself. "I am very glad," he began, "to find you alone; what I have to say is of a private and confidential character, and—forgive me, I beg—somewhat painful. In fact, it would have been impossible for me to speak before my nephew."

"I don't understand you," replied the old woman. She was frowning again, but seemed to be listening very intently. "I have no secrets from my boy."

"Ah, my poor sister; the gods have not been good to you. Blinded by nature, you have, I fear, also been blinded by something stronger than nature—love. You say you have no secrets from the boy; that does not necessarily imply that he has none from you. Do you follow me?"

"No, I don't. If you've anything to say about Comethup, why, in the devil's name, can't you say it before his face? You never did do things in a straightforward, honest fashion; there was always something crooked about you. If you've heard anything about my boy, or against him, I'll tell you to begin with that it's a pack of lies, and whatever it is I won't hear it! I'm keen enough and I know enough of the world to know what the boy's worth; he's not of your stamp, and never will be, please God!"

"There, you observe," said Mr. Carlaw, addressing the furniture, "the absolute accuracy and beauty of my reasoning. I told you that you were blinded by love. What I have heard comes from no third party; I love and esteem my nephew so well that had any one dared to breathe a word against him, that person would have felt the weight of my displeasure. I am, I trust, my dear sister, still a gentleman, whatever my worldly position may be, and I do not carry idle tales. I came to you to-night because it is my earnest wish, as I just now hinted, to help that young man \_\_\_"

"I have no doubt he'd be immensely obliged to you if he heard you say so," broke in Miss Carlaw, "but I think he can do without your help."

"I fear not," replied her brother sadly. "I risk your displeasure—your anger—I know, in saying what I am about to say, but my duty is clear, and I *must* speak. Will you pardon me for saying that into whatever pitfalls our dear nephew has plunged the fault is not, perhaps, entirely his own?"

Miss Charlotte Carlaw got up from her chair and came round the table with the aid of her stick and stopped exactly opposite her brother. "Pitfalls? What are you talking about? You've come here to say something; why the devil can't you say it? I suppose I'm bound to listen to you; a fellow of your sort must tell his lies in some ear or other if he can't gain the attention of the one he first seeks. Now"—she rapped her stick furiously on the floor—"out with it! What have you to say about my boy?"

"My dear Charlotte, you are, I observe, as impatient as ever. My sole desire was to break the matter gently to you, in order, if possible, to save you any unnecessary pain."

"Pain? What should pain me?" Yet her voice and her face were a little troubled as she spoke.

"My dear Charlotte, I know your generous nature, and I know—or I can guess—how lavishly you have dealt with this boy. It has been my good fortune to meet him once or twice, or perhaps I should say to see him in the distance; for we move, as you are aware, in different spheres. I have seen the richness of his dress; I have observed that he never appears to be in want of money."

"I don't do things by halves," said Miss Carlaw with a little touch of pride. "I said I would look after the boy, and I've done it. But what has all this to do with you—or with what you have to say?"

"Everything, my dear sister, everything. I suppose—forgive the question, but it is necessary—I imagine he has a large personal income?"

"He has," replied the old woman shortly. "A thousand a year."

Mr. Robert Carlaw lifted his hands in amazement. "A thousand a year! Incredible! And even that does not satisfy him."

"Not satisfy him! What do you mean?"

"To put the matter plainly, my dear Charlotte, circumstances which I need not detail took me recently into a certain quarter of the city. I may state—not without a blush, for I'm still a gentleman—that my condition of life is such that I am compelled sometimes to resort to various shifts by which to raise money. You have not had to do that; fortune has been kinder to you than to others. In this case I had gone to visit a money-lender. Do I pain you?"

"Go on," said Miss Carlaw quietly. She had backed away from him a little and was standing beside the fireplace, with one hand reaching up and resting on the high mantelshelf.

"Imagine my surprise, my distress, when I met in such a place your nephew, Comethup Willis!"

"Comethup at a money-lender's! Either you're mad or you think I am, brother Bob. Or have you suddenly gone blind, like your sister?"

"Alas! my dear Charlotte, I was never more wide-awake in my life, and never did I speak in more sober earnestness. I said nothing to the young man at the time, but the money-lender being a friend, I carefully and cautiously questioned him. And then I discovered the whole disgraceful business." Mr. Robert Carlaw rose to his feet and began to pace excitedly about the room.

"Keep still, man, keep still!" cried Miss Carlaw furiously, "and get on with your story."

"The man, who, like the rest of his kind, makes the most of his opportunities, informed me that he had advanced a large sum of money to young Mr. Willis. On my inquiring, naturally enough, what security he had asked, he told me that Mr. Willis had informed him that he was heir to the whole of Miss Charlotte Carlaw's large fortune, and that he supposed that fact was security enough. The man evidently thought so, for he had advanced your misguided nephew the sum of a thousand pounds at a ruinous rate of interest."

Miss Carlaw stood perfectly still for a long time; all expression seemed to have died out of her face. When at last she spoke her voice appeared to have changed, to have aged in some strange fashion. "Brother Bob," she said, "we are of the same blood, you and I, and whatever our later quarrels may have been we've played together as boy and girl. I pray you, Bob, in mercy to me,

tell me that this is some hideous jest. I'll forgive you; I swear I'll even laugh at you, if only you'll tell me that you've come here, knowing my love for this boy, to play a cruel joke on me, and then to go away and laugh at it. Brother Bob, tell me you're making fun of me." The appeal was piteous enough to have melted any heart, but brother Bob merely shook his head and sighed again more heavily than before.

"Alas! my dear Charlotte, it is no jest. To say that I was thunderstruck would be to put the matter mildly; and I can well imagine what your feelings must be. What he does with this money is more than I can say; I can give a shrewd guess, but I may be doing him an injustice, so I won't say what that guess is. But it is certainly true that he has raised this money in the fashion I have explained to you. If you still believe that I am guilty of such atrocious bad feeling as to jest with you on a subject of such a nature, I beg that you will yourself ask him."

"Yes, I shall certainly ask him," replied Miss Carlaw.

"That is wise, that is just," replied her brother. "Perhaps I might suggest that it would be better not to mention my name in the matter. After all, I am not concerned in it in any way, and being a man of peace I do not desire to have this young man's enmity. He will probably believe that you have heard it through some business channel of which he knows nothing."

"Oh, you needn't fear that I shall mention your name. If he admits it, the fact that I know it is sufficient. Have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing, beyond the hope that you will not deal hardly with him. He is young, thoughtless, headstrong; he has been brought up extravagantly, and——"

"With plenty to be extravagant upon," said Miss Carlaw, with something of a return of her old manner. "Well, brother Bob, I suppose you'll go home to-night in triumph; you'll go home and laugh because an old fool has been blind in a double sense; because she's been fooled as thousands of women have been fooled before, eh? Oh, you need have no mercy; go and tell all your friends, every one who knows you, tell all the world that I have warmed something in my bosom until at last it has stung me. Tell 'em all."

"Indeed, my dear sister," said Mr. Carlaw, "you do me a grave injustice. You spoke just now, not without emotion, of our childish years; my heart goes out to you to-night more than it has ever done. I may say that, having seen much of men and women in this queer world of ours, I feared something of this from the beginning; I felt that the boy had not that strength of character, if I may so term it, necessary to take his place with any dignity in an exalted sphere. Humbly he might have done well; the best of us are likely to have our heads turned."

"There, that will do; I'm quite capable of abusing him myself, if necessary, without your help. I suppose I ought to thank you for what you've told me to-night, but I'm afraid I can't quite do that. I wish, in my heart of hearts, I might have died five minutes before you came in, for then his kiss was warm upon my old cheek, and I—God help me!—I believed in him. There, don't speak to me. Go away, please; I want to be alone."

Mr. Robert Carlaw quietly took his way out of the room and out of the house. As he walked home he looked up at the night sky and smiled softly to himself, and felt that the world was good and that Providence had been specially kind to him.

"Women are strange creatures," he muttered to himself, "and when they've been upset or have had something rudely torn away from them they do remarkable things. Years ago, my dear Charlotte, you rejected my offspring and put Master Comethup Willis in his place. I may be wrong, but I think now, with the swing of the pendulum, it is ten thousand chances to one that you will restore Brian to your favour; and then our begging days are over, and all our fortunes will be made. And I shall have made them."

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE FALL OF PRINCE CHARMING.

Miss Carlaw stood for a long time in the same attitude after her brother had left her; the whole hideous thing had come upon her so unexpectedly and with such force that she was like one stunned. She began presently to pace about the room, moaning once or twice to herself as she walked, and then again stopping suddenly with a new light on her face and a smile about her lips. But those latter moments were rare and fleeting; they came to her only when she felt for an instant that the story she had heard was a hideous invention, and that her faith in Comethup might still remain unshaken.

After a long, long time her heart leaped suddenly at the sound of wheels and the opening of a door; then died down again at the thought of the interview before her. She heard his footstep in the hall, and then knew by the opening of the room door that he was coming to her as he always did. She stood stiff and rigid to receive him.

The sound of the voice she loved so well almost shook her resolution to be stern with him, almost broke her into an appeal. She knew that in another moment his arm would be about her shoulders in the old boyish fashion, and she cried out in an agony, "Stop! Stay where you are. Don't come near me!"

He stopped dead; so suddenly quiet was he that she almost fancied he had stopped breathing. Then the tension was over; he gave a quick little gasp and said hurriedly, "What's the matter?"

"Years ago, Comethup, when I first saw you in the house wherein your father lay dead, I drove a bargain with you—a bargain which, child though you were, you were fully capable of understanding. Do you remember it now?"

"Yes, of course." His heart was beating thickly, and he had a dim and miserable feeling that he knew what was coming.

"I fear you may have forgotten it. I asked for your love and your confidence; swore that I would be your friend if you dealt with me openly and squarely through all things and at all times. Have I kept my word?"

"God knows you have!" he replied in a low voice.

"Have you kept yours?—Ah! you are silent on that point. I ask you to-night if you have anything to tell me—anything to say to me?"

He raised his head and looked at her; even made a step toward her with his arms stretched out. Then the arms fell to his sides again and he simply answered, "Nothing."

Miss Charlotte Carlaw's face hardened suddenly. "Then the talking must be done by me," she said. "I reminded you just now of our compact when you were a child; perhaps it will be well to remind you of the penalty for breaking that compact. I swore to you then, and I meant it, that if you ever deceived me, ever proved yourself to be anything but the boy I believed you to be, I'd cast you out and you might starve. I meant it then, and, by the Lord, I'll keep my word! It has come to my knowledge to-night that you have done what, in my eyes, is a shameful and disgraceful thing; that, trading on the fact that you believed yourself to be my heir, you have borrowed a large sum of money; have used the bounty and generosity of a foolish old woman who believed in you, and so have actually drawn money which you can not possess until after my death. Will you deny that? Is it true?"

"Yes, it's true," said Comethup.

She gave a long sigh, turned away from him, leaned her arm against the side of the fireplace, and laid her old face against the arm and began to cry helplessly. It was the most pitiful sight imaginable, and yet he could do nothing to comfort her, dared not even go near her. In a dim, forlorn fashion he seemed to see passing before him all that had happened in that very room—the riotous feasts, when he had been a child—the sound of merry laughter; he even seemed to see himself as he had once stood on the table, singing a foolish song, with the captain watching him silently; he could hear his own childish treble, could feel again the old woman's hand grasping his ankle. And now the room was empty and the generous-hearted old creature, the giver of the feast, who had craved only for his love in return for all her bounty, was crying hopelessly over her shattered idol.

Presently she ceased her weeping and turned upon him with a certain sad fierceness of manner. "Have I ever denied you anything, boy? Was I so much in your way or had you given me so little of your love that you must long for the time when you could step into possession? O God! for the dream I have lost! Why, you're worse than any murderer—for the things you have killed in me to-night! I honestly believe that that is the unpardonable sin—to kill some trusting fellow-creature's belief in you."

"Don't, don't!" he cried; "you'll break my heart!"

"And what of mine; did you think nothing of that? I swear to you that if you had come to me and had told me that you were in want or in difficulties I'd have helped you if I'd had to mortgage everything I possessed. Your income has been a large one; it passes my comprehension to know what you've done with the money; I'm quite afraid to think. However, that's all done with; I'll never believe in any human creature again. I believed in you with all my heart and soul; I saw in you, or thought I did, something better and truer than in any one else. Now I find my mistake. Thinking over it now, I see what a fool I've been. I remember those days on the Continent when we were travelling about, and when your money went more rapidly than I could put it in your hands. I didn't mind then; I thought you didn't know the value of it, but would learn in time. Now your chance to learn is gone. You and I part to-night!"

He stood there dumb, knowing that he could say nothing to her, knowing that he dare not plead for himself. Indeed, he did not think of himself at that time; he found himself dimly wondering what was to become of Linda when this last sum of money was exhausted. He had never foreseen such a crisis as this. The fashion in which he had supplied Brian and his father with funds, beginning as it had done in his boyhood, had grown to be such a natural thing that he had ceased to be surprised at it, or, indeed, to think about it very much at all. He put himself clearly and quietly outside the question; his heart only ached desperately for this old woman who was destined to be left alone again after all these years, despite all her goodness to him. He stood still for a few moments watching her, and then turned quietly and went toward the door.

She called after him: "Have you nothing to say to me?"

He came back slowly. "Oh, my dear," he said in a broken voice, "what shall I say to you? To thank you for all that you've done, all that I seem so shamefully to have misused, would sound like a mockery. After all, all that you say is good and fair and just; I have lied to you and deceived you and broken my bargain; I can't say anything more than that. Deep as my gratitude is, I wish—O God, how much I wish!—that you had left me as you found me when I was a little child. I suppose

I wasn't fit or strong enough to take the position you meant for me."

"I suppose not. And you won't tell me what you've done with all this money?"

"No, I can't tell you that," he replied. Before him again he seemed to see the face of 'Linda—'Linda, whose fool's paradise he had created, and who lived in it contentedly, knowing nothing of what it was founded upon. In his own steadfast, single-hearted way he knew that that secret must be kept, and kept to the end for her sake.

"Well, if you won't, you won't," said the old woman, with a sudden return of her hardness of manner. "I suppose it doesn't matter now. But, since you refuse all explanations, so I refuse to have anything to do with you further, or with any trouble you have created. You have borrowed this money under the belief that you were my heir, but you've reckoned without me. Here, tonight, under the very roof where I first gave you all your honours, I strip them from you. Those who lent you the money may get it back as they can; I'll encourage no such business as that. I'll warrant they'll pull long faces when they find they've been misled. Yes, I strip everything from you. The boy I loved, the Prince Charming I worshipped, is dead—never has been at all. Another—a creature I don't know and don't understand, a stranger to me—has taken his place. Prince Charming has gone—God help me!—forever."

He turned then and went quietly out of the room. When at the door he looked back for a moment she was seated in her chair with her hands resting on the top of her stick, and her face bowed on the hands; she was rocking herself to and fro in the fashion he remembered so well.

He stole up to his room, struck a light, and looked round that happy place of his boyhood for a long time; then presently closed the door, went down the stairs, put on his hat, and left the house, taking nothing with him, but going out as quietly and as steadfastly to begin the world again as though he had been merely starting for a quiet half-hour's walk. He had not the faintest idea of what to do or where to go; there was no one to whom he could turn, for even the captain would not understand, and must never be told. Prince Charming, as the old woman had said, was dead; it would surely be wiser that he should be forgotten also.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### BRIAN PAYS HIS DEBTS.

Mr. Robert Carlaw, having once started that beautiful and simple scheme which he had devised, felt that something more was necessary for its completion; the first bold stroke had been given, but other bold strokes would be needed. Accordingly, he set about the matter delicately; sent copies of Brian's books of verse to the old woman, in order, as it were, to prepare the way for the entry of the poet himself into the position which had been so long usurped by another. He had decided not to tell his son anything about the matter until the business had been successfully concluded and Miss Charlotte Carlaw was ready to open her arms to her new heir.

But when day after day went by and then week after week, and there came no response from his sister, he began to be possessed with doubts and fears; wondered if, after all, he had snatched away the one means of living left open to them all, and had failed to discover another. He told himself, however, with a knowing shake of the head, that he knew women better than that; he counted on the fact of Miss Carlaw's desperate loneliness should she have discarded Comethup. Perplexed and troubled and trembling, Mr. Carlaw at last made up his mind to seek his sister and endeavour to learn the true position of affairs.

He was admitted without delay to her presence, and found her standing in the same room and in the same attitude as when he had last seen her, almost as though she had not moved since. But her face was worn, and lines appeared upon it which he did not remember to have seen before; for the rest she was as upright and dignified as ever.

"Well, brother Bob," she said, with some bitterness, "have you brought me any other fine news? Do you come again, in pure unselfishness, with the desire solely to help a fellow-creature? Come, let's know what you want. Out with it."

"My dear sister," began Mr. Carlaw, "when last I saw you, on a memorable and a painful occasion, I went away with the horrible fear tugging at my heart that it would have been wiser had I said nothing; that the probability was that you would behave—quite naturally, I admit—somewhat harshly to a foolish and headstrong youth. That fear has haunted me ever since, and haunts me still."

"Well, I'm afraid it will have to continue haunting you, brother Bob," replied Miss Carlaw dryly. "If you want to know full particulars of the matter I can tell you in a dozen words. I asked my nephew whether the statement was true or false; he admitted that it was true. He left my house that night."

Mr. Robert Carlaw, remembering his sister's affliction, felt it safe to indulge in a smile of satisfaction; but his tones when he spoke were tinged with sadness. "My dear Charlotte," he said, "this is quite what I feared. Will you not permit me to plead for the boy, to suggest——"

"Not a word," broke in Miss Carlaw fiercely. "I don't know why you come here, unless you want to triumph over a lonely old woman; but I want to hear nothing more about the matter. The boy is



done with, and I won't listen to the pleading of an archangel about him. Have you anything more to say?"

Mr. Carlaw hesitated for a few moments and then began his petition lamely. "My dear sister, I will not, of course, say anything further about the unhappy matter if you do not desire to have it spoken about. Perhaps I may say that, more than anything else, my heart has been touched for you; my sympathy has gone out to you in this hour of your loneliness more than you would think possible."

"I was lonely for a good many years, brother Bob, and it didn't seem to affect you much. Come, deal squarely with me; what is it you want to say?"

"My dear Charlotte, you are ever impatient; but that is characteristic of you, and I think I love you for it—I'm quite sure I do. I was going to suggest, if I might be permitted to do so, that having been used for so long to young society you will naturally feel the desire for that sort of society very strongly. In a word, my dear sister, you want to be taken out of yourself, as it were."

"Well, go on," said Miss Carlaw, who was listening intently.

Thus encouraged, her brother proceeded more glibly: "Now, it has seemed to me that if you could receive visits from—may I say it?—from those who are interested in you, those whose society is cheerful, whose lives are fresh and sweet and unspotted from the world, it would have a beneficial effect upon you. Now, for example, my son Brian——"

She burst suddenly into a peal of bitter, scornful laughter; the man stopped and looked at her angrily. "You're a bad pleader, brother Bob," she said; "you don't do the thing well at all. So this is your idea, is it? You think that as I have got rid of one who seemed all the world to me, and who seemed to take the first place in my heart—you think, because of that, you'll suggest a substitute." She stamped her foot and rapped her stick upon the ground. "No, a thousand times no! I tried with one; thought him the best there was on earth; I'll try no more. Still less should I be disposed to put in his place one who comes of such a stock as you. It's a pretty idea, brother Bob; 'pon my word, it's a fine idea! But it won't do; from this moment forward I've done with everything and every one. I thought I could find love and truth in the world; I've failed to find them, although God knows I've tried hard enough. Therefore I have the right to say that I don't believe they exist; and I *shall* say it, and take my way through life accordingly. Now, I ask only one thing and I intend to have it; and that one thing is—to be left alone, to be troubled no more with any of you!"

"But, my dear sister, be reasonable; think for a moment of——"

"Think!" she echoed bitterly. "Do you imagine that I haven't thought and thought and thought until my brain reels; until all my past days, good and bad, file before my darkened eyes like a long-drawn-out procession that never ends? Is it possible for you, I wonder, to understand all that this thing means to me? Is it possible for you to know how I wander through the empty rooms of this place and hear his voice again as I heard it when he was a child? Heavens, man! do you know what it is to have set up something to worship, to have had nothing else in all your life that was quite so fine and splendid, and then to be told quite suddenly that you've been dreaming; that it never existed, that you've been cheating yourself all the time and have got to unlearn all the pretty fable you've taught yourself? And then you think I could fill his place; you imagine I could start all over again with the chance of being cheated afresh? I know now what was meant when it was written that a rich man couldn't enter into heaven; I suppose it applies equally well to a rich woman. This was my heaven, more than a paradise; and my accursed wealth has driven me out of it and closed it to me forever! If I had been poor, he might have clung to me and cared for nothing else, but the money stood in the way. Well, I ought to have known; I'm old enough to have learned my lesson before this. Now, brother Bob, let's put an end to this; go your way and I'll go mine. That's my final word."

He knew that she meant it; saw in one horrible moment that he had lost, and that to plead with her would be of no more use than to fling himself against a rock. Coming out into the streets he walked along with his hat tilted on the back of his head, staring before him in a dazed fashion as he went.

"My dear Bob Carlaw," he muttered to himself, "you've most decidedly made a horrible mess of things. You've killed the goose that laid the golden eggs, with a vengeance. I thought this was going to be the smartest thing I'd ever done. Worst of all, there's Brian to be faced, and Brian's temper is positively devilish. This comes of trying to help others; if I'd fought for my own hand through life I believe I should really have cut a figure in the world, after all."

He kept his miserable secret for some weeks, hoping that an event would occur which would render it unnecessary for the matter to be disclosed at all, trusting in that Providence which in a vague fashion he had alternately blessed and cursed all his days. There was a forced gaiety about him at this time; he burst into unnatural snatches of song at the most inopportune and unexpected moments, as though to keep his spirits up and to assure his doubting mind that all was well. But the crash came when Brian, finding that funds were running low, airily suggested to his father that the usual appeal should be made to Comethup Willis.

Mr. Robert Carlaw, in coward fashion, put off the matter for a day or two; and then, when concealment was no longer possible, blurted out the truth, not without tears. He implored his son, his dear son, to remember that he had at all times been a fond and indulgent parent, and that he had in this as in all other things acted for the best. He urged, moreover, that they should not yet despair; his eccentric sister might restore Comethup to her favour, or might, best of all,

look with kindly eyes upon Brian and his young wife. Their credit was good, owing to the costly manner in which they had lived. There was still time, the trembling man argued, in which to look about them and make up their minds what to do.

To say that Brian was stunned by the intelligence would be to put the matter mildly. In characteristic fashion he had gone on from day to day, complacently confident that the next would bring all that he needed to make life pleasant; and here in a moment he saw the whole thing stripped away from him—saw in imagination the pleasant prospect upon which he had so long gazed closed in by the hard, dull wall of privation, against which he might beat his hands in vain. He had lived in luxury like a spoiled child, ministering to his every whim and caprice, happy and flattered and careless of everything and every one about him. When at last he fully grasped what had happened, his fury and violence were greater even than his father could have imagined; he cursed that long-suffering man roundly, cursed every circumstance of what he termed his poverty-stricken existence, and ended his outburst by whimpering feebly, like a child thrust out suddenly in the cold and the darkness.

Left alone, the natural cowardice of the man took a new form. It had never been his habit to bear the burdens of life—that was a matter which might more easily be left to others; he determined he would not bear this one. To justify his conduct had never been necessary; he had been fortunate in seeing always the easiest path to travel, and had immediately taken it, even though such an action involved the stepping over some one else to reach it. Consequently there was no thought in his mind now of the sufferings or troubles which might be incurred by any one near to him. Brian Carlaw was the one person to be considered, and Brian Carlaw must not starve. If any justification were necessary, he told himself with something of pride that he had a work to perform—a work for which the world asked and waited; he owed a duty to the world and must perform it at whatever cost. This being the case, when his first anger was gone he looked about for a means of escape. Difficulties were closing in about him, and he must get away from the net while yet there was time.

So it happened that, not for the first time in the history of this amazing pair, Mr. Robert Carlaw found himself one day again deserted. Brian had gone, leaving behind him a letter to his father written in quite his best and airiest fashion, and urging that gentleman to break the news to the deserted wife.

Mr. Robert Carlaw was, not unnaturally, annoyed; he felt that his son's action savoured of base ingratitude when it was remembered that the father had tried to do so much. "And the worst of it is," he muttered to himself as he read the letter, "that he's left the woman on my hands. That's the coolest part of the business."

'Linda, all unsuspecting, greeted him with a smile as he entered the room; for he went to her at once, ready to blurt out the matter without preface or disguise of any kind. He felt that he was the deeply injured party, and it was convenient that she should be there that he might pour out his wrongs to her.

"You look troubled," she said gently. "Is anything the matter?"

"Matter! The most infernal, disgraceful, and degrading business that has ever come to my knowledge. 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth!'—well, I've found out what *that* means. Here am I, who have sacrificed myself, sacrificed everything on earth, for the sake of an ungrateful rascal who deserts me at a moment's notice. And then you ask me if anything is the matter!"

She had risen from her chair and was looking at him with a troubled expression, with the fingers of one hand trembling nervously at her throat. In the storm of words she had caught only one or two; one of them she had caught particularly. "Deserted!" she whispered. "I don't understand you."

"Well, there's not much mystery about it, I should think," he cried brutally. "Brian has gone."

She looked at him in silence for a moment with a sudden fear whitening her face; then a little laugh crept to her lips and trembled there, as though she would cheat herself with the thought that the man was jesting. "But where has he gone?" she asked lightly. "Have you been quarrelling with him again?"

"Quarrel? There has been no question of quarrelling. The fellow has simply sneaked away and left me—I mean us—in the lurch. I suppose you know what it means when rats desert the sinking ship, don't you? Well, we are sinking, and away goes the first rat."

She came swiftly across to him and caught him by the arm and looked into his face. "Do you mean what you say? Where is Brian? I won't believe—oh, I'll go and find him!"

Halfway to the door his voice arrested her. "You may shriek the house down and you won't find him. He's miles away. Egad! when I come to think of it"—Mr. Robert Carlaw scratched his chin and smiled—"he's a pretty cool hand. And I'm not sure that it isn't what his poor old father would have done under the circumstances." He turned over the letter he held in his hands and looked at it. "And the phrasing is beautiful, quite the sort of thing that would grace his biography, you know."

She came back slowly from the door and pointed to the letter. "Is that from Brian?" she asked in a whisper.

"Yes," he replied, still looking at it with a fond smile.

"May I see it? What does he say?"

"Well, I don't think it's wise for you to see it all," replied Mr. Carlaw. "But he sends a message to you which will probably explain matters more clearly than I could do." He turned to the letter and presently came upon the passage he wanted. "Ah, here we are. 'Tell her that I think, under all the circumstances, she will have no great cause to regret me. It is a question which has been discussed on many occasions, and as regards the solution of which I am still in doubt: Whether men of genius should marry? It is, perhaps, a little late in the day to raise the point; but my duty to a world which demands of me my best compels me to gain experience of both sides of every question. I have tried the one with no very definite success, and as I hold that ordinary laws and rules do not govern the man who is beyond all laws, so I feel that I have a perfect right to take my life again into my own hands and to shape it anew. You may tell her, if you think it necessary, that I leave her as free, from my point of view, to contract any other alliance as I shall feel on my part. In a word, I—I don't think, on the whole,'" added Mr. Carlaw, folding up the letter, "that it is necessary for you to hear any more."

The face she turned to him almost frightened him; the change in it in the past few minutes was pitiful. "Then there is something else?" she asked. "Haven't I the right to know that also?"

Mr. Robert Carlaw shrugged his shoulders. "As you will," he said. "To put it in a few words, my son Brian, with that irresponsibility which has ever characterized him, and which I believe characterizes most men of brilliant parts, has taken this sudden journey—well, not unaccompanied. Do you follow me?"

She nodded and her lips moved, although no sound came from them.

"I felt you would," responded Mr. Carlaw. "You see, the lady—for she is a lady, in that sense—has long cherished a great admiration for him and for his work; she is extremely wealthy and I am not —"

He stopped suddenly and made a step toward her, for she had cried out and had closed her eyes and had swayed blindly toward a chair. But she waved him off as he came near her, and sat down quietly, staring straight in front of her.

"You see, the question remains," went on Mr. Robert Carlaw airily, "what are *we* to do? Personally, I am a Bohemian, a wanderer—some might even say a wastrel; a cup of water and a crust will suffice for me, and I am happy. Frankly, I prefer wine and well-cooked dishes, but in an emergency the simpler fare will do for me. But to be reduced, as we are now, to beggary in a moment—well, it's trying to a man's nerves."

"Are we reduced to beggary?" she asked in a low voice, and in a tone which suggested that that was the smallest part of the matter.

"Of course we are; but for that we should probably still have my erring son among us. The money being gone, and the source from which it was derived gone also, my poor boy lost his head. You see, it has been a maxim of mine throughout life to walk in the softest and shadiest places in search of the brightest flowers, and I rather fear that my poor son has caught the trick of the business from me. Finding that the sun has gone out in one quarter, he naturally turns to another where it is still shining, and where fresh flowers nod to him in a new breeze, as it were. Really, I suppose we ought not to blame him."

"And he has left—left me nothing in the world?" she asked. "Not that that matters in the least; but I don't quite understand what you mean."

"Well, my dear child, no man can perform impossible feats; Brian had nothing to leave you, and therefore was helpless in the matter. Oh, I don't think you should blame Brian for that. Having nothing, he could leave nothing; there's the whole thing in a nutshell."

She looked at him with a puzzled expression; the greater sorrow had slipped away for a moment, while these commonplace things were forced upon her. "But Brian told me we were very rich, or at least that we had a good income; he told me he made a lot of money with his books."

"Ah, my child, when a man's in love he'll say or do anything. After all, Brian's desire was a laudable one; his wish was to keep you from sorrow or want. His own income was small, decidedly small; the—remainder came from another source."

"Another source," she echoed. "I seem indeed to have been living in some world from which I am rudely awakened. What was this mysterious income which has gone on so long and seemed inexhaustible, and yet has suddenly ceased? What was it?"

"Well, I suppose, now that the thing is ended, you may as well know everything; it can not matter very much. My nephew, whom I believe you know—of course you know him—has been generous enough, having a large private income of his own far beyond his wants, to provide Brian with—well, with considerable sums—really, I believe, out of an admiration he possessed for Brian's work. That's the whole matter."

"Oh, my God!" She had risen suddenly to her feet and was covering her face with her hands; the man stood still, somewhat amazed, watching her. Presently she took her hands away, and he saw with more amazement that her face was wet. She came toward him quickly, and had a difficulty at first in getting out her words; some of the phrases were broken into by little hysterical laughs. "Of course, all this comes—comes as something of a surprise—almost a shock—to me. You've told it all—all so suddenly that I haven't been able to think of it—to get it clearly. Tell me one thing: how long has this robbery been going on?"

"Robbery! Really, my dear child, you use the wrong term. There has been no question of robbery; all the payments that have been made have been made freely and willingly."

"Yes, I can believe that," she said softly, and covered her face again. "But how long has it been going on?"

"Well, I believe we were in temporary difficulties soon after my young nephew left school. My eccentric sister—generous soul—had placed large sums of money in the boy's hands, while we were actually on the verge of starvation. Comethup came to our rescue; he has been coming to our rescue periodically ever since."

"Then this house, these pictures, the carriage in which I ride, this dress"—she struck herself fiercely on the breast—"all were bought with—with his money? Is that so?"

"Practically, that *is* so. You see, poetry, however good and however conducive to fame, is practically a drug in the market; there is no great income to be made from it. Consequently, other means of support became necessary and were fortunately at hand. I don't suppose Brian's personal income has been a tenth part of what we have been spending. That's the melancholy fact. And now everything has gone from us."

"Then I understand that we—these payments have ceased?" she said slowly.

"Entirely ceased. My poor nephew is no longer in a position to assist us; he has lost his aunt's favour, and like ourselves has been cast upon an unsympathetic world."

"Do you know how that happened?" she asked drearily.

Mr. Robert Carlaw decided under the delicate circumstances to lie. "No," he replied, "I do not know. My worthy sister is, as I have suggested, eccentric, and one never knows from hour to hour what whim or fancy may seize her. No, I am not aware of the circumstances."

"So what I'm to understand is this: that the man who has helped us so long being now himself a beggar, we are reduced to beggary; and Brian"—her voice broke and she turned her head away—"Brian seeks some one else who can support him. Are those the facts?"

"Crudely, those are the facts," replied Mr. Carlaw. "I have been told that it is useless to attempt to govern genius by the ordinary laws to which smaller humanity is subject, and so we must take my misguided son as we find him and make the best of him. From the world's point of view he has, like his unfortunate parent, gone to the devil—but the world in his case will not, I think, judge him hardly. The question that remains for us is, What shall we do?"

"What shall we do?" she echoed, starting up and facing him scornfully. "What shall we do? Hide ourselves—hide ourselves from the sight of every honest man and every honest woman! Creep through desert places where no one can see us; keep out of the sight of those who might glean the faintest idea of our story. What shall we do? You have carried a brave face to the world while your hands were filled with money wrung from a generous-hearted boy, who did it—God help us all!—from a motive you wouldn't understand if you knew it. And you ask me what we shall do! You are an old man, and I a woman suddenly grown old; you have but few years before you—I, unfortunately, may have a long lifetime. Yet, if I could live through all the ages, and could get that best gift that man or woman may claim, the loss of memory, I could not wash out the stain of this thing. That is absolutely unforgivable. That I should have been kept in ignorance of it; that I should have taken the hand of this good fellow in friendship and smiled into his eyes while he fed and clothed me! Have you sunk so low that you can't feel that—can't understand it? Can you stand there and smile at me, knowing that you've stripped from me everything that made my life—my love—my self-respect—my very honour? And then you ask me what I shall do!"

Mr. Robert Carlaw was somewhat abashed. He had expected to meet tears and lamentations; he had not thought that she would look upon the matter in this light, or that she could find it in her heart to address such words to him. "I beg, whatever you do," he said somewhat nervously, "I beg that you will do nothing rash; that you will think seriously of the position and review it with calm deliberation. Frankly, I am in that position that it is impossible for me to assist you; if I obtain the cup of water and the crust to which I have referred I shall consider myself fortunate."

"I want help from no one," she replied. "I only want to go away and hide myself."

"As you will," he replied, and shrugged his shoulders and left her. He reflected, as he went to his own room, on the ingratitude of all created beings, and of women in particular, and decided after much thought that his best plan for his own future self-preservation would be to follow Brian and endeavour to get again into his good graces. He saw with some penetration that Brian was the only man now left who had any money at his command.

She sat for a long time after he had left her, trying to get the whole terrible business into an ordinary compass in order that she might understand it. It was a thing so gigantic and so terrible and so unexpected that it was difficult for her to realize it completely. All that she had ever hoped and prayed for—all her world, in fact—had been swept away in an instant; she wanted, as she had said, to go and hide herself and strive to forget it. Left alone with all her dreams shattered, with the man in whom her faith had been centred standing before her in a mental picture, debased and fallen and degraded, she dared not look upon the world—scarcely dared to think about the matter.

It was quite late in the evening when, taking nothing with her, and glancing to right and left like a guilty thing that fears to be seen, she crept out of the house and away into the streets. In the hours that had passed since she had heard the story she had prayed once or twice for death; had hoped that some sudden madness might come upon her which should cut off the years as by a magician's knife, and leave her, a little lonely child again, in the garden of her father's house. And with that prayer came a new thought—a sudden wish to see the place again.

It was impossible that her mind could be left entirely blank or her heart quite vacant; with everything that she had believed in and trusted stripped away from her, her thoughts went back to Comethup, and raised him a silent, splendid figure blessing and helping her through all these years during which she had flouted him and set him aside. Beside that splendid figure the man she had dreamed she loved faded into nothingness; she felt that, if only for an hour, she must get back to the old place, where she had broken his heart and left him; must get back, if only to cry her own heart out.

She had a little money with her, and was fortunate in catching the last train, which would take her to within a few miles of the old town. Fatigue meant nothing to her; she alighted at Deal and set out to walk, hurrying along the road and whispering his name as she ran, and crying incoherently to him to forgive her.

The town was dark and silent when she reached it. She was in a mood to sit down and cry—half from weariness, half from delight at being in the old familiar streets again. She hastened on toward the garden and went in, swaying a little from weakness as she passed over the fallen gate and up the dreary avenue. There, under the balcony where she had parted from him, she stood still, looking up at the deserted house and weeping bitterly. And suddenly from among the shadows of the trees there stole out the figure of a man.

He came forward slowly with his arm stretched out; as the moonlight fell upon his face she saw that it was the old shoemaker, Medmer Theed, and that he was smiling upon her. The sight of one friendly face in that dark and desolate garden struck a chord in her that had not been wakened before; she caught his hands and burst into a sudden passion of tears.

The old man drew her gently to his breast, and laid her head there and whispered soothingly to her. "My child, my baby!" he said. "They shall not harm you. I knew you would come back; I have waited here so long—so long! Yet the nights have been full of dreams of you; the wind has whispered your name among the trees; the birds seeking their nests have cried to me, 'She will come back; when all else desert her, she will come back to you.' And see, they were right, and all the waiting is ended. Just as I dreamed that she came back to me—she who died—so the child I loved has returned, and all my watching is over."

"Take me away! Take me away, and hide me," she cried, clinging to him.

"Yes, yes, they shall not find you, child. The dreams have come true at last, or almost true. They shall not find you; we will hide you safely in the old place you knew as a child, and I will watch over you. Come—they shall not find you."

Unresisting, she submitted to be half led, half carried from the garden and along the deserted streets to the old man's house. There, with his arm still fast about her, he unlocked the door and led her in and took her to an inner room; with the gentleness of a woman he laid her down there and covered her up. In a few moments, from sheer weariness, she was fast asleep.

It happened that night that Captain Garraway-Kyle, feeling restless and lonely, had thrown his old-fashioned military cloak about him and had gone for a long walk. Coming back very late he paused for a moment near the old archway through which the shop of the shoemaker was reached, and after a moment's hesitation passed through and stopped before the shop. The captain was a man of few friends, and had been in the habit, since his first conversation with old Medmer Theed, of going to the place sometimes in the evening for the sake of company. On this occasion, feeling for some indefinite reason more lonely even than usual, and seeing a light gleaming through the shutters, he knocked softly at the door. In a moment it was opened, and he saw the old man, bearing a candle, standing within the doorway. The captain civilly wished him good-evening and made as if to enter in the ordinary way. For the moment, however, the old shoemaker barred his entrance; then, stepping aside, with a grunt, he somewhat churlishly admitted him.

"It's very late, I'm afraid," said the captain, "but I saw a light, and guessed you were not in bed. Are you alone?"

"Of course," replied Theed. "What did you expect? Am I not always alone?"

"Why, of course," replied the captain somewhat surprised at his tone. "Like yourself, I am a lonely man, and am glad sometimes to find a fellow-creature to whom I can talk." He had entered the little low-roofed shop by this time and had seated himself upon a bench. "Why, it's quite cold to-night, isn't it?" he added.

He had spoken in his usual quick, rather highly pitched voice, and suddenly the shoemaker raised a warning forefinger, and glanced toward the door at the back of the shop. "Hush!" he whispered softly.

The captain looked at him in amazement. "I—I'm very sorry," he said, lowering his voice. "I had no idea that there was any one in here."

"Yes, sleeping," whispered the old man eagerly. "When the winds sang of her in the trees, and the trees bent to each other to whisper of her coming, she came suddenly to me in the old place where I had waited so long; she came weeping, as I had dreamed she would come, and crying to me to take her away and hide her. And so I brought her here, that none may find her."

"I don't understand," said the captain in a startled whisper. "Who is it?"

"She came to me as a little child; was sent to me by God for my comfort. Often and often she has sat where you sit now while I worked, and has made the dreams I dreamed about her more real than my waking life. But they shall not find her—they shall not find her."

"Linda!" whispered the captain, and caught the other's arm. "What brings her here; what is the meaning of it?"

"I do not know; I have not asked," replied the shoemaker. "I know only that she came weeping, as I had dreamed she would come; weeping as that other child who grew to be a woman must have wept, as all women are born to weep. But she is safe now; they shall not find her again."

"Let me see her," whispered the captain, rising from the bench on which he sat and approaching the door of the inner room. "Remember, I loved her too; let me see her."

For a moment old Medmer Theed stood jealously before the door; then drew aside somewhat reluctantly, and pushed it open and signed to the captain to follow him. Treading cautiously, they went in and stood beside the little rough bed on which she lay. She was still sleeping soundly, and as the captain bent over her he saw that there were traces of tears still on her face. After a few moments they came out again into the shop.

The captain felt that nothing could be done that night; he knew nothing of what story she had to tell or of what had happened. Perplexed and troubled, he bade the old shoemaker good-night, and set off for his cottage. Medmer Theed barred the door and then, after glancing in again for a moment to see that his charge was safely sleeping, laid himself down across the threshold of the room and rested there all night, although he scarcely slept at all. Every slightest noise in the street seemed to his excited imagination the sound of pursuit, and he half sprang up more than once, watchful and eager to defend her. When day came at last he did not unfasten the shop as usual, but left the shutters still closed, so that the only lights in the place were two long streams of sunlight which poured through certain round holes in them. His work was left untouched, and he hovered about between the inner room and the shop, pressing food upon Linda and treating her in every way with more than a woman's tenderness.

Linda for her part sat throughout the day with her chin propped in her palms, thinking. How much she reviewed in those hours it would be impossible to say; in what new and better light she saw many events she had not fully understood before. Everything had been torn from her; she had to start her life again, to build up new hopes and new dreams and new beliefs; but she could not do that yet. Years seemed to have passed since the previous day; she had for the first time in her life taken great strides within a few hours—been shaken suddenly to an understanding of what her life had been as she had never understood it at any other time.

The captain came down to the shop during the day, but finding it closed he hesitated to knock and went away again. In truth, the captain was puzzled what to do: to leave her alone with the strange old creature Medmer Theed, to leave her to face and fight against the desperate trouble which had driven her there, seemed impossible; and yet as the captain had never seen her since the day of her flight with Brian, he hesitated now to intrude upon her sorrow. However, when night again came on, he set out for the shoemaker's shop, determined at least to gain some tidings of her or to learn that she was well.

He had a curious feeling as he walked along that some one was following him, even trying, in a half-hesitating fashion, to overtake him. As he turned in at the old archway the one who followed had evidently made up his mind, for the steps drew nearer, and before the captain could turn his head a hand was laid on his shoulder. He stopped and looked round, and recognized by the dim light of the lamp above them the features of Mr. Robert Carlaw.

"Pray pardon me," said that gentleman in a curiously subdued tone. "I have taken the liberty of following you for some distance; I was not quite sure as to your identity, and one does not care to accost a stranger in the street and meet with a rebuff."

"You wish to see me?" asked the captain coldly.

"My dear sir," replied the other, "I am in such a state of mind at the present moment that I really don't know what I am doing or what I am saying. I have a dim notion that duty has brought me here, and the thought of duty has always been paramount with me. Sir"—he struck an attitude and slapped himself with one hand on the breast—"I am in a state verging on distraction!"

The captain looked at him critically; he almost thought for a moment that the man had been drinking. But he was still more astonished when he caught the gleam of tears in his faded eyes. "I fear you are in trouble," said the captain gently.

"Trouble!" echoed the other. "I want a new word to describe my feelings, an entirely new word. My son could have found the word or the phrase, and my son is dead!"

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE PLEADING OF THE CAPTAIN.

For a moment or two the captain stared at Robert Carlaw in astonishment. A hundred thoughts went dancing through his brain; he wondered if the death of Brian might have something to do with Linda's flight back to the old place. While he was framing some question in his mind Mr. Carlaw broke out into a tempestuous explanation.

"Cut off—cut off—in what the world would term the midst of his sin; robbed of life in the very flower of his manhood and his strength! Yet what a life—and ye gods!—what a death! Even in

that he was splendid; even in that he fills the public eye. It was the very death that the public would expect him to die; they'll catch their breath when they read of it. Drowned—drowned on a moonlight night and with his arms about a woman! Drowned—and with twenty thousand a year in his arms! It's magnificent!"

He was weeping still, but his face literally shone with the joy and pride of the thought; he dashed the tears away, and with the same gesture waved his arms in triumph toward the sky.

"But when did this happen?" asked the captain. "And who was the woman?"

"It was all so like him," exclaimed Mr. Robert Carlaw, scarcely heeding the other's question. "He worked on impulse; he lived his life on impulse; he died on impulse. This last thing alone should make him immortal. What other man would have had the courage? What other man would have had the frank and splendid audacity? To desert his wife when he felt that she was no longer what he needed; to——"

"So he deserted her, did he?" said the captain slowly.

"Yes; such minds do not stick at any conventional things. He deserted her; he fled with another. The other was rich and—so I understand—beautiful. She had a yacht waiting to carry her and her poet away—think of the romance of it, think of the romance of it! They reached the yacht, it appears, and set sail for their paradise under a moonlit sky. Imagine the scene! Then, in the midst of it all comes grim Fate in the shape of a lumbering coasting steamer and cuts them in two. A survivor has already declared that he saw Brian Carlaw and the woman go down locked in each other's arms. My poor boy—he has carried himself well before the world to the last!"

"Do you know," asked the captain with some sternness, "that his wife is here, within a few yards of us?"

"I was not aware of it," replied Mr. Carlaw, glancing about him. "My sole reason for coming here—to this place of his birth—and at so early a moment is because I feel that something should be done for him; that they should understand the loss they and the world have sustained, and should fitly mark their grief. From whom could the news come so appropriately as from the father who loved him and sacrificed so much for him? That is my real errand. But you say that she is here?"

"Yes," replied the captain; "she came here yesterday—I suppose when she learned that he had deserted her. She must be told of this."

"Yes, I suppose she must," replied Mr. Carlaw hurriedly. "Of course, she takes no real or great place in this sorrowful business; my son stands alone, and the name of the lady with whom he died will naturally and inevitably be linked with his. A few will be shocked; to the majority, I trust, the position will appear appropriate. Personally, I am sorry for the wife—but she does not touch the story."

"Thank God for that!" muttered the captain to himself. Aloud he said, "I must tell her, and must see what is to be done for her, poor child!"

"Ah, I remember you as a man of a tender nature, my dear captain," said Mr. Robert Carlaw, gazing at the sky. "For the present I have other work on hand; it happens, on occasion, that the dead are more important than the living. And in the glory of my dead son, I—his unfortunate father—may chance to cut a figure at last." He started to whistle as he turned away, but remembered himself in time, and walked with a drooping head and a less jaunty step than usual. The captain looked after him for a moment and then went toward the shoemaker's shop. He knocked, and after some little delay was admitted by old Theed. The captain stepped into the shop and jerked his head in the direction of the inner room. "Is she sleeping?" he asked.

The old man nodded. "All day long," he said, "she has sat like one in a dream, scarcely seeing me; a little time since she fell asleep, but even now her dreams are troubled and she cries out strange things."

The captain paced up and down the little shop nervously for a minute or two and then turned to the shoemaker. "I should like to see her," he said. "I have something to say that must be told her at once—something that should be told by a friend, lest she should hear it from any other lips. I should like to see her."

Medmer Theed looked at him keenly; came nearer and laid a hand on his arm. "Are they seeking her?" he asked in a whisper. "Will they trouble her again?"

The captain looked at him, doubtful what to say or how much to leave unsaid. "The man who has troubled her so long," he replied at last, "is dead, and will trouble her no more. But she must be told."

There were a dignity and a firmness in his tones which mastered the more ignorant man; without a word he pushed open the inner door and motioned to the captain to enter. As the captain stepped through, the old shoemaker would have followed, but the captain gently signed to him to keep back, and closed the door and was left in the room alone with Linda. She was still sleeping, and he set the light he carried on a little table near the bed, and quite simply and noiselessly went upon his knees and bowed his head in his hands and muttered a little prayer to himself.

"God of the little children," he breathed, "who hast sent back to me this child whom I loved in my old age, teach me, in thy infinite mercy, how best to tell her, out of a heart that loves her, what her sorrow is; teach me how best to comfort her."

He rose from his knees and seated himself beside the bed, and laid a lean old hand on the white one which lay near it. She stirred softly in her sleep and opened her eyes and looked at him—

looked at him for some moments without recognition. Then, slowly and without turning her gaze from him, she drew nearer until she had crept quite into his arms, until her face was hidden on his breast. And so for a long time they remained in silence.

"Little one," he said at last, "you have not forgotten your old friend, you have not forgotten the old days. A long, long time has passed between, but in your hour of need you have crept back quite naturally to us to find a haven here. There, don't tremble; nothing shall harm you; nothing shall come near you. You were a child when I knew you before; dream that you are a child again."

She clung to him, weeping. "Oh, that I might!" she whispered. "If I might go back and see with the clearer eyes I have now; if I might know what I know now and make atonement!"

"The time must come when we all cry that, child," he said. "The time must surely come when the bravest and the best of us would be glad if we might begin again, seeing the way before us with clearer eyes. Listen: are you strong enough lying here in your old friend's arms—are you strong enough to hear what I shall say to you?"

She looked up at him wonderingly and grasped his hand more closely, but he dared not look at her.

"There was a man whom you loved, a man you called husband—ah, don't shudder; don't weep like that, or you'll break my heart, child! Because you loved him he holds a better place in my thoughts than he could ever otherwise have done; because you loved him I must bear him kindly in my remembrance."

"Oh, if I might atone, if I might atone!" she whispered, and hid her face again.

The captain did not understand; he went on in the same gentle tones: "There comes a time for every man and every woman when all blame and all praise are as nothing to them, and pass them over; when their little lives fade out and are judged by the standard of something we do not understand; a time when they pass beyond our censure and we can afford to think lightly of their mistakes. 'Linda, do you understand?"

She looked up at him; her brows wrinkled a little as she watched his face, but she did not speak.

"He left you without thinking what might happen, careless of what sorrow the world held for you. But you can afford to forgive that now; in time you may even learn to forget it. Your prayers or your tears can not reach him any more."

"I understand," she whispered. "You mean that he—he is dead?"

"Yes. He is dead. He died quite suddenly and painlessly."

She was silent for a long time; he had expected that she would cry out—had fully anticipated a painful scene; but this apathy was more disconcerting than anything could have been. After a time, without looking up at him, she asked softly: "And Comethup? What of Comethup?"

"He is well, I believe," said the captain, trying to hide his astonishment. "I have not heard from him for some time." The worthy gentleman was at a loss to understand the strangeness of her demeanour; he cast about in his mind for a clue to guide him, but could find none.

"You know that he has left his home—that he has been cast out into the world?" she asked.

The captain forgot everything in his new astonishment. "What do you mean?" he asked. "I had heard nothing about this. I don't understand."

"Not now—not now," she whispered. "Some other time you will know all about it and will judge me as you should. Leave me alone now; I want to think. Kiss me"—she turned up her face to his—"and don't think hardly of me, dear old friend, if you can help it."

He kissed her and softly patted her cheek, lingered a moment, and then, as he saw her lying with closed eyes, stole out of the room, shutting the door behind him. With scarcely a word to Medmer Theed he went out of the shop and into the street, and walked back to his own place. There, pacing up and down the little parlour, he turned over many things in his mind, and wondered again and again in a vague fashion what he should do; above all things, what he should do in regard to 'Linda.

To leave her with the old shoemaker was obviously out of the question, and yet what else was to be done? The captain felt here at once the helplessness of his mere manhood; saw that, whatever delicacy he might possess, it was quite unequal to such an occasion as this. "It wants a woman," muttered the captain to himself; and so started on a new train of thought.

The result of that particular train of thought was that the captain, after passing a sleepless night, set off early the next morning for London, and presented himself within a few hours at the door of Miss Charlotte Carlaw's house. He sent up his card and was at once admitted and taken into the old woman's presence. She turned her head toward him as he entered the room, and smiled a welcome and held out her hand. The captain took the hand in his courtly fashion and hoped that she was well.

"Oh, in better health than I ought to be, I've no doubt," replied the old woman. "And what brings you to town? Have you come like all the rest to upbraid me for my harshness—to cry out his virtues to me? have you come for that? Because, if you have, you will be wiser to save your breath and say nothing."

"Let me begin by saying that I know nothing of the matter," replied the captain, "and that that is not my errand. I have certainly learned in an accidental manner that Comethup no longer lives here; but I have heard so much within the past few days that my poor old brain is in a whirl, and I



can think of nothing coherently."

"Well, while you collect your thoughts," replied Miss Carlaw, "I can tell you in a few words what has happened. You were fond of the boy just as I was; believed in him, I think, just as I did—which shows we were both fools in that sense at least. In a word, he has been steadily—or unsteadily—spending my money for years past in riotous living—ever since he was a boy, in fact; and now, to crown it all, has borrowed a large sum of money on the understanding that he is my heir and can pay it back when I am dead. When I'm dead—you hear that? That's the bitterest part of all; I'd have forgiven anything but that."

"There's been some horrible blunder," said the captain, shaking his head sturdily. "I know Comethup, have seen him grow up since he was a little child, and I can't believe that it's possible. There's some mistake."

"I wish I could think so," replied Miss Carlaw. "But there's no doubt about it; he has admitted it. However, we won't talk about it any more; I swore never to talk about it again. What do you want with me?"

"Stay a moment," urged the captain. "Won't you tell me what has become of him or where he is?"

"I don't know," she replied, turning away. "He's done with so far as I am concerned; in fact, he never really lived. We'll speak of him no more, please." Then in a moment she lost that gentler tone and swung round upon him fiercely. "In God's name, man, have some mercy! If my face tells you nothing of what I have suffered, the agony of loneliness that has been mine during these past weeks, then at least let my lips tell you. I always liked you; I believe you to be a good and honourable gentleman. Perhaps I can say to you what I might not to another. He has spoiled my life, old though I am, just as he has spoiled his own; can't you see that I couldn't take him to my heart again? He refused all explanations of what had been done with the money; stubbornly refused to say a word about it.—There, let's have done with it. Tell me what you came here for."

The captain saw that it was useless to pursue the subject; he sighed and turned to that newer matter. "I must speak of him again for a moment, although indirectly. Do you remember a most unhappy occasion, when you came to visit me in the hope of meeting a girl to whom the boy was to be married?"

"Yes, I remember. What of it?"

"Whatever his after sins may have been, he behaved, as regards that matter, with a delicacy and a consideration for the woman who had betrayed him which was, to my simple thought, wonderful. Even if, as you say, he is worthless, he had that one merit of loving her sincerely and strongly through everything; of that I am convinced. She fled with his cousin Brian and they were married. At the present moment she is destitute."

The captain paused and looked at her intently to see the effect of his words; she merely nodded to him to proceed.

"Her husband—a worthless fellow, I fear—appears to have deserted her for another woman, and within a few hours of his desertion to have been drowned at sea. She has come back to her old home and is living under the protection of a strange old creature, a shoemaker, who loved her and cared for her when she was a little lonely child. Beyond that man and myself she hasn't a friend in the world; there is no one to whom she can turn. She is hallowed forever in my sight because poor Comethup loved her; she is set apart from all other women on that account. She is very young and, as I have said, helpless and hopeless. Dear old friend"—the captain made a movement toward her—"I want you to help me."

Miss Charlotte Carlaw, whose face was working strangely, turned her head away from him and beat one foot restlessly on the floor. "Why should I do that?" she asked at last in a low voice.

"Because you're a woman," replied the captain eagerly; "because—deny it if you will—you can't shut out the thought of this boy we both love from your heart; because this girl in her loneliness may appeal to you in your loneliness, may give in time a kinder thought of him. You must not try to persuade me that you are so hard as you would have me believe. If you will not let me plead for the boy himself, let me plead for the woman he loved and lost—the woman who is friendless."

She was silent for a long time and presently sat down in her old attitude with her hands resting on her stick and her forehead on her hands. And the captain watched her.

"You are a good man," she said at last, without raising her head. "There's never a day, never an hour when I do not think of him, and yet I can not call him back to me. But if you think—and you know so much better than I can hope to do—that it would be right and just for me to take this girl—that it would be better for her and better for me—then I'll do it. And don't boast of your feelings, sir," she added, raising her head with something of a return of her old manner, "because I have my feelings too; perhaps I'll even take her more warmly to my heart because he loved her. Lord! captain, what a blundering set of people we all are from the time we blunder into life till the time we blunder into the grave! I suppose I can leave all the arrangements in your hands; I seem somehow to have lost something of my old sense of power, something of my old strength lately; I want some one on whom I can rely. You will tell me what to do, won't you?"

"If I might suggest," said the captain, "I think the best thing for you to do would be to come down to her; to see her and take her away with you. Will you do that?"

"I will do whatever you think best," she replied. And so the matter was settled.

The captain felt that the hardest part of his mission had yet to be performed; but he went home

that very night and presented himself without delay before 'Linda. To his surprise, however, he found that she was perfectly passive, and willing to fall in with any suggestions he made. He told her that this old lady was quite blind and very lonely; that she had loved Comethup very dearly; that she wanted the girl's companionship and help. At the same time the captain delicately suggested that it would be wiser for 'Linda to say nothing about Comethup in any way; he hinted that the point was a sore one with Miss Carlaw. 'Linda was silent for some time, and then she looked up at him quietly.

"I have done so much harm in my life," she said, "although I hoped only to do good! If you think—if you really think that I may do any good—that I may make any atonement—I will do as you wish. I have trodden my own wilful path so long, I will tread any other you point out to me."

"I think this is best," said the captain gently.

Miss Charlotte Carlaw came down the next day and the captain conducted her to Medmer Theed's shop. The carriage in which she had arrived was left standing in the street outside the old archway, and the captain, without a word, guided her through the shop and opened the inner door and led her through. Then he came out and closed the door, and left the two women alone. He had previously prepared the shoemaker for what was to happen, and the old man had accepted it without question and appeared satisfied that she should go. As the captain stood waiting in the little shop, Medmer Theed sat on his bench, hammering softly at the leather, as of old.

In the room within Miss Charlotte Carlaw had paused for a moment with her hands stretched out gropingly. 'Linda came timidly toward her. "Where are you, child?" asked the old woman; and then their hands met and they drew close together. Perhaps it was the touch of a woman's hand that 'Linda needed just then; she suddenly found herself drawing close to the strange old figure, and for the first time her tears began to flow.

"Let's make a new beginning, child," said Miss Carlaw softly. "And, for both our sakes, will you promise me never to speak of what is past and ended, never to refer to any one we both knew? Will you promise that?"

"Yes, I promise," whispered the girl.

They came out together presently into the shop; the captain stood waiting to conduct them to the carriage. Medmer Theed still hammered softly on his leather. The girl went up to the shoemaker and put an arm about his neck and whispered his name; he looked up at her with a vacant expression, and she kissed him and murmured some broken words of thanks. He nodded his head slowly and went on with his work. He was still hammering when the carriage drove away, the captain standing bareheaded in the street, looking after them.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### MEDMER MELTS A SILVER SPOON.

It was a clear, crisp November evening, with a touch of frost in the air, and the captain sat in his little parlour before a tiny fire, staring into the coals. Behind him on the table a candle, burning in a tall, old-fashioned candle-stick, threw a giant round-shouldered shadow of the captain on the wall and part of the ceiling of the room. Two years had gone by since the captain stood outside Medmer Theed's shop and watched the carriage roll away—two years during which he had aged a little more, and had gone but little beyond the confines of his garden.

To-night he sat and stared into the coals and thought a little wistfully of the past, and wondered a little what had become of the figures that had acted out their lives in close contact with his—some of them, indeed, in that very room. He thought of the tiny child hugging a puppy in its arms, standing outside his gate looking up at him with big, frightened eyes; remembered sunny Sunday mornings when that child had sat beside him in the big pew in church. He sighed at last, and moved restlessly in his chair and turned his head to look round the familiar room.

There was a sudden sound of hesitating steps upon the gravel outside, and then a cautious lifting of the latch. The captain twisted in his chair and rose to his feet, picked up the candle from the table, and opened the door of the room. In the shadows of the little hallway he saw a man standing.

"Who's there?" cried the captain, raising the light above his head.

The man came forward slowly until he stood within a yard of the light and raised his head. The captain staggered back a step into the room.

"Forgive me," said the man huskily. "I have wandered outside this old place for an hour, fearing to come in, but now—I suppose you don't care to—to take my hand?"

The captain had put down the candle hurriedly, and had the man by both hands and was dragging him in a feeble, excited fashion into the room. "Comethup—my boy—my boy!" he said, over and over again.

He got his visitor into a chair near the fire and began to chafe his half-frozen fingers and to put back the long hair from his face as though he had been tending a child. And while he did so

Comethup looked steadily and smilingly at him, and the little captain smiled back at Comethup.

"This is very good of you, sir," said Comethup at last, in something of the old boyish voice. "I might have known you wouldn't turn from me, however bad you might think I had been. And isn't it good just to get back to the old room again? I've been so happy in this old room! What a little chap I was when I first came to you! Do you remember? And what a lot has happened since then—what a lot has happened!"

"Where have you been all this time, boy?" asked the captain, still chafing the other's fingers. "Why have you never been near me?"

Comethup shook his head and smiled drearily. "No, I couldn't do that," he said. "I've had something of a fight for it, you know, with no weapons to fight with. Look at me"—he indicated his shabby, travel-stained dress by a gesture—"look at me; I'm little better than a tramp, you know. Why—God bless your simple heart, sir—I'm even in hiding."

"In hiding?" echoed the captain.

"Yes. You know I borrowed a lot of money, and told the people from whom I borrowed it that I was my aunt's heir. Well, it turned out I wasn't; they haven't been able to get their money back, and I haven't been able to pay the interest. There are writs out against me, I believe, and all sorts of things. Oh, what a muddle it's been, every bit of it!"

"But what are you going to do?" asked the captain.

"Well, if you'll let me, I'd like to rest here just for to-night; and to-morrow, before the sun is up, I'll be far away again. I'm going abroad, going to try and make a fresh start."

"Is there no other way?" asked the captain.

"None. I've got to live somehow, and I must start in a new world, with a clean slate. But don't let us talk any more about myself; tell me all that has happened in this long time. Poor Brian is dead, I understand."

"Yes, he's dead," replied the captain slowly, "and is a greater man in death than he was in life. Do you know that they've raised a statue to him in this town, the place of his birth?"

"Yes, I heard of that," replied Comethup. "I saw the statue only this evening. It's curious that they should have stuck it up on the old walls where we used to play together when we were boys, isn't it? It was half dark when I saw it, but it looks very fine, and they've caught his attitude to the life."

"Yes, it's quite like him," replied the captain. "They made a great fuss of it at the time; it was raised by public subscription. He seems to have had a great many admirers."

"Tell me of the others," said Comethup. "What of—of 'Linda; is she well?"

"Yes, very well. She has been living since her husband's death with Miss Carlaw, your aunt; so you understand she wants for nothing."

"Thank God for that!" said Comethup fervently. "You've taken quite a load off my mind. I've thought of her a thousand times and feared that she might be in want and that I might not be able to help her. And my aunt, does she—does she still think badly of me?"

"I'm afraid so," said the captain.

"Well, I gave her every reason to do so. There—don't ask me anything about it, because I can't tell even you; there are some things, you know, that one has to keep quite to one's self. It's good to know that *you* don't think so very badly of me; that you are willing to take me by the hand again just as though all this had never happened." He got up from his chair and laid his hand on the captain's shoulder. "If you'll let me sleep in the little room in which I slept as a child I'll be grateful to you. And let us say good-bye here for the last time. Long before you're awake in the morning, old friend, I shall be gone. And I pray you, for the sake of the love you had for me so long ago, don't think of me as you see me to-night—poor and broken and an outcast; but remember only the child you played with years and years ago; remember only the boy you were proud of when you used to come and see me at school. Will you do that?"

"Boy or man, it makes no difference," said the captain; "I can only think of you as I have thought of you always—as one who is nearer to my heart than any I have met on my journey through life."

Before he could be prevented Comethup had caught the old man's hands and had carried them swiftly to his lips. "Thank you," he whispered; "God bless you! I can go now with a lighter heart than I have carried for a long time. Good-bye, old friend, good-bye!"

They gripped hands once more, and Comethup, crying lightly that he knew the way, stumbled out of the room and went swiftly upstairs, leaving the captain standing alone.

The captain sat down and tried to resume his thoughts. But everything seemed to have been tumbled about and thrust into fresh directions by the arrival of Comethup. After a little time the old man got up and reached down his heavy cloak and put on his hat and went softly out. The night was fine; only the slow chiming of the hour from the church clock struck upon his ears. He walked through the garden and out into the deserted streets.

Going along with bent head, pondering deeply, he was brought to a sudden recollection of his surroundings by hearing some one falter his name; he looked up with a start and saw 'Linda before him. So surprising had been the coming of the other visitor that he was scarcely startled to see her suddenly there before him; he did not even ask her the reason for her presence.

"I was coming to see you," she whispered as she held his hand. "I have been trying to make up my mind to come to you all the afternoon."

"Are you here alone?" he asked.

"Yes, quite alone. We are going abroad to-morrow, and I craved permission to come down to the old place once again. We may not be returning for years. I wanted—oh, can't you understand?—I wanted just to creep back here again for an hour or two; to visit the old scenes, perhaps even to dream some of the old dreams. And so I took a little room at the inn here, where no one seems to remember me, and I am going away quite early in the morning. Miss Carlaw is coming down to Deal to-morrow and I am to drive from here to meet her, and from there we start on our travels. But I felt I could not go away from the old place without seeing my old friend."

The captain thought of the man who slept at his cottage, and decided at once that 'Linda must be kept away from there. "I am afraid," he said, "that we shall have to say our farewells here. It is very late, and when a lady"—he threw a little light laughter into his tones—"when a lady is staying at an inn she must keep regular hours. I'm glad, for your sake, that you are going abroad. Come, let me take you back again."

She seemed a little surprised at his apparent coldness, but took the arm he offered and walked on with him. Very little was said, but near the door of the inn she stopped for a moment, with both hands clasped on his arm, and looked away past him down the street. When at last she spoke her voice was very soft and tender, and trembled a little.

"It may be a long, long time before I see you again, dear old friend, and as this is to be our farewell there is something—something I would like to say to you. I seem again to-night to be a little child, just as I was in those old days when you put your cloak about me and hushed my weeping in your arms. I have given you, I fear, cause to think badly of me. Will you think better of me if I tell you that I would be glad to be a child again, weeping in the rain, if only I might do some of the things I have tried to do so much better? Something else I must say before I leave you. There was a man—a dear, good fellow—who loved me; I have thought of him—oh, believe me—with tears, many and many a night when I have lain awake. I fear there is no heaven I can reach; I am afraid that every gate of any paradise that might be mine will be closed against me because I deserted him when he most needed me. Even you—good, kind friend that you are—even you don't know everything. There is an image of stone over there"—she flung out her arm with a passionate gesture—"I saw it this afternoon, with its smiling face raised to the sky; I would that my hands were strong enough to tear it down! It mocks me where it stands—mocks the pain that rages in my heart. If you should ever see the man who loved me—the better man—will you tell him from me, now that it is too late, that I learned to love him with all my heart and soul; that I would that I might crawl to his feet and kiss them, and tell him so. Will you tell him that?"

"If I see him," said the little captain, "I will tell him."

She kissed him hurriedly and hugged him in the old, passionate, childish fashion, and ran into the inn. He waited for a few moments and then turned away. He was too upset by the events of the strange night to care to go back to his own cottage; more than all, he feared, in a vague fashion, to meet Comethup. With his hands clasped behind him under his cloak he walked on, scarcely knowing where he went, and found himself presently turning in under the archway which led to the shoemaker's shop. He dared not think, dared not bring himself to the realization of the fact, that these two people were in the same town, almost within cry of each other, this night. He wanted to get away from the thought of it; wanted desperately to talk to some one. He saw a light gleaming through the shutters of Medmer Theed's shop, and after hesitating for a moment knocked at the door.

He heard the bolt drawn inside, and the door was cautiously opened and the old man appeared, looking out at him. He was dressed only in his shirt and trousers, and with his unkempt gray hair tossed about his head looked a stranger, wilder figure even than usual. Seeing the captain, he held the door wider open and beckoned to his visitor to enter.

"Come in, come in," he said in a mysterious whisper, "but let no one else come near." He had closed the door by this time and shot the bolt. "You, who love her, have a right to be here; for we work together, you and I, for love of her, don't we?"

"Of course," said the captain, looking at him a little uneasily and wondering what he meant. "You are at work late to-night," he added.

"Yes, very late, and with strange work." He suddenly caught the captain by the arm and drew nearer to him. "Hush! Do you know that *he* has come back?"

"I don't understand you," said the captain. "Who has come back?"

"The man who wronged her, the man they thought was dead. If they had wanted to keep him dead why did they thrust him up there for all men to see? why did they put him there against the sky to laugh at her and mock her and torture her afresh? Listen, and I'll tell you something. Just as I watched for her, night after night, through storm and rain and starlight, till she came to me, so I have watched for him, night after night, through storm and rain, till he has come back too. I tell you they can not kill him; he is here to work harm to her still, to wring fresh tears from her. At night, when all men sleep, he comes down and prowls round here searching for her, waiting for her. I've seen him."

The captain shook his hand off half angrily, half fearfully. "What madness is this?" he cried. "The man is dead and can trouble her no more; that is but an image of stone, the work of men's hands. The man lies in his grave, miles away from here."

Medmer Theed shook his head obstinately and laughed. "You don't know," he said, "you don't know. My dreams have taught me more than you could learn. Dead or not, I tell you that his spirit has come back, and waits there at night to work fresh evil to her. And that's where my dreams and my love for her shall help me."

He laid his hand again on the captain's arm and drew him into the inner room. A bright fire burned in the little grate, and thrust into the very heart of it was a small crucible; the captain, drawing nearer, saw that the handle of an old-fashioned spoon projected above the edge of it.

"Why, what are you doing?" he asked.

The shoemaker chuckled and softly stirred the fire. "There is but one way to kill a spirit," he whispered, looking up at his companion. "Lead or iron or steel won't do; it wants finer stuff. Silver's the stuff. You are a man of war, and might bring a regiment against him in vain; but this little silver bullet, if it can but reach him, will put an end to his mischief forever. See"—he pulled open a drawer in a little table and took out an old-fashioned, heavy-barrelled pistol and a small instrument, shaped almost like a pair of pincers, for moulding bullets—"I am all prepared. The silver is good, the pistol aims truly. He shall not trouble her any more."

The captain, glancing at him in perplexity, saw in his eyes a madness of determination he had not seen in any face before; he understood that whatever wild thought was in the old man's brain it would be useless to attempt to combat it. After lingering for some minutes, during which time the little mass of silver in the bottom of the crucible gradually increased in bulk, he bade the old man good-night, and went out. As he looked back from the doorway he saw the wild old figure still bending over the fire, laughing softly and muttering incoherent things.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### COMETHUP LEARNS THE TRUTH.

Quite early in the morning, almost before the gray dawn had come stealing across the sky, Linda left the inn and set out swiftly for the outer walls of the town. Some of the old glamour of the romantic personality of the dead man was still upon her, some faint pride in him still remained. She wanted to see that statue which had been raised to him, and of which she had caught a glimpse as she drove into the town on the previous day; she wanted to see it when no one else was there, to carry away in her memory the thought of him as he stood thus and looked in all men's eyes, and so perhaps to wipe away the memory of the poorer, meaner thing she knew him to have been.

A white, heavy mist was blowing across the marshy lands from the sea; as she came up upon the grass-grown old walls the mists were floating and flowing about the statue, hiding and showing it by turns. She went close and looked up at it for a long time.

The sculptor had been happy in striking the characteristic attitude of the man. The figure stood with one hand lightly planted on the hip and the other hanging by the side; the head was thrown back and the face, with the old daring, wilful smile upon it, turned toward the sky. It was strange to see him there, high above her, on the very spot where they had wandered and played together as children. She turned away at last and began slowly to retrace her steps, looking back once or twice at the silent figure above her.

Suddenly she heard quick steps behind her and, turning sharply, saw the figure of a man looming out of the mist. The man came nearer with a half-stealthy movement that frightened her. She was on the point of crying out, and had stopped, scarcely knowing what to do, when the man overtook her in a stride or two, and peered into her face and cried her name. With a great feeling of relief she put out her hand to him.

"Old Medmer Theed!" she exclaimed. "Dear old friend, you startled me for a moment; I could not distinguish you in this mist."

He paid no heed to what she said; he did not even notice the hand she held out to him. "So he draws you here still," he muttered half to himself. "It is as I thought; his power is still as great as ever. See"—he leaned toward her and peered into her face—"your face is white and there are tears in your eyes. But it shall end, child; he shall trouble you no more."

She remembered afterward that he kept one hand behind him, as though he held something in it—something he did not wish her to see. Fearing that some strange, wild thought such as had troubled him in the old days was troubling him again, she spoke soothingly to him and smiled. "Indeed, there is nothing to trouble me," she said lightly; "all my troubles are ended."

"Then why do you come here?" he asked suspiciously. "Why should you come here except to meet him? and why should you weep when you meet him?"

"I don't understand," she said, looking at him with a puzzled expression. "I have not come here to meet any one; no one is awake yet, save ourselves."

"Ah! he comes only when others sleep," muttered the old man. "I was here but yesterday and saw him creeping round here, and watching and waiting. And he has drawn you to him."

"Tell me what you mean!" she cried. "What have you seen?"

He pointed to the statue towering above them through the mist, and lowered his voice to a whisper. "I have seen his spirit—the spirit of him they think dead—come down in lonely hours and wait here for you."

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, startled. "This is only one of your dreams; people can not come back from the dead. Forget all about it, I beg of you; believe me, it is only one of your dreams."

For answer he suddenly gripped her arm and pointed, with the hand that had been behind him, in the direction of the statue; she saw that he held something in that hand, although she could not see clearly what it was. "Then what is that?" he cried. "See, there he is, waiting still!"

With a cry he sprang forward and dropped on one knee in the roadway, and pointed with his arm. Another figure had appeared from beyond the statue and was standing before it, looking up at it—the tall figure of a man. While Linda glanced from the figure back to the old man kneeling in the roadway, she was stunned by a sudden loud report and a blinding flash that seemed to scatter and drive away the mist; and then, in a moment, the figure before the statue turned swiftly round and stumbled and flung up its arms and fell prone before it. She ran to it and, scarcely knowing what she did, turned it over and looked down at the face. And it was the face of Comethup!

She had a dim, wild, despairing hope that she might be dreaming; that the gray morning and the stone figure at the foot of which she knelt, and the man whose head was propped upon her arm, and the wild old figure standing weeping and beating its breast beside her might all be shadows in a dream she would wake to forget. But when she heard the voice of the man in her arms she knew that it was all true.

"Linda! God is very merciful—and all the world he builds for us is very, very right—and very sweet. But a moment ago, as I stood there, with nothing to hope for—hold me closer and look into my eyes—I prayed for death. And see—in a moment it comes—swiftly, too. I don't—don't understand, but it's all—all very right, isn't it?"

"Dear," she whispered, "can't we do anything? Tell me—you are not—not really hurt?"

He smiled up at her with the smile she knew and remembered so well. "We must not—must not lie to each other now," he said, "because there is so little time. I am dying—No, don't turn your face away; keep your arms tight about me. He did not—did not know; don't let them—harm him. Quick—there is little time; tell me—why you are here. Have you left her?"

"I am going—going abroad with her. I came here to see the old place again for the last time."

"God is very good," he whispered, closing his eyes. "I might have died—without seeing you." He stirred a little in her arms and tried weakly to thrust her away. "Now, you—you must go; you must leave me, dear. You must go—back to her."

"No, no," she cried, holding him closer. "I will not leave you now."

"You must—you must. And take him with you. Hide him; don't let them harm him. Oh, why torture me now? Do me this one—one last service. Go back—back to her; keep this from her. Tell her—some day—that I died—you need not—tell her—anything else. Will you go?"

"I can not, I can not!" she cried, weeping.

"You must—or you will undo—all I have tried—so hard to do. Don't you understand?" He raised his eyes to the statue above them. "See—he smiles above us. You must leave me here. Here is my—resting place—here my fitting—monument. Leave me—here." His eyes were closing again; his hands were groping for hers.

She bent nearer to him, kissed him on the lips, and whispered: "Listen. I will do all you wish, because—because I love you. Can you hear me?"

He smiled and gripped her hands more tightly. Bending to him again, she caught the whisper as she touched his lips: "God—is very good." And then his eyes closed, and he died.

For a little time she sat holding him in her arms; then resolutely—remembering her promise—she got up and laid him gently at the foot of the statue, and caught the old man by the hand and ran down the hill toward the town. All was quiet. She noticed, as they went along swiftly, that the old man, who still carried the pistol in his hand, had lost the old strong dominant look from his face and was weak and passive as a child. She took the pistol from him, shuddering a little as she touched it, and hid it in her dress; took him to the door of his shop and thrust him in, and bade him, as she left him, be silent and to tell no one of his dreams. As she came out into the little street again, shaking from head to foot and striving to master her tears, the old man ran after her. He was smiling foolishly.

"I dreamt there was blood upon him; but that—that was long ago, wasn't it?"

"Yes, yes; long ago," she whispered hurriedly. "Go back, and tell no one your dream."

Fortunately she had ordered a carriage very early, that she might drive to Deal in time to meet Miss Carlaw. She kept her veil down as she entered the inn and got away from it as quickly as possible, refusing anything to eat. She scarcely dared speak to any one lest she should betray her agitation. Safely in the carriage at last, she knew that she must pass almost within sight of the spot where the statue stood with the dead man lying at its foot; it seemed horrible to have to go away and leave him there—dead—to be found by strangers. And then, with another burst of tears, she remembered how he had smiled as he died, and how she had promised to keep all knowledge of it from the old woman. Humbled and broken and afraid, she clasped her hands before her face

and prayed silently for strength to keep that promise to him at least. She was grateful to think, for the first time, when she reached Deal that her companion was blind and could not see her face. Miss Carlaw, guessing perhaps that her visit to the old place had awakened sorrowful memories, said but little to her and left her to herself when, after reaching Dover, they took the night boat for Calais.

And while most of the passengers were asleep 'Linda crept on deck and stole to the side of the vessel and dropped the heavy, old-fashioned pistol into the sea.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### AUNT CHARLOTTE ATTENDS A CELEBRATION.

"You have not yet told me why you returned so suddenly to England," said 'Linda.

She was seated on a low stool beside Miss Charlotte Carlaw's chair; her head was resting against the old woman's knee. Miss Carlaw, leaning in her old attitude on her stick, had been silent for some time. The two women had returned only the day before, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, from the Continent.

"Well, there were several reasons, my child," she said. "I've been growing older within these past few months—older not only in years but in my outlook on life, I think. You'll laugh, perhaps, when I say it, but I've gone through many, many years of my life in a sort of wild hurry, striving to get out of it—out of every hour of it—the most that could be squeezed. If I had my time to come again, I think—no, I am quite sure—that I should linger a little by the roadside, as it were; perhaps in that way I should see more of it, and should understand more clearly the meaning of it all. The nearer we come to the finish of it, child, the more clearly do we understand that it is not for us to judge; not for us, in our petty fashion, to say what is right or what is wrong. Only at the end, when we go to Him who sent us here, carrying in our hands the poor little fruits of what we have done, can we know how sadly we have blundered, how much there is that we might have done better. Look at me, 'Linda; I started without eyes, but even that should not have blinded me to all the better things I passed by. And so, before it is too late, I want to do one little thing that I have left undone; I want in all humility to make some reparation to you."

"Reparation? To me?"

"Yes, to you. There was a time—a long while ago—when I thought hardly of you, because I thought you had deceived some one I loved. Well, perhaps you judged him better than I did; perhaps, after all, I was the poor fool who was deceived, and you—out of that love which teaches a woman more than anything else can do—found the better man, after all. You remember I came to you, pitying your loneliness, when he died, and I have been more than recompensed by your love and devotion to me since."

"You have been very, very good to me," said 'Linda in a low voice. "But for you I might have been left destitute."

"There, there, we won't talk of that," said the old woman. "You know, since we have been abroad our good old friend the captain has written to us more than once. He mentioned in one of his letters to me about the statue which had been erected to your husband. I don't want to trouble you with sad memories, but it has occurred to me that you might like to go again to the place where he was born and to the place where they love and remember him so well. Help me to be unselfish, child, for I fear that I have selfishly tried to thrust out of your memory any thought of him. I know you loved him, and he was, perhaps, a better man than I judged him to be. Will you forgive me if I have misjudged him?"

"Indeed, I have nothing to forgive," replied 'Linda.

"Ah, you say that out of your good heart; but I reproach myself very much that I have not been gentler with you—that I have not considered your grief a little more. Now, listen to me. The captain told me in his letter—you remember you read it to me—he told me that on the anniversary of Brian Carlaw's birth there was going to be a great celebration; that the people of the little town were going to put wreaths and flowers at the foot of the statue; that many celebrated people who had known and loved and admired him in life would be there to show their respect for his memory. And that has brought me back to England."

'Linda sat quite still, listening. Before her mental vision passed a picture of a man lying dying at the foot of that statue; a man who had willingly and cheerfully given all he possessed in life for her; a man who had thought that God was good because the woman who had cast him aside kissed his lips at the last.

"And so, my dear child," went on the unconscious old woman, "I have made up my mind that we will go down there at the time of this celebration, and you shall take your place as you should by the memorial of the man you loved. That is only fair and just and right; that has brought me back to England. Come, tell me that it will make you happy to go back to the old place again, to feel some pride—as you must feel—in the man whom all others are honouring."

"I—I think—I fear the journey would be too much for you," said 'Linda, striving to steady her voice. "Indeed, you must not do this for my sake."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Carlaw. "I've set my heart upon it, and I shall be bitterly disappointed if you don't carry out my wishes. You must be proud of him, and it will take the keenest edge off your sorrow and make you think kindly of him if you go. I am going to have my own way in this, I can assure you. We'll go down together to the grave of the man you love, for I suppose they buried him there?"

'Linda did not answer. A sudden new thought had come into her head—a thought that brought a quick flush to her cheek and filled her eyes with tears. "It shall be as you wish," she said after a pause.

The celebration of which the captain had written—the anniversary of Brian Carlaw's birth—was three days later; the two women went down late on the day before, and secured rooms at the inn at which Miss Charlotte Carlaw had previously stopped. Early the following morning, after they had breakfasted, they set out on foot for the place; for Miss Carlaw had said: "We'll have no ostentation about the matter; and we'll get there early, before the other people arrive."

Their walk was a short one; the old blind woman, leaning on 'Linda's arm, was led through a gate and then found her feet walking softly on grass; on the sweet summer air the scent of roses was borne pleasantly. "A sweet and pleasant place," she murmured as they walked on.

They went some little distance farther and then 'Linda stopped. "This is the place," she whispered. "The man I loved sleeps here." The arm on which Miss Carlaw leaned seemed to tremble, and she thought that the girl was weeping.

"How very quiet it all is!" said Miss Carlaw in a hushed voice. "I can only hear the twitter of the birds and the rustle of the wind in the leaves. The people, where are the people? Has no one arrived yet? Please remember that I am blind, dear; you must be eyes for me?"

"No; the people are not here; we are quite alone," said 'Linda.

"But the statue; describe the statue to me."

"It is a statue that only I can see," said 'Linda slowly; "ever since he died I have seen it towering to the very heavens, putting me to shame. It is the statue of a great and good man—a man so splendid in one purpose and one hope and one faith that all other men sink into nothingness beside him. And in the eyes—oh, can I ever forget them?—in the eyes there is a light of such love, such goodness, such forgiveness, that they burn forever into my soul, until I try to close my own to shut the light of them out."

Miss Carlaw, wondering and trembling, made a sudden step forward and stumbled over something; she recoiled and caught 'Linda's arm. "What place is this?" she whispered. "That was a grave I stumbled upon. Where have you brought me?"

"To the grave of the man I loved," said 'Linda, weeping. "There is no statue here—not even a headstone; no crowds come here to worship. The only wreath upon the grave is that of a few humble flowers twined by the hands of an old soldier who loved him. This is the grave of the man I loved—the grave of Comethup Willis."

Miss Charlotte Carlaw began to tremble and her hands went up falteringly to her lips. "What is this? What do you mean? Why have you brought me here?"

"To right a wrong—to tell an old, sad story that should have been told long since. Sit down here; it is a quiet place, wherein he wandered as a little child; he sleeps soundly now beside those who loved him. You thought that he was wild and reckless, that he spent your money shamefully, that he traded upon the fact that he might one day expect it all. Do you know on whom that money was spent?"

"No, no; tell me," faltered the old woman.

"For years and years he was robbed by the man I thought the best on earth, and by that man's father. When he was but a boy, travelling with you on the Continent, those two—father and son—were following him from place to place, preying upon him—living upon him. They had nothing of their own. The very money that enabled Brian to fly with me and to marry me—oh, the bitter, bitter shame of it!—was wrung from the man who loved me. I had nothing, and Brian earned scarcely anything at all; I lived in a fool's paradise. The very dress I wore, the food I ate, everything was bought with his money. You have told me how he borrowed a large sum of money, and how you discarded him for it. That money was borrowed when extravagance had taken all that Comethup had and when he feared I might come to want. I have tried to tell you this again and again, although I only knew it from your lips a few weeks ago; they kept me in ignorance until the very last of what the true facts of the case were."

There was a long pause. Miss Charlotte Carlaw was rocking herself to and fro and moaning fitfully. "Is this—is this true?" she asked at last in a whisper.

"Yes, it's all true," said 'Linda.

"And is he dead? Can I never—never take him in my arms again; never whisper to him how sorry I am? Tell me, how did he die?"

"He died quite—quite suddenly. He was killed. He was mistaken for—for some one else by a man who was mad, a man who mercifully forgot all about it afterward and whose crime was never discovered. But you will like to know that he died in my arms, that I was able to tell him at the last what had been in my heart so long—that I loved him. I was able to kiss him—and he died in my arms, smiling, and saying that God was very good. I have written—a long time ago—and told his old friend the captain all this, so that the captain might think well of him. And that is all."



The old woman was kneeling beside the grave. "Oh, my boy, my boy," she whispered; "dear Prince Charming, if you can hear me now, forgive an old woman who loved you with all her heart and soul, and who did not understand until it was too late.—And, oh, most merciful God," she added, raising her face toward the sky, "I thank thee that Prince Charming lives again—that thou hast given him back to me!"

All was quiet and restful about them; the birds twittered softly among the branches, and the scent of the roses floated to them from the garden of the little cottage against the wall of the church—the roses among which poor Comethup had wandered and dreamed his dreams as a little child.

THE END.

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