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A FIGHT WITH FATE. BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

A

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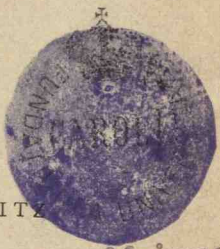
BY

MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF "FOUND WANTING," "FOR HIS SAKE," ETC. ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.



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OF VOLUME II.

A FIGHT WITH FATE.

CHAPTER I.

PARTING.

WHEN the carriage was at the door and the visitors were ready to start, Lord Lynford said, "Suppose you and Miss Verner come with me by a path through the wood below here, Mr. Tyrrell, and join the carriage a little beyond the gates. There are some curious rocks on the way you might care to see."

"Thank you. I daresay Miss Verner may like to go; for myself, I wish to be silent for a while; I have much to think of. You'll forgive my bluntness?"

"Certainly, my dear sir; it is rather refreshing. And you, Miss Verner? Shall I vow a vow of

silence if you, *too,* wish to think?" he added, in a low tone, as the old man turned away and stepped into the carriage.

"Pray do not," she returned; "I like to talk and to be talked to."

"Wait outside the gates at the top of the hill," said Lynford to the driver; then, turning to Beatrice, he observed, "Yet I do not think you are by any means thoughtless. This way. The lawn, you see, is a small plateau, and the descent on the western side very steep." So saying he led her to a narrow path which plunged down through a thick growth of underwood, brambles, and bracken, all more or less touched with the beautiful colours of late September; while here and there, between the stems of the tall trees on the left, they caught glimpses of the blue, glittering waters, for the grey clouds had dispersed and the afternoon was warm and sunny.

They walked on some little way without speaking, Beatrice enjoying the wild beauty of the woodland and the delicious perfume of the pines.

"You have been thinking hard for the last five minutes, in spite of your professed intention

to talk. Will you tell me what subject occupies your mind?"

"I would if I could," she returned, smiling. "I don't believe I was thinking; I was dreaming, with a vague sense of enjoyment. The place is so delightful, the scent of the trees so delicious."

"And pray add, my companion so sympathetic."

Beatrice laughed. "My companion is very nice and very good, but I am not sure that he is sympathetic."

"How is that? I am sure *I* sympathise with you."

"Oh, thank you very much, Lord Lynford!" and there she stopped.

"That means you don't care a damn whether I do or not?"

"I don't know the exact value of a 'damn,' but I am always grateful for kindness," and she looked at him with laughing eyes.

"I am afraid your career will not be very successful, Miss Verner; you are so hopelessly honest."

"If I can get a little happiness out of it I shall be content."

"I fancy you don't get much of that at present."

"Yes, I do,—just at present."

"I am afraid I cannot flatter myself it is because you are with me."

"You are a very pleasant companion, but, of course, I shall never see much of you. Now latterly I have been so happy because I find poor, dear Val so interesting; he is a wonderful boy. And Mr. Tyrrell,—he is quite charming; he gives me the idea of a grand old patriarch."

"Well, yes; rather. They were awful old rips, —those patriarchs,—by the way."

"What does that mean?" asked Beatrice, quite sincerely.

"Ah! I daresay you haven't that expression in your vocabulary. Well, let us say *roué,* 'fast man.'"

"Fast? No; I always picture them going along in a stately manner on camels."

"Don't you think they had a gallop on an 'Arab steed' sometimes?"

Beatrice shook her head. "No; I cannot fancy a patriarch ever being young or galloping about."

"Well, I am quite sure old Tyrrell had a fiery, vigorous youth."

"Ah, yes; and how handsome he is! He must

have had great sorrows, for I never thought any eyes could look so sad as his do sometimes. Just now, when he came down from looking at the pictures with you, one could see something had shaken him. How sad and stern and resentful he looked! I should not like to offend him, but it is curious that——" She paused.

"What?" he asked.

"Second thoughts are best. I prefer not to say what was on my tongue."

"But why? Don't you think you can trust me? I wish you would."

"It's not that; it is because I am afraid you might think me rude."

Lord Lynford vowed that nothing should offend him, and thus reassured she went on.

"Well, then, sometimes Mr. Tyrrell reminds me of you."

"If that is all, I am very much flattered."

"No, it isn't all; but when Mr. Tyrrell is contradicted or irritated he doesn't say much,—he has a good deal of self-control,—but a sort of bluish-white light comes into his eyes, 'full of threatenings and slaughter,' and just like what I

have seen in yours when *you* are vexed, though your eyes are not nearly so dark as Mr. Tyrrell's."

"You have never seen me vexed."

"Perhaps not; then I would rather not see it."

"Good heavens! do you think me a brute? are you afraid of me?"

"Oh, no!" and a wild-rose-like blush crept over her cheek; "that would be too silly. Your anger can never matter much to me, because we are mere passing acquaintances; but—yet at first I did fear you a little. I think I am naturally a coward,—I have to reason myself out of many fears; but I am better."

"Well, pray get rid of this absurd idea. I—believe me—I wish to be your friend; to—to make your life somewhat different from what it is."

"That is very good of you. I am surprised, I am grateful; but, of course, it is out of the question."

Lord Lynford did not reply immediately, and a few steps farther on they came to some curious stratified rocks, quite different in construction from those in the neighbourhood, and had the appearance of a small fortalice, regularly built; beneath was a spring sufficiently well fed to send forth a

little brooklet, which poured itself over the stones and down the declivity with a soothing, silvery murmur.

Beatrice was quite enchanted. Facing the rocks, in a shady nook which was almost hidden among its leafy shelter, was a rustic seat.

"What a delightful place to sit and read in!" cried Beatrice. "I should enjoy a nice book here, or to sit and dream in."

"Why don't you come, then?" said Lynford, sitting down beside her; "it is nothing of a walk from your place here. Where the road turns inland, not half a mile from your gate, keep along the beach till you come to the first outlying patches of wood; there's a lodge there, and no one can pass unless known to the keeper; the way to it turns off just below. Come, I'll introduce you to him, if he is at home, and his wife; then you can make use of these woods to dream in or sketch."

"Alas! I cannot sketch," ejaculated Beatrice.

"Well, as you like. No one shall interfere with you, and you will be quite safe."

"Thank you so much!" and her eyes sparkled; "but I heard you say some friends were coming

to stay with you and shoot. If they come down here——"

"They shall not," said Lynford, very decidedly. "We'll shoot over the other side of the hill. There's more game in those covers. You must make the most of your liberty. When does Mrs. Garston return?"

"The end of next week," she sighed, and Lynford laughed.

"Here is the lodge," he said, and a few steps more brought them to the entrance. A stout, good-humoured-looking woman was busy washing outside. "Ha, Mrs. Cox!" cried Lynford. "Do you see this young lady? Remember she has the freedom of these woods, and tell Cox the same."

"Very well, my lord."

"All well, eh? the little fellow that had whooping-cough?" he added, kindly.

"Yes, he's a deal better, thank you, my lord," bobbing a curtsey, "and I hope your lordship's hearty."

"All right, thanks. Come, Miss Verner, we must retrace our steps, and hasten them, too; Tyrrell will be waiting."

"Is it true," asked Beatrice, when they had regained the upper and principal path, "that Mr. Tyrrell is going away,—and Val?"

"Yes; they are going to some German baths."

"I only gathered it from what was said at luncheon to-day. I don't think Val knew of it."

"Very likely not. Are you sorry?"

"Yes, awfully sorry! My life will be quite different when they go, and it is very uncertain when we may meet again."

"Well, yes, of course it is. They have very wandering tastes."

Beatrice did not reply, and, as the silence continued, Lynford turned and stole a glance at her. Her thoughtful eyes seemed gazing far away and were full—yes, there was no mistake about it—full of tears.

"What, are you so grieved to part with that poor boy and the old man?"

"I am," she returned, emphatically. "It makes me wonderfully happy to be with them. They are so simple, so real. I feel I can be quite my own self when I am with them, and neither heed nor fear making mistakes or rude speeches, as Mrs.

Garston tells me I constantly do. And the worst is I may never see them again."

"Yes, I am afraid that is probable. But I suppose Mrs. Garston will soon return, and then——"

"Ah! that will not make up. She is very nice, I know, but—she does not want me as a friend. I cannot think why she keeps me with her. Some day she will put me away. But, oh! it is of no use talking of these things to *you*. Pray forgive me. I am very stupid."

"You are no such thing. You shall not abuse my honoured guest to me. The laws of hospitality forbid it."

"Ah, that is charmingly said!" cried Beatrice, trying to rally. "I am not afraid of you when you speak so nicely."

"I kiss your hands, as the Austrians say," he returned. "Now, remember, you are to wander about these woods as if they were your own."

"Oh, yes, I shall indeed, until Mrs. Garston returns."

"Ah, by that time we shall have lived a little longer, and perhaps recognised how very deceptive appearances generally are, and see that

the sooner we get rid of old worn-out prejudices the better."

"It takes more than a week to get rid even of *one* prejudice."

"That depends on the strength of the mental vision before which the prejudice is unmasked."

Beatrice was too busy gathering some beautiful leaves and golden-tinted bracken to reply, and Lynford hastened to assist her.

"This is not an ordinary woman," he thought. "Her transparent truthfulness gives her a wonderful degree of distinction. She is keenly alive to the difference of our respective positions, yet that never embarrasses her or alters the tone of her mind; yet she enjoys beauty and pleasure. That she is afraid of me is an important admission, and she doesn't know why she fears me. It is some dim revelation of Nature's. But this fear is an admirable basis on which to raise the delicate superstructure of love. Even if I teach her to love me, shall I be able to persuade her that the life I suggest possesses every ingredient of happiness the heart of woman can desire?—but it does. There," he exclaimed aloud; "there is a long trail of brambles most wonderfully painted by Nature's

autumnal brush. I'll get it for you," and he broke it off. "No exotic treasure in the conservatory can surpass the colouring of this dweller beyond the pale of authorised culture."

"No, indeed," said Beatrice, stretching out her hand to receive it; then, with a little cry, "but it is thorny. I have torn my finger." She held it up, reddened with the blood which came from a long scratch.

Lord Lynford took the branch from her, and throwing it on the ground, wrapped his handkerchief round her hand, deftly enough, Beatrice apologising while he did so for the trouble she had caused by her own carelessness.

"It is no trouble to help you, child," he exclaimed, with a degree of familiarity that was in a way corrected and excused by the tone of superior age and rank in which it was spoken.

Then they hastened on, to find Val waiting impatiently and Mr. Tyrrell so sunk in thought that beyond a few words of adieu to his host he did not speak.

It had been a delightful but too exciting a day for Val, and the late dinner or supper, at which Mr. Tyrrell insisted Beatrice should join

them, carried his excitement to a higher pitch. His grandfather seemed to have quite got over the fit of silence and depression which had seized him after his luncheon at the Hall, and, having ordered champagne, drank to Val's health and happiness as the future master of Lynford Hall.

"What on earth do you mean, gran'?" cried the boy, his eyes wide open with amazement.

"I mean, boy, that that fair domain will soon be mine, and after me yours. I have offered to buy it from Lord Lynford, and he has accepted my offer. Ah, lad, you will have a lovely home! Would to God I could have seen your dear father reigning over these lands! But Heaven has denied me that joy, and I must not rebel. Life would have been too happy, too prosperous, had he been spared to be with me this day. I can but make life as bright, as tranquil, as possible for you, my child," and his great dark eyes grew moist.

"What!" cried Val; "the Hall ours?—ours for always? Why, gran', what a splendid idea! that delightful old house to live in always, and the woods and the pictures and the armour!—not *all* these things, gran'?"

"Ay, everyone of them, boy! There's the

difference between making money and losing money. Lord Lynford has been wasteful and extravagant, so he pays the inevitable penalty. Mind you, I do not wish to speak against Lord Lynford. He has the failings of his class. He is neither better nor worse; but, by Heaven, he is a man, every inch of him, and a real Clavering! If he chooses, I will always be his friend. Ah, lad, the tradition of ages, the power of caste,—nothing can stand before the force of diligent labour and resolute will! Ralph Clavering, Baron Lynford, has done after his kind, and great has been his fall; but he has been sorely handicapped, and——"

"Oh, gran', I can't think about him; I am so delighted. And may I have a pair of ponies for myself? There's room enough for any number of animals in the stables. Denis can drive me anywhere then."

"Faith, Denis can steer better than he can drive!" exclaimed Tyrrell, in a more natural, genial tone; "but you shall have the ponies, core of my heart, or anything else you like."

"Ah, gran'!" cried the boy, his eyes falling on Beatrice; "and Bea shall come and see us,

sha'n't she, when we have all that beautiful house to ourselves?"

"She shall if she likes, my dear son." But Beatrice saw that he was scarcely conscious of what he agreed to.

"Isn't it great news, Bea?" continued the boy.

"Oh, yes, Val; it is just the place for you to enjoy yourself in. I am very glad for you, but I am sorry for Lord Lynford, too. It must be a trial to part with such a place,—the home of your forefathers, too."

"Ay!" said Tyrrell, in a tone of deep feeling. "Had that place been mine—mine by right of inheritance—I would have worked myself to a skeleton, I would have lived on bread and water, to clear it from encumbrance and enabled my successor to hold his own among his peers. Ah, how different things might have been!" He paused abruptly and resumed quietly, "But I like Lord Lynford better than almost any other man I have met at this side of the world. If he chooses I'll be his friend, though no doubt my friendship is a thing he would not value."

"Oh, yes! I have heard him speak of you

with admiration often; I know he thinks you a remarkable man."

"I'm obliged to him," returned Tyrrell, shortly, but a pleased expression stole over his strongly-marked features.

"All this time you are not taking your food, my child," resumed the old man, kindly, "and you've not drunk the boy's health. "Here, you must take this little glass of champagne to Val,—may health, peace, and prosperity be his."

Beatrice repeated the formula, stretching out her hand to press Val's.

After a little more rather disjointed talk, their host, looking anxiously at his grandson, said to Beatrice, "My dear child, you must go home. See, Val looks flushed and feverish; he must to bed. I will go home with you myself; it is a fine moonlight night. I hope I'll find him quietly asleep when I return." So Beatrice put on her hat and kissed the boy's feverish brow.

The old man was very silent as they skirted the beach on their way to Villa Marina. Once he paused, looking across the bay to where the woods of Lynford climbed the side of the headland.

"It's a fair spot," he murmured, "and it has taken many and many a generation to pile up the armour, the books, the pictures, the plate, the hundred and one heir-looms and relics accumulated in yon house. There's a whole history of England in its belongings. Well, no other buyer will reverence them as I do, nor value nor care for them as I do; Val shall do the same if I can teach him. But I am keeping you, my dear young lady. I daresay you think me a stupid old buffer."

He drew her hand within his arm in a fatherly fashion, and they soon accomplished the rest of the distance without exchanging many more words.

* * * * * *

The next morning, soon after Bea's breakfast-tray had been carried away, Denis made his appearance.

"'Mornin', miss. I've come to say me young master has had the divil's own bad night. He was in a fever, tossin' and tumblin' and callin' for drink; so we are to be off by the eleven-thirty train to see a big London doctor, and the boss himself told me to ask you if you'd come round

to say good-bye. Master Val said he wouldn't go without seeing you."

"Yes, of course I'll come, Denis. But, oh, are you going right away?"

"Faith, we are so, miss,—to the back of beyant, among a lot of God-forgotten Germans! We had a taste of them this time last year, and I can't say I'm anxious to repate the dose." So saying, Denis departed, and Beatrice hastened to follow him, pausing in her progress to the Pier Hotel to buy a bunch of fresh monthly roses, with a sprig of heliotrope, from a little flower-girl, herself about the last rose of the fast-fading season.

Val was stretched on his little movable couch, waiting to be taken to the station, and looking very white and exhausted. He was ill and weak and irritable.

"Oh, Bea!" he cried, "I am so sorry to say good-bye. I am quite good for nothing, and I don't care what becomes of me. I don't think I shall ever see you again if I live to get to this place. I'll write to you, and you will write to me? Won't you? Are those roses for me? Oh, thank you! I love flowers, Gran', aren't these

sweet?" But gran' was too busy, too much preoccupied, to heed him. He bid Beatrice a kindly good-bye, patting her gently on the head; but his thoughts were evidently far away. She felt unaccountably distressed at this absence of mind, but the carriage was at the door and gran' was eager to be off, so the leave-taking was cut short and they were soon out of sight, while she went back slowly with bent head to her own abode.

She was amazed at the sort of depression, bordering on despair, which weighed down her heart. She did not know how much attached she had grown to the crippled lad who interested her so deeply. He was no angel, indeed he was exceedingly human; at times unreasonable, peevish, ill-tempered, impossible to please; then, again, tender, unselfish, and full of generous thoughts, —it was delightful to talk with him. There was something original and even poetic in his ideas which charmed Beatrice, while his strong and freely displayed liking for herself completed the fascination. She had involuntarily grown to regard Mr. Tyrrell and his grandson as fast friends, on whom she could always lean, and now they seemed to have slipped from her grasp and

vanished from the realities of her life. It made her feel ashamed, but she could not help crying bitterly when she found herself quite alone in the big drawing-room at Villa Marina. It was an oppressively warm day, and as during Mrs. Garston's absence no very particular cleaning was ever done, the spacious apartment was pervaded by an odour of undisturbed dust, a sense of closeness anything but exhilarating. Nor was this melancholy state of affairs improved by a letter from Mrs. Garston which arrived by the mid-day post,—

"You have wasted a lot of stamps writing to me so frequently. I had to pay twopence for overweight on the last, in which you enclosed the cards of all those people who have called. It was really quite unnecessary. Is Lord Lynford still at the Hall? He never turned up while I was in town. This is rather a pleasant house, though, on a small scale. I have had enough of it, however, and intend to leave on Monday; so you may expect to see me on Friday to dinner. Tell Mrs. Foxhall that she must have a pheasant and some salmon. I hope you have seen that the

rooms have been kept nice and clean. If you want any money you must wait till I come. I shall be at Renshaw's for two days *en route.*

"Yours truly,

"JULIA GARSTON.

"P.S.—Be sure the conservatory is done up and plenty of flowers in the drawing-room, for I see I shall have many visitors. J. G."

The prospect of seeing her amiable employer did not bring Beatrice any sense of comfort. She felt strangely unequal to resist the crushing though smiling harshness which was Mrs. Garston's characteristic, and against which she had hitherto opposed a barrier of buoyant good-humour. "I must be growing weak and silly," she thought. "I feel as if I must sit down and cry if she speaks to me in that mocking way she has. If I did it would be all over with me. How I wish I could go back to Sarah and be at home! What a blessed word 'home' is!" Drying her eyes, she went to communicate the contents of Mrs. Garston's letter to the landlady, and returning to the drawing-room after her almost untasted

luncheon, she saw the Lynford Hall break, with its owner and three or four other gentlemen, all talking and laughing, drive past as if returning with the expected guests from the station.

"Ah! There goes my lord," observed Mrs. Foxhall, who had come to ask some question respecting the preparations. "They do say he is going to sell the old place, and I'm sorry for it."

CHAPTER II.

MATTERS AND THINGS IN GENERAL.

THE days which succeeded were dull and depressing. For some reason Beatrice found herself dreading Mrs. Garston's return. "Perhaps," she thought, as she employed herself finishing off the various odds and ends of work which she had a little neglected for the pleasure of Val's society, "I have been a little spoiled by these good friends, and fancy myself of greater importance than I am; still, I do not think Mr. Tyrrell and Val will quite forget me. There is a great air of truth and faithfulness about them, and I *must* have patience."

The fourth day of this loneliness was very fine, and Beatrice, who had not gone out, resolved to try what fresh air would do to rouse her up. As soon, then, as she had finished her early breakfast, she set forth, armed with a book, to avail herself of Lynford's permission to ramble

through his woods. Her busy thoughts helped her over the ground, and she seemed to gain the side entrance with surprising rapidity. Once within the boundary, she relaxed her pace and began to look about her with a new sense of enjoyment in the ever-fresh beauty of the woods, and secure in the solitude, as the shots which, from time to time, struck her ear came from the opposite side of the plantation. After a little wandering she reached the seat where she and Lynford had rested, and where she now established herself with a volume of Thackeray's, feeling herself soothed by the trickle of the little waterfall, the perfume of the pines, and the sort of palpitating silence which seemed to wrap itself round her. Gradually her attention to the page before her relaxed. The truth in Thackeray is more painful than amusing to the young and enthusiastic, who crave for the loftiest heroism, the deepest villainy, without any shading off between the hard, straight lines. That heroism should be touched by meanness or pierced here and there by ignoble fear; that villainy should sometimes be generous or sometimes even self-sacrificing, seems incongruous and offensive to

their sense of the fitness of things. How many years, what varied experiences, it takes to teach us that most of our vices are virtues run to seed!

So "The Virginians" lay unheeded on her knee, while Beatrice calculated how soon she might have a letter from Val. How earnestly she hoped he *would* write! This spell of real companionship and sympathy seemed to have rather unfitted her for the battle of life, and she felt to shrink from the idea of loneliness as she never did before.

As she mused in this somewhat melancholy strain, the sound of steps rustling among the withered leaves attracted her attention, and she perceived Lynford making his way towards her.

"You have not been very quick in making use of your privileges, Miss Verner," he said, pausing beside her and leaning against the stem of a pine-tree.

"I was busy in the house," returned Beatrice, with a welcoming smile, and feeling, with a little surprise, that she was quite glad to see him. "I thought you were shooting at the other side of the woods."

"My guests are, at present; but, you see, I am obliged to leave them, to write letters."

There was a short pause. Lynford came over and sat down beside her. "And you have been weeping over the disappearance of old Tyrrell and the boy?"

"How do you know that?" cried Beatrice.

"You have been weeping just now; I see a diamond drop or two on your long lashes."

"I can't help it, you see," she returned, colouring. "They were so very kind and sympathetic that, now they are gone, I feel utterly desolate, and Mr. Tyrrell never said anything about seeing me again."

"These very sympathetic people are apt to carry away their whole stock of sympathy with them for future use," said Lynford. "You do not consider, then, that you have *any* friend left in this part of the world?" asked Lynford, looking into her eyes with a soft, questioning glance.

"You know I am a total stranger here," she returned, trying to rally her spirits and determined not to bare her bruises to eyes she did not quite trust. "But do you mean that Mr.

Tyrrell and Val will forget all about me and bestow their sympathy on new people?"

"That is the usual course," said Lynford, with calm conviction.

"I suppose you are right. You have seen and known a great deal." Bea tried to say it bravely. "Then do none remember,—does everyone forget you as soon as you are out of sight?"

"I fancy it is the general rule, unless, indeed, you become essential to some individual, to whom life is unendurable if away from you."

"That must be a very rare case."

"Not common, I grant; but I have met instances. A great chum of mine, in by-gone days, was greatly attached to a woman,—not a very beautiful woman, indeed not at all beautiful, but rather a charming person. Well, absence from her was absolute pain to him,—anyone could see it was, at least any of his intimates. That condition of things was most probably due to his own intense nature rather than to her attraction. It spoiled his life, though."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Bea, deeply interested. "I suppose they were too poor to marry?"

Poverty, to her, was the one universal obstacle.

"No; my friend was a rich man. There was a better reason still why marriage was an impossibility,—the enchantress had a husband already."

"Ah, what a tragedy! But if he knew she was married, why did he let himself love her?"

Lord Lynford laughed. "Excuse the incivility of my quotation if I say, with Byron, 'Curious fool, be still! Is human love the growth of human will?'"

"But it is rather terrible to think that one can be made wretched and wicked, too, against your will."

"There are a good many unaccountable and terrible things in life, but I do not see where the wickedness comes in. Everyone is not blest with a well-regulated mind like yours. I suppose you will arrange your love-affairs on the limited liability system. A man must be free and unencumbered, of irreproachable character, and blest with a fair competence, before he could hope to touch your well-regulated heart."

"Thank you," she returned, cheering up at

this prospect of a skirmish. "I should like my *fiancé* to be all you describe, only I should not mind his being poor. It would be a very happy time, I think, waiting till you were well enough off to be married, and growing to know each other better and better."

"Perhaps so," said Lynford, laughing again. "*I* never saw any happiness in waiting. In short, I never *waited* if I could possibly help it."

"No, I suppose not," said Beatrice, dreamily. Resting her clasped hands on her knee, she remained silent for a minute or two, during which Lynford watched her profile, and noticed that her chin was softly and delicately moulded, with a slight curve upwards.

"And your friend?" she asked, suddenly, as if out of her thoughts; "what became of him?"

"Oh, poor fellow! he was a mighty hunter, and went to India to shoot big game. Unfortunately, he let a tiger come a little too near before firing. The beast, though mortally wounded, sprang on him and finished him. I was not sorry to hear it."

"Yes, I understand that. It is better not to live than to be unhappy."

"Exactly!" cried Lynford, highly pleased by a sentiment which suited him so well. "In fact, it is only a poltroon who would grovel in misery for the sake of mere existence."

A pause.

"And so you are rather inconsolable for the loss of Val and the old man?" he resumed.

"I am; they made me very happy, and I don't like to think they may have forgotten me already."

"They may not have forgotten you. I only said it was not improbable. Indeed, I am inclined to think you are a sort of woman to be remembered."

"Thank you. You are very polite."

"I am in earnest," said Lynford, quietly. "First, because you are unselfish and sympathetic, and your presence is pleasant and soothing. Then you give the impression of being true. Then come more mundane reasons, which might displease you, and, last but not least, you have a soft, sweet voice."

"That is all very nice," replied Beatrice. "Could you go on a little in the same strain."

"Yes, I could!" cried Lynford, with sudden

animation. "If you will listen I could go on considerably."

"I think it would be better to save it for some other time," she said, her colour rising under his eyes; "too much praise is cloying."

"You are such a stern little puritan that I am half afraid of you. Tell me, when do you expect Mrs. Garston?"

"On Friday or Saturday next."

"So soon! Ah, the sun is already going down. Suppose that before you cease to be a free Briton we steal one happy day; at least, I think I could make one day pleasant to you. Come for a sail in my boat. We'll go outside the bay, and I will take you to a pretty little hamlet where there are the remains of a Norman castle, greatly ruined but very picturesque, and we shall have a *tête-à-tête* luncheon, when I shall finish my reasons for believing that you are not to be lightly forgotten. My guests leave me to-morrow, and the weather promises to be first-rate. We can philosophise and discuss to our hearts' content. You'll come, won't you?" insinuatingly.

"It would be delightful," said Beatrice, who was not nearly so much attracted by the prospect

of a whole day *tête-à-tête* with Lord Lynford as he hoped she might be. "But I am afraid it would not do."

"Why, are you such a prude as to be afraid of Mrs. Grundy?"

"Yes, I am. Mrs. Grundy is often right."

"Pray is there anything wrong in a lady and gentleman going out in a boat together?"

"Nothing whatever. If you and I and our people were old friends, if you were in my own rank of life, if it would not be likely to displease Mrs. Garston, and——"

"That *is* a tangible objection," interrupted Lynford, smiling cynically; "for the rest, I am sure you are too sensible to think about my very exalted rank, which is an accident. People don't trouble about such matters nowadays."

"I do not think I ever troubled myself as to whether you were Lord Lynford or Mr. Lynford, but there *is* a difference, and it seems to me—though I don't pretend to understand such things—that it is better for our society there should be. So I am quite content that we should be on different platforms."

"I don't think I am," he returned, "especially

if it cuts me off from what would have been a great pleasure. What! are you going home?"

"You mean back?" said Beatrice, and there was a touch of pathos in her tone.

"I suppose you will sit down and give yourself up to the blue devils all this long, lonely evening," resumed Lynford, as they walked towards the keeper's lodge.

"Oh, no. I shall write a long letter to my sister, and I have a book,—one poor Val left me."

"You are fond of that boy."

"Yes, very fond, and I believe he is fond of me, though you think he will forget. I still hope for a letter from him."

"I trust you will not be disappointed." He walked beside her in silence for some way, and then resumed, "Do you ever build castles in the air?"

"Yes, frequently."

"What style of edifice do you erect?"

"Very modest ones, generally; *you* probably would call them cottages in the air. Of course, our standards are very different."

"Possibly. Do you never soar above the cottage?"

"Sometimes. My highest flight is to dream of seeing Italy, Rome, Vesuvius. The dream is pleasant, whether it be fulfilled or not."

"At your age all things are possible. Perhaps Mrs. Garston may take you abroad with her."

"Oh, no,—that is, I would rather not travel with Mrs. Garston, or anyone. I mean that to enjoy myself thoroughly I should like to go independently. Now, good-evening, Lord Lynford. It grows late; I must hasten back."

"You are a remarkably independent young lady. Don't you think companionship doubles enjoyment?"

"Oh, yes!—*real* companionship. Good-evening, Lord Lynford."

"Good-evening. There's light enough still for you to reach your abode?"

"Quite enough, I think."

These words brought them to the keeper's lodge. Lynford opened the gate and shook hands with her, but made no attempt to accompany her any farther; and Beatrice walked on

briskly, her thoughts dwelling on her *rencontre* with the owner of the soil and perceiving that, strange as it might be, he showed a decided tendency to seek her society. "It must be a mere whim, the crotchet of a spoiled child of larger growth. He is probably changeable and fanciful to a degree. Mrs. Garston would not, could not, be so fond of him if he had not made love to her at some time or other; now he almost seems to dislike her. I hate such inconstancy! and if he thinks he can amuse himself by taking me up and putting me aside when he chooses, insignificant as I am, he is extremely mistaken, though he can be very pleasant and even taking; but I am afraid he has no heart."

With this conclusion, she dismissed Lynford from her mind and reached the villa while still conjecturing whether Val would write to her or not.

* * * *

A telegram from Mrs. Garston on Friday morning announced her arrival on the following afternoon. On the whole, Beatrice would have preferred her coming at once. She had an odd sort of foreboding that Mrs. Garston would be

less friendly, less easy to get on with, in the future than in the past; but she was given to evil forebodings just then, and tried to divert her mind from them.

Having finished all preparations and feeling too unsettled to read, she indulged herself, in the security of her solitude, by playing and singing—in her very untutored fashion, and by ear—on the piano she never ventured to touch when Mrs. Garston was at home. Her songs were of the most familiar and ordinary order, but it gave her great pleasure to sing them all by herself. She had thus got through "Kathleen Mavourneen," "Logie o' Buchan," "John Anderson, my Jo John," and "Annie Laurie," when a voice said, quite near her and in a low tone,—

"You have a sweet little pipe of your own."

She started up, her heart beating violently,—so violently that she felt ashamed of herself,—and saw Lynford leaning on the top of a high-backed chair.

"I owe you a thousand apologies, Miss Verner," he said, deferentially, "for stealing upon you in this way. I called to ask if Mrs. Garston had arrived, and hearing the sounds of song, I

would not allow the servant to announce me, feeling sure I should not hear another note if you were interrupted."

By this time Beatrice was herself again.

"Most certainly not," she returned, giving him her hand; "if you chose to listen, on your head be it."

"Exactly. You really have the making of a capital voice. Of course, in its present condition it is not worth much; but I believe it might be a fortune to you. I am a real lover of music, and know what I am talking about. You ought to have lessons and——"

"That is out of the question," interrupted Beatrice, a little impatiently. "Of course, I should dearly like to learn, but there is no use in talking about it."

"I am not so sure," returned Lynford, coming to sit beside her on the sofa, where, after her sudden start, she had subsided; "a voice like yours has its value. I know some masters or professors who might think it worth their while to cultivate it for the sake of its future worth. I know some of these people, and I should be glad to help you in any way."

Beatrice looked at him very earnestly, while a soft colour rose in her cheek.

"How good of you to think of it!" she exclaimed, warmly. "But, alas! I must not think of it. How am I to live during the years of study? I cannot impose on my sister."

"You could pay your debt many times over if you succeeded."

"Ah, what an overwhelming 'if!'" exclaimed Beatrice.

"Nevertheless, I should risk it if I were you," he returned, with great seriousness. "Leave Mrs. Garston,—you'll have to do it sooner or later,—return to your sister. I shall be in town in a week or ten days at furthest, and can put things *en train* for you. What do you say?" he concluded, with suppressed eagerness.

"Many, many thanks; but it must be 'no,'" she said. "Just think of the time it would take, and always the possibility of failure at the end!"

"It is, of course, a possibility, but by no means a probability; and just think of the freedom and pleasure of such a life compared to the monotony, the enslavement, the servility, of your present existence, my dear little friend!—pray forgive me

the expression, suggested more by your youth than your stature."

"I am not so young," said Beatrice, shaking her head; "I was quite twenty in August."

"Indeed! It is a great age. Imagine how patriarchal I must feel when I admit that I am sixteen years your senior."

"Are you, really?"

"Do I look so much younger?" with one of his pleasantest smiles.

"Sometimes you look much older."

Lynford did not reply, and, after a moment's pause, said suddenly,—

"You will think of my scheme?—my musical scheme, I mean?"

"I expect I shall,— a good deal too much. I shall not be able to keep it out of my head."

"Believe me, it would be your best plan." Another pause; then Lynford said, abruptly, "Any letter from young Tyrrell yet?"

"Not yet; but I have no doubt that as soon as he has recovered from the journey he will write me a long, long letter." She looked straight and defiantly at Lynford as she spoke.

He laughed in an irritating manner. "We'll see. What do you bet?"

"Bet? Oh, no!"

"Haven't you the courage to back your conviction?"

Beatrice shook her head. "I do not see the force of betting on such a subject."

"May I look at your music?" asked Lynford, rising.

"If I had any you would be welcome to examine it all," said Beatrice, laughing, "but the few pieces I possess are at home,—here I have nothing."

"Then you played and sang from ear or memory?"

"Chiefly from ear."

"Sing me 'Annie Laurie' again."

"I cannot. It would be of no use. The consciousness that you were listening would paralyse what little power I have."

"Power," repeated Lynford, as if to himself. "You might have a good deal if you liked. Listen to me: think seriously of adopting music. If you do let me know. Write fully and freely to me. I shall soon be in town, certainly within a fort-

night; address me at my club, the 'Travellers',' and, believe me, I will do my best for you."

"It is very, very good of you to care what I do," exclaimed Beatrice, greatly touched by his thought for her. "But I shall probably remain with Mrs. Garston."

"I have a presentiment you will not, Miss Verner. I have some curious presentiments about you. I see a very bright future before you. Give me your hand," and he took it. "I have the gift of palmistry. Let me read the lines on your hand," and he bent back her slender fingers, holding them in a firm grasp. "Ah, your fortunes are just now at their worst. But a change is coming. You are the object of a strong and passionate affection. This is a serious matter, my dear young friend,—if you will pardon the familiarity. You will soon find that you can give exquisite pleasure or cruel pain. I wonder which you will choose."

So far Beatrice listened gravely, with half-open lips, impressed by the speaker's air of good faith, but at this point the absurdity of her own simple, ordinary self being the object of a *grande passion* struck her suddenly as utterly preposterous, and she burst into a sweet, healthy, natural fit of

laughter that put an end to Lynford's prophetic airs and incapacitated him from resuming them.

"You are desperately matter-of-fact, Miss Verner," he said. "But one day you may admit the truth of my forecast."

"Then, it can only be when I am a prima donna."

"No doubt, and a couple of years may see the double event."

A short silence, and Lynford resumed, "So she is coming to-morrow."

"Who? Mrs Garston?"

"Exactly. I shall soon see if the *entente cordiale* continues. Now, tell me what you have been doing with yourself since—since our ramble in the woods." And Lynford tried to draw her into a semi-confidential conversation, but Beatrice was not responsive. Her old fear and distrust of Lord Lynford came back to her with increased force; and suddenly declaring that she was evidently anxious to get rid of him, he rose to depart, his last words being, "You will confide in me yet!"

CHAPTER III.

"DEFEAT."

MRS. GARSTON arrived punctually and in excellent spirits, which means temper. She vouchsafed to be pleased with her dinner, with the arrangement of her rooms, and the distribution of the flowers decorating them, and grew quite communicative as she sipped her coffee beside the fire, for the evenings were crisp though fine.

"I have had a very good time of it, on the whole," she remarked. "We were quite a small party at the Brandlings', but rather *distingué*. The only ladies besides myself were our hostess and a Lady Valentine, rather a well-known person. There was a curious lawsuit between her and her husband, Sir Emilius Valentine,—but, of course, you know nothing of these sort of things. Life in upper circles is a sealed book to you. Then there was Colonel Villiers, of the Seventeenth Hussars, a great sportsman,—rather fast, too, I imagine;

and a writing man, who knew all about the theatres and actresses, and all sorts of things. He used to tell *such* droll stories; then there were a cousin and some other relation of the general's, and Mrs. Brandling's nephew, Lord Balknockie, a Scotch peer,—rather good-looking,—who devoted himself to *me*. He could be amusing sometimes, but what a difference between him and Lynford!" this as if to herself; then, after a short pause, "Is Lord Lynford at the Hall?"

"Oh, yes. He has been here all the time, I believe. He called yesterday, hoping to find you."

"Here all the time!" cried Mrs. Garston. "Why—why did you not tell me?"

"But I did, Mrs. Garston. I mentioned in most of my letters when I saw him with Mr. Tyrrell."

"I suppose I did not pay much heed to what you wrote," said Mrs. Garston, remembering with a strong feeling of annoyance against herself how carelessly she had skimmed her secretary's letters, often not opening them at all.

"I suppose," she continued, in an altered tone,

"you were devoted to your fascinating cripple as soon as you were out of my sight."

"I was a great deal with him, certainly, Mrs. Garston, but I never neglected anything you gave me to do. Both Mr. Tyrrell and his grandson were *very* kind to me. I should have been rather miserable here by myself but for them."

"And was Lynford often with them?"

"Yes, very often with Mr. Tyrrell. They used to walk about the place,—up at the Hall, I mean, —and——"

"It is very strange that such an aristocrat as Lynford should 'take up' with these plebeians. And were you *always* present at these interviews?" flashing a sudden fierce, scrutinising glance at Beatrice.

"Not always, but very often," was the steady reply.

"What did they talk about?" sharply.

"I did not hear, except rarely. I used to be at one end of the balcony, reading to Val, when they were at the other. They seemed to have lots to say about Australia and gold-digging, and the management of land in England,—rather uninteresting things to me at least."

"And did Lynford ever speak to *you?*" with a glance that seemed to search her soul.

"Oh, yes!—he is very polite."

"Don't mind a word he says!" cried Mrs. Garston, almost vehemently. "He is one of the most unscrupulous, deceitful men that ever lived, and it's enough to ruin your character to be seen with him."

Beatrice first opened her eyes in astonishment, and then her mouth with a little, amused laugh. "But, Mrs. Garston, you do not mind walking out with him yourself."

"*Me!*" cried Mrs. Garston, harshly and indignantly. "Pray do you forget the immense distance between *you* and *me?* This is a proper return for my good-natured disregard of that distance. It is a lesson to me!"

The scorn in her tones roused the stout though quiet spirit that kept guard in Bea's heart.

"I do not forget it, Mrs. Garston. I am quite aware there is a great gulf fixed between us, probably an impassable one; but that is no reason why a gentleman—and a nobleman ought to be one—should not address me with the civility due to, let us say, a respectable woman."

Mrs. Garston paused before replying. She was angry with herself for having spoken with such heat; for, in short, having betrayed the state of her feelings and temper.

"I suspect those Tyrrells spoiled you, and made a fool of you," she resumed, in an altered voice. "They are anything but true friends to you. They will walk off some day and never give you a thought, and then where will you be?"

"Well, they have walked off," said Beatrice, with a smile. She was quick to see the droll side of things. "They have gone to Germany for Val's health."

"Just as I thought!—promising and vowing, I suppose, to write daily letters. Ah, you'll never see the scratch of a pen from them."

"I think I shall in time," said Beatrice, firmly.

"Not you. But there is no use in talking to any one so stupid and obstinate as you are."

"Obstinacy and stupidity generally go together," returned Bea, with much composure.

Mrs. Garston suddenly felt anxious to change the subject. "You said you had some notes and cards for me," she said.

"Yes. I will fetch them," and Beatrice took

a number from a drawer in the writing-table. These helped Mrs. Garston to pass the rest of the evening rather agreeably.

There were invitations from some of the best houses in the neighbourhood pressing the fair widow to waive the ceremony of returning the writer's visit and give them the pleasure of her company to dinner on the 21st, or to the last garden-party of the season on the 24th, or to a little impromptu picnic on the 22d.

These had to be answered, and the few items of expenditure chargeable to Mrs. Garston to be looked over, before she would retire for the night; and, though Beatrice bore herself bravely, she was thankful to turn the key in her door and relax the strain of self-control she had kept up all the evening. It was absurd to feel so depressed, so cast down, so dying to get away from Mrs. Garston, so wounded by the assertion that the notice of a man like Lynford was enough to destroy her character. But above all was the disappointment of not receiving any letter from Sarah, though yesterday was the day on which she almost invariably wrote. Of course, many things might have occurred to prevent her, but she had rarely needed

the comfort of a letter so much. It was weak, contemptibly weak, but it must be confessed that Beatrice drew the bedclothes almost over her head to dull the sound and quietly cried herself to sleep.

Next morning found her refreshed and cheerful, however. She was a good deal pleased and even flattered by the warmth of Stéphanie's greeting. That somewhat grim Frenchwoman not only *embraced* her on both cheeks, but asked pardon for taking the liberty.

"*Tiens, chère mademoiselle!*" she cried, "I have not been at all happy. I have met nothing and nobody so *sympathique* as yourself. The *valetaille* of a country house such as we have come from are real *canaille.* They think they are great ladies and gentlemen, and because I like to keep my money in my pocket, and not spread it out all over my back, they treat me like a *pauvre misérable.* Mademoiselle, you are *grande dame* compared to those brigands of *femmes de chambres et valets,* who have no manners, no taste. And have you sat at home and read and worked your little fingers off, like a real saint? Ah, the *triste* existence!"

"No, indeed, Stéphanie! I have been very happy. My young friend, Val Tyrrell, has been very nice and kind. I have gone out driving and boating with him."

"Ah, *par exemple!*" interrupted Stéphanie; "there is an *enlivenment!* However, madame expects to be very gay. We have brought some lovely new dresses from London,—waited on nearly two weeks for them in that empty grave of a city, as it is at this season. And my lord? He never came; he was expected—ah, yes, he was a good deal expected!"

"He is at the Hall; he called a day or two ago to ask when Mrs. Garston would arrive."

"Ah, he will spend all her money when she marries him,—all! I know these sort of gentlemen."

"I am sure I hope not!" exclaimed Beatrice. With a nod and a smile she left her interlocutor, as she did not care to receive too many confidences from the rather cynical Frenchwoman.

It was the second day after Mrs. Garston's return when Lynford presented himself, and his reception was unusually cool.

"I fancied you must have gone to the North Pole, at least," she said, pettishly.

"It is not exactly the season for such an excursion," he returned, with placid politeness.

"First I heard you were coming to town on business; then that people were staying at the Hall; then something else; and I waited on, sorely needing an escort to some of the new pieces which are appearing now."

"I should be more oppressed with regret if I did not know how easy it would be for you to secure any amount of escort," he returned. "Pray who gave you so accurate an account of my proceedings?"

"Miss Verner, of course. She wrote constantly and told me everything."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes. I don't find her as satisfactory as she was at first; there is a curious strain of insolence in her frankness. I believe she thinks herself quite as good as I am."

"Not really!" exclaimed Lynford.

Mrs. Garston was not sharp enough to catch the note of sarcasm in his tone of extreme surprise.

"She does, indeed! I begin to think she is an unnecessary addition to my household. Now that I begin to see more of English life, I perceive that Mrs. Grundy has softened a good deal of her former terrors. Companions of the sheep-dog order are not at all necessary; you can do very much as you like, and no questions asked."

"Just so; you are quite right. I do not see why you should keep Miss Verner with you unless you really wish to do so."

Then the conversation drifted to the people Mrs. Garston had met during her visit to Yorkshire, and discussing freely the character and difficulties of Lord Balknockie.

"I fancy his property will soon go the way of mine," said Lynford, finally.

"I hope he will not be so hard to deal with as you are," she returned, casting a tender, reproachful glance at him. "He would not reject a good offer, I am sure."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of another visitor,—one of the "county" ladies whose acquaintance Mrs. Garston was so anxious to cultivate.

"This is very good of you, my dear Mrs.

Dacre!" exclaimed Mrs. Garston, rising to receive her with graceful cordiality. "I was intending to drive over to Dacre Court this afternoon, when Lord Lynford came in."

"Then I am very much obliged to him," said Mrs. Dacre,—a plain, pleasant-looking, richly-dressed little woman,—"or I should have missed you. My errand is to explain that I have changed the day of my garden-party, and to entreat you not to throw us over in consequence. We have been asked to meet the prince and princess at Crofton Castle,—*the* great place of the county, you know; and, as it is a sort of command,—the names of the guests are always submitted to royalty, of course,—we must go; and the invitation is for the —th, the day I had fixed; so we have changed it to the —th, which will perhaps be better, as it is a Saturday."

Mrs. Garston readily accepted the alteration. Her eyes sparkled at the idea of the "prince and princess." To be invited to meet these social suns would indeed be a supreme triumph, and all these glories might be hers if only Lynford would fall down and marry her.

Meantime, Mrs. Dacre was talking to him. "I

am afraid we shall be rather dull this winter," were the first words Mrs. Garston caught when she recovered a little from her beatific vision. "The castle will be shut up, and Sir Guy resigns the mastership of the hounds. They want Mr. Dacre to take it, but he is really not strong enough. Why don't you do something for us, Lord Lynford? for I do not believe it is true that you are going to desert us. You must persuade Lord Lynford, Mrs. Garston, to take the hounds and open the dear old Hall again. It is the most charming house to receive in."

Mrs. Garston flushed with pleasure at this implied influence with Lynford, but before she could speak he replied, "I am charmed to think the old place finds such favour in your eyes, my dear Mrs. Dacre, and I earnestly hope its new owner may give you many opportunities of visiting it, but——"

"You don't mean to say you have sold the Hall!" cried Mrs. Dacre, in an accent of real distress, for Lynford was liked by most of his associates.

"I am happy to say I have, though that sounds

uncivil; but needs must when the devil drives, and the devil has driven *me* very considerably."

Mrs. Garston listened breathlessly. Who had bought it? Had her scheme grown and fructified while she metaphorically slept? What a magnificent triumph! But before she could check this flight of imagination by a glance at probabilities, Lynford shattered the vision.

"In some ways," he continued, with almost cheerful composure, "I hope my successor will be a gain to the neighbourhood. He is an old man, but a remarkably fine fellow, rich and generous; and will help, I am sure, in all schemes for the good of the county."

"I am surprised you don't hate him!" cried Mrs. Dacre. "I am sure I should hate anyone who bought Dacre Court."

"That would be most illogical on my part, considering that he has paid a high price and delivered me out of nearly all my troubles. Still, my feelings might be very different had I not taken a fancy to my supplanter. But he is really a very fine specimen of a self-made man. Is he not, Mrs. Garston? I really owe the pleasure and the benefit of his acquaintance to Mrs. Garston."

"I cannot claim that merit, seeing that we both made his acquaintance at the same moment," she said, growing very white, but mastering the emotion of her cruel disappointment by the help of pride and anger. "He is wonderful, considering that he was a digger or a bushranger, or some such thing."

"Is it possible!" cried Mrs. Dacre, in a tone of horror. "Imagine such a creature lording it in the home of the Claverings!"

"By Jove, old Tyrrell is deucedly better-looking than any Clavering I ever saw," cried Lynford, laughing. "He may not be conventionally well-bred, but there's not a tinge of vulgarity about him. He has an air of simple nobility rather peculiar and decidedly uncommon."

"This is quite interesting. Pray has he a wife? The wives of such men are generally their greatest drawback."

"Mr. Tyrrell is a widower, and has only a crippled grandson. He may have a numerous kindred in Australia, but I have not heard of them."

"Ah! Is he too old to marry?" asked Mrs. Dacre, with much animation.

"That depends on his own and the lady's ideas. But there is many a man of five-and-twenty older by long years than Tyrrell at seventy."

"Oh, dear, yes. He'll marry some girl young enough to be his granddaughter, and meet the usual fate of such elderly husbands," cried Mrs. Garston. "Ah!" interrupting herself with a long-drawn "ah." "I was a fool not to think of it before!" she went on, with a curious, malicious light in her eyes. "*That* accounts for the deep interest, my young secretary's deep interest, in that tiresome boy, the grandson. Eh, dear Lord Lynford?" she added. "You know how we have laughed about it? Fancy seeing Beatrice Verner mistress of Lynford Hall!" She darted a keen glance at him as she spoke.

"Ah, there might be a worse one, and if she can make a hit she is right to try," said Lynford, carelessly. "What, going, Mrs. Dacre? First promise to give me the pleasure of a visit before I turn my back on the old place for ever. Fix one day next week to dine with me, and I will try and persuade Mrs. Garston to come and meet you, and pray each of you suggest whom you would like to meet."

To this both ladies assented, and after very friendly adieux Mrs. Dacre departed.

When Lynford returned after seeing Mrs. Dacre to her carriage, he found Mrs. Garston standing by the window, gazing across the bay to the Lynford woods, one hand tightly clenched and dropped at arm's length by her side.

"Bright little woman that Mrs. Dacre," he said, lightly, as he approached.

Mrs. Garston did not answer immediately. He stood waiting for her to speak, with a profound conviction that he was "in for it."

"And you have accepted this 'digger's' offer, though you rejected mine!" she said at length, in a low, intense tone. "More, you have rejected *me* with it. Could I have believed such a thing possible in the days when you followed me like my shadow, when you seemed only to live for me!"

"My dear friend," he returned, not unkindly, "we have very high authority for believing that these violent delights have violent ends. I was keenly alive to the charm of your beauty, and you deigned to be pleased with my admiration; but I am quite sure we understood each other much too

thoroughly ever to vow eternal constancy. I don't think it is a favourite virtue with either of us, eh? I am too utterly broken to be worth powder or shot, and I should be a mean rascal to take advantage of your generous impulse in my favour. I shall sink into an obscure wanderer, for I have vowed a vow of celibacy, and socially I could be of no use to an ambitious woman, as I know you are. You will find a dozen good *partis* at your feet next season, and when I return from my cruise among the South Sea Islands you will give a dinner or two to your old homeless admirer? Come, Mrs. Garston, be your own strong, successful self. Let the dead past bury its dead, and go forth conquering and to conquer."

"Is it dead, is it all dead, Lynford?" she asked, with a sound of tears in her voice.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Garston, you know *you* celebrated the obsequies of our past almost before I did. I don't want to be—well, uncourteous or unpleasant, but I was *not* without correspondents in India. Let us part friends. Come and bid me a friendly farewell on Wednesday. I shall leave the old Hall a few days later, and as soon

as the sale is actually accomplished I will quit England."

Something in his tone struck conviction to Mrs. Garston's soul; she felt the game was up. For a few seconds she was silent, a choice collection of devils, fury, bitterness, hate, revenge raging in her heart; not daring to speak lest her voice should betray her. At last she conquered herself sufficiently to say, in a carefully modulated voice,—

"Ah, you are probably right; these old romantic ideas hamper one terribly. Men have more common sense and less imagination. So let bygones be bygones, and accept my best wishes for your future."

"It is a great gift or combination of gifts to possess all the softness and fascination of feminine beauty with strong reasoning powers. I congratulate you on possessing it," returned Lynford, taking her hand and kissing it. "On Wednesday, then, I shall have the pleasure of receiving you? If a fine day, suppose we turn it into a sort of picnic entertainment,—tea at about four-thirty, a ramble through the grounds and over the house, and dinner at half-past seven; would that suit you?"

"Quite! It is an admirable arrangement."

"I must ask one or two fellows over from Warchester,—it's a cavalry station, you know,—and have one more flare-up in the old place before I turn my back on it."

"I am sure it will be a delightful party," said Mrs. Garston, with an air of animation. "Now I am going to send you away. I have about a dozen letters to write before post hour."

"And so have I. I therefore accept my dismissal with a good grace."

For an hour or more after Lynford's departure Mrs. Garston was invisible; alone and with locked doors, she did battle with herself, nor was it till some days had passed that she began slowly to recover from the scathing sense of defeat and rejection.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE GREAT KING."

FINDING that her landlady was really a good cook and her landlord understood a butler's duties, Mrs. Garston determined to dissipate the gloom which was settling down upon her by entertaining a party at dinner, just to show Lynford that she was not inconsolable. It was to follow immediately after his own farewell function, and she spared no expense or trouble to make it as perfect as possible.

To this end, the amount of writing and estimating, etc., demanded from Beatrice was largely in excess of her usual work, and she had rarely felt so disinclined to do it.

She was oppressed by a vague sense of uneasiness about her sister. She had had a few lines from her excusing herself for omitting to write on the day they had agreed upon, and mentioning that she must have caught cold when

visiting in her old district. Miss Verner had been one of the vicar's staff, but on establishing her "pension" had been obliged to resign that occupation, much to the vicar's regret, and was now only an occasional worker to fill up a gap. Her indisposition, she said, was of small importance, though her head was so heavy and confused that writing was irksome.

Since the receipt of this letter Beatrice had written twice without receiving a reply. She therefore set about her various tasks with less interest and animation than she generally evinced, and was bluntly told she must be growing stupid more than once by Mrs. Garston, who was in a curiously bad temper.

The day of the dinner-party was blustry and wet,—a source of additional annoyance to the handsome hostess, who, like many a more intellectual woman, was superstitious about such trifling indications of the currents of chance, and considered bad weather as a sign that she was out of luck.

She was ready in good time, however, and settled herself with an evening paper, just come, in the drawing-room, in order to compose her

mind and her countenance into a proper condition of serenity, tinged with pleasure, before her guests arrived.

The first to appear was Lynford, who thought it his duty to show himself as her backer on this her first hospitality to the "county."

This attention gave Mrs. Garston a faint sense of satisfaction,—only enough to render regret at his determined rejection of her offers more poignant.

They had, however, hardly exchanged greetings when Beatrice came in, looking very white, an open letter in her hand and her hair slightly rough, as if she had hastily pushed it back.

Without appearing conscious of Lynford's presence she came quickly across the room, exclaiming, in an unsteady voice, "Dear Mrs. Garston, you must let me go home to-night; my sister is dangerously ill."

"Go home to-night? Impossible! I daresay there is no such pressing necessity; you are given to run away with ideas."

"Read that!" exclaimed Beatrice, offering her the letter.

Mrs. Garston took and glanced at it.

"Who is this 'Arthur Grey' who signs it?"

"The vicar of our parish. There was no one else to write, and it must be serious—Sarah's illness, I mean—if *he* writes; he is always so very busy."

"Still, you need not go till to-morrow morning. I should like to enquire into the truth of your assertions."

"The truth!" repeated Beatrice, with wide-open, puzzled eyes. "What truth? Do you—can you—think I have invented this, Mrs. Garston? I cannot wait for any enquiries! I made my plans and packed while you were dressing, and I shall just have time to catch the seven-thirty train; and, though I am very sorry to disoblige you, I must go."

"Then understand me!" cried Mrs. Garston: "if you go, you do not return, and you forfeit the quarter nearly due to you."

"I cannot help it," returned Beatrice, sadly but firmly. "Good-bye, Mrs. Garston. Thank you for the kindness you have shown me while with you. I am sorry to part in this way, but nothing shall keep me."

She held out her hand. Mrs. Garston drew

back. "No!" she exclaimed; "not till I have examined into the truth of this improbable story. You must consider your engagement to me at an end."

"Very well," said Beatrice, indifferently, as she turned to leave the room. Lynford opened the door for her, offering his hand at the same time. He pressed hers warmly, looking into her eyes with an expression of sympathy, which seemed to give her a little comfort for the moment; then he shut the door and came back to where Mrs. Garston stood by the fire, an evil look darkening her handsome eyes. He threw himself into an easy-chair, a rather sneering smile on his lips.

"Why do you object to letting that poor little devil go?" he asked. "You don't like her a bit."

"I did, at first; she was useful and malleable. Since I have been away she ventures to have opinions of her own; she opposes me tacitly; she is quite changed. And are you so dense as not to see the probability that this illness is all a plot to get away to those bushrangers? Why, she might fascinate that old simpleton and get him to marry her. Why, even to be his mistress, with a settlement, would be a great hit for her. Or some

former lover might have written to her to join him in London. Who knows?"

Lynford laughed,—not a pleasant laugh.

"I bow before your superior penetration and experience," he said, with a slight emphasis on the last word. "These solutions of Miss Verner's sudden flight are possible, I admit."

"Thank you for a very unkind speech," returned Mrs. Garston, flushing up to her brow; then, after a moment's pause, she said, as if to herself, "I wonder where she found the money to take her away? She is such a goose! She never kept a penny in her pocket. Did old Tyrrell send her any?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Dacre and Colonel Villiers," said the accomplished Hahn, throwing open the door, and all confidential talk was over.

Meanwhile, Beatrice had gone swiftly back to her own room, where she found Stéphanie in the act of locking her box for her.

"Well?" said the lady's maid, interrogatively.

"You were quite right. She would not give me any money,—that is, she told me that I forfeited a quarter by acting as I did, so I was too proud to ask any."

"Yes, yes, and you were a fool, a large fool, to expect it, and yet a larger not to insist. Still, I will keep my word for you; here are two gold pieces, and you shall give them back in one month. I like you, mademoiselle, and I shall be sorry when you are gone, for *me,* not for you. Madame and you could not get on unless you went down, down. Then she would put her foot upon your neck, and make trouble for you. Now go, all is ready, a fly at the door; his fare is eighteen pence,—no more, mind you. If I am in London I will come and see you, but for you, never go near madame no more!"

"Thank you, Stéphanie! You have been very good to me. I will write and send you your money as soon as I get home. If my sister is not very, very ill, how delighted I shall be!"

"Good-bye. No, not good-bye,—*au revoir!*"

* * * * *

It was not so terrible a journey as it might have been, for Beatrice was weary with the strain of half-resisted anxiety and the great shock of the vicar's letter. So, with the merciful capacity of youth for recuperation, she slept a great part of the way, and when she roused herself as the train

approached London, hope came to her with her renewed strength. Sarah had good health in general; she would throw off this attack; and, oh, how carefully she, Beatrice, would nurse her recovery! and surely she could find some kind of employment which would permit of her remaining at home.

Was it possible that she could ever learn to sing well enough to make money by her voice, as Lord Lynford suggested? He *ought* to know. He seemed to know everything, and he was very good to her,—very! She was a little ashamed of feeling so curiously distrustful of him. It was a sort of feeling she could not resist, nor reason about, but she began to fear it was most unjust.

It was near midnight when they reached the station, which seemed funereal in its gloom and emptiness, for the passengers were few, the book-stalls were closed and their lights out, while the newsboys and stragglers were all gone. The silence and dimness struck Beatrice with a sense of trembling apprehension. It was terrible to be there alone and to go back home only to find one weaker, more helpless than herself.

After a little delay a cab, an old, rattling four-

wheeler, was found for her, and she set forth on her rather long drive.

How long, how dreary it seemed! Beatrice was trembling in every limb before she reached the well-known little garden gate, and could hardly find the extra sixpence demanded by the driver for carrying her box to the kitchen door.

There was a light in a window over the little front parlour. Someone was watching. Beatrice rang softly, and the door was almost immediately opened by a young woman,—a stranger.

"Oh, please, are you Miss Beatrice?" exclaimed the girl, in a half-frightened voice.

"I am. How is my sister?" said Beatrice, in a low, breathless tone.

"Nurse says she seems a trifle better to-day, and if they could keep up her strength she might beat the fever yet."

"Has she a nurse, then?"

"Yes, miss, since yesterday. It was more than I could manage, though I had mother in to help; but yesterday the doctor said as how things could not go on so, and he brought a nurse himself,—same time as they wrote to you, miss."

"Pray help me to bring my box in," said

Beatrice; and this accomplished, they bolted and locked the kitchen-door. There was a kettle hissing softly on the hob, a smell of meat stewing from the oven, as if beef-tea was in preparation.

Then Beatrice took the precaution to change her boots for light shoes.

"The poor lady is not easily disturbed, miss," said the servant, noticing this. "She sleeps a deal, which must be good for her."

"I suppose it must be," returned Beatrice, catching at any straw. "Does the doctor think her *very* ill?"

"I don't think he does, miss, for he has the windows open day and night; so he ain't much afraid of her catching cold."

"Can you go in and tell nurse I am here, and ask if I may see my sister?"

"Yes, I will, miss. Won't you have a cup of tea or some'at? The kettle is well nigh b'iling."

"No, thank you. I only want to see my sister."

The girl went away up-stairs, while Bea sat quite still and thought of the quietly warm welcome which had always met her on the threshold of that homely home. Why should she be so

scared by the fear that she might never meet it again? This was mere nervousness, she told herself. Sarah was always well; whoever had colds or sore throats or other indispositions, *she* was always alert and afoot, ready to do anything for everyone. It was impossible she could succumb to a sudden illness; and now her sister had come to watch by her and devote herself to her, that surely would give her fresh strength.

Here h'Emma, as "the girl" was called, reappeared. "Nurse says as how you can go up, miss, though she was just settling for the night."

Beatrice, disregarding the ungracious message, hastened up-stairs.

She found her sister established in the largest bedroom, — one which had always been their father's, and after him was given to that autocrat, Mr. Jones, who was at once Sarah's tyrant and champion. What had become of him? What had become of everyone?

It was a cool, fresh night, and the open windows admitted a little gusty breeze which stirred the curtains and made even the shaded lamp flicker. The nurse, in a long, shapeless garment, her head enveloped in a large kind of muffler,

was standing beside a chair-bed which was made up in a corner.

"It's very late, 'm," said the nurse, "and we have had rather a restless day."

"I will not stay long," said Beatrice, humbly; "then to-morrow I can attend to her while you sleep."

Though she had carefully lowered her voice, it evidently reached the patient's ear, for she opened her heavy eyes and smiled feebly but happily, only uttering the word "Beachy."

Beatrice flew to her side. "Yes, dear,—Beachy; come to stay with you until you are quite well and strong."

Another slow smile, and the eyes began to close again, while the nurse whispered, "Not too near, miss; not too near."

"What a curious colour she is!—how darkly flushed!" returned Beatrice, in the same subdued tone.

"Ah, yes! it shows up very clear to-night," said the nurse.

"What *is* the matter with her?"

"Well, it's rather a bad fever,—took visiting in her district, I expect."

"But I thought she had given it up?"

"Any way, the doctor said he thought that was how she caught it. She has been ailing more than a week, but two days ago she was obliged to go back to bed. Now, 'm, please, go you and lie down; I think poor Miss Verner will have a quiet night."

Here a slight movement of her sister's drew their attention. Bea went over to the bed, and saw that she was trying to put her hand under the pillow and was looking earnestly at her.

"What is it, dear?" asked Beatrice; then, remembering it was her sister's careful habit always to put her keys under her head, she sought and found the bunch. A look of satisfaction stole over the flushed face as the sufferer murmured, thickly and indistinctly, "For you, dear." With another contented smile she again closed her eyes, and Beatrice felt comparatively happy to see how welcome she was.

The night passed more tranquilly than Beatrice had anticipated. She was very tired, and seeing her sister so much disposed to sleep, she did not realise how ill she was. She expected

more restlessness with fever, and therefore she hoped the best.

Unconsciousness soon stole over Beatrice. When she woke it was broad daylight, and she was feeling refreshed and brave.

The nurse reported a tolerably good night, and Beatrice gladly undertook to give the patient what food they could get her to take and to watch beside her while nurse slept.

As soon as she was off duty, Beatrice asked the servant for some explanation of the state of affairs. "How is it that there is no one but my sister in the house?"

"Well, you see, 'm, Mr. Turner was away still for his holiday; and the day the doctor said you ought to be sent for he told Mr. Jones as how it was a very bad fever, indeed, and that the lodgers had better clear out, for it was very infectious; so they all went. Only Mr. Jones, he said that he would call and see you and settle matters with you; and if you could give me some money, 'm, it would be a good thing. The butcher's book has run over a week; so has the grocer's; and Miss Verner paid regular every Monday."

"Very well, Emma; I will see what is in the

house," returned Beatrice, putting a bold face upon it, while her heart sank a little.

She was quite sure Sarah was not without funds, but where should she find the money or look for it? and then, Beatrice thought, there was that loan of Stéphanie's; *that* must be paid, and soon. This illness would be costly, too; but if only Sarah—dear, thoughtful, provident, unselfish Sarah—could recover, they would work together, and never—no, never!—would Beatrice forsake the old home again.

Recalling her sister's habits, Beatrice sought out the key of a quaint old cherry-wood bureau, much adorned with brass, and within a perfect maze of small drawers. There, as she anticipated, she found a little hoard of gold, silver, copper, and one five-pound note, amounting to very nearly twenty pounds, some of which, in the guise of a post-office order, was soon flying per rail to Madame Stéphanie; and Beatrice determined to keep things in such order as would delight the invalid when she was well again and able to manage her own house, and "she would soon be herself," Beatrice thought. Nurse was a mournful sort of person, inclined to take the worst view of

things. *She* knew what admirable health Sarah had, and her untried strength would carry her through this, its first trial.

An interview with the doctor, however, damped these happy hopes. Though he was kindly and cautious, the cruel knowledge of her sister's danger grew upon her, and she recognised the deadly nature of typhus fever.

Then the weary days dragged their slow length by in terrible monotony. There was so little to be done, too; only the frequent ministration of milk and beef-tea, constant fanning, and keeping the room cool with open windows. Soon the sufferer became almost unconscious and wandered indistinctly, about what her tender attendant could not understand.

Alas! Never again did the kind, calm voice which had so often gently rebuked the little sister's petulance, and encouraged her when she tried to do well, address intelligible words to the ear that longed to hear them.

With hopeless composure, poor Beatrice helped to nurse her to the last, while the fell disease ran its inevitable course.

The tenth day after the return of her sister,

Sarah Verner's useful, unselfish, unobtrusive life passed almost silently away; and white-robed hosts, who watch the upward, onward struggle of true hearts, welcomed the new guest with Heaven's greeting,—"Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

CHAPTER V.

"A TOTAL ROUT."

LYNFORD was not sorry when the last days at the Hall were over, and he had bidden farewell to Mrs. Garston,—a final farewell, he earnestly hoped.

The sense of being soon in a position to pay his debts gave a lightness to his spirits which in some measure counterbalanced his natural and proper shame at having bartered his birthright, a noble inheritance, for a mere mess of pottage to allay his unhealthy hunger for costly excitement, for sweets and stimulants which cloyed almost as soon as tasted.

He gathered from enquiries made through Pounceby that Mr. Tyrrell and his grandson were staying on at Baden, where the latter had been very seriously ill, and they had now moved down to Hyères, where they intended to pass the winter.

He was greatly concerned to find, on calling to enquire at the modest little mansion in Spring Grove, that Miss Verner was so dangerously ill. This was an unexpected and provoking obstacle to that constant intercourse with her sister on which he had reckoned and to which he had looked forward with such eager delight. He abstained from leaving a card or giving his name, preferring to await the result of Sarah's illness before obtruding himself on Beatrice.

"If this sister dies," he thought, "there will certainly be a difficulty the less for me." Yet this reflection did not give him the satisfaction he might have expected. His feeling was less of anger and impatience with the unavoidable separation from Beatrice than distress at the idea of her sorrow and anxiety. He pictured her speaking face pale and worn with watching and anxious care for the only creature that belonged to her, her pathetic mouth tremulous with the grief she dare not express, her dark, soft eyes heavy with unshed tears. And when able to snatch a brief rest she had no one stronger than herself, no near or dear friend to comfort and console her, no one to hold her in loving arms and kiss the weary eyelids till they

closed over the tired eyes. Nor did any thought of the beauty which—at least, according to his fancy—she possessed mix with this picture. The desire to help and soothe her was alone present to him,—somewhat to his own surprise. "I suppose it is because the women who have hitherto attracted me had all that wealth and position could give them, and could be consoled for the loss of their nearest and dearest by a new dress or a new lover."

Yes, it was extraordinary, but he felt he could even give up a good deal for that quiet, unpretending girl, whose candid, absolute naturalness gave him a sense of breathing purer air when he spoke or listened to her. She made him wonder why he ever wanted anything but the simplest, the most inexpensive pleasures, and to feel how utterly his life had been thrown away.

"She will be the most charming companion in the world," he said to himself, as he left the hansom which conveyed him to Kensington at a little distance and walked across the garden to make his now nearly daily enquiry.

The servant who opened the door put her apron to her eyes as she replied, "The poor dear

passed away about nine o'clock last night, sir. Went off just like a lamb; they could hardly tell when she stopped breathing. Ah, such a good lady,—so quiet and silent, but that kind!"

"And the young lady, her sister?"

"Oh, she's just wore out. You know she did a deal more nursing than the nurse. But she was up again in good time, and saw the vicar, who called quite early."

"When does the funeral take place."

"On Wednesday, sir, I believe, but I am not quite sure."

Lynford went thoughtfully away. Once the funeral was over he would write and ask permission to call.

The hardest time of all was when that cruel day was over; then the full force of desolation is most overwhelming.

Till then poor Beatrice bore up bravely; then the nurse left, and she felt indeed alone. The hours slipped by in a curious haze of bewildered pain, the dim, perplexing consciousness that there were quantities of things to do and settle, and the painful impossibility of regulating her mind as how she could accomplish any of them.

It was the second day after the good sister had been laid in the grave, and, weary with a morning chiefly spent in talking with a local solicitor who had always done what little business her father and sister had required, and of other matters with the vicar, Beatrice threw herself down on an old-fashioned couch which stood in the dining-room, and, burying her face in the cushions, set her mind to retrace the past and recall all the instances of kindness on Sarah's part and ingratitude on her own that memory could furnish, after the fashion of self-tormenting common to emotional young people, when the servant-girl, already under notice to leave at the end of the month, came in with a note, which Beatrice took almost reluctantly; she only wanted to be quiet and to think.

When the girl had closed the door she opened it slowly and read,—

"I trust you will not think me intrusive, my dear Miss Verner, if I venture to ask you so soon after your sad loss to allow me to call and see you. I shall not be very long in town, and I should be grateful if you would tell me something

of your plans, which perhaps I might be able to assist.

"With sincere sympathy, yours,

"LYNFORD."

"How wonderful!" murmured Bea, half aloud, a certain degree of comfort warming her chilled heart. "He must have a better nature than I thought. Why does he take this trouble? Perhaps Mrs. Garston has relented and sent him. Of course I shall see him, and thank him for coming."

So the girl was soon summoned to take the following note to the post:

"DEAR LORD LYNFORD,—I shall be very, very pleased to see you and thank you for thinking of me in my great sorrow.

"Yours truly,

"BEATRICE VERNER.

"I am always at home."

The next afternoon, as Beatrice was making a languid effort to look through the contents of a box labelled with her own name, Lord Lynford's

card was brought to her. "It's the gentleman as brought the fruit and flowers," said the girl. And she at once went downstairs to receive him.

A more pathetic figure he had never seen, as she came across the room and put her hand in his. Her straight black gown did not conceal the quiet grace of her figure, her movements; her face looked smaller, her eyes larger, the lids heavy with weariness and grief; her very hair had lost something of its golden brightness; and how white, yet fair, she looked!

"You are very cold," were Lynford's first words, as he took her small, chill hand in his and then laid the other over it.

"I am so seldom in this room; it is not worth while to light a fire," she said, in answer to his glance at the empty grate.

"Thank you,—thank you very much for allowing me to call," began Lynford, with wonderful tenderness in his deep voice.

"Did Mrs. Garston ask you to call?" said Beatrice, in a low tone.

"Mrs. Garston! No; certainly not; I have not seen her for three weeks. I—I wanted to satisfy

myself as to how you are, and to see if I can be of any use in any way."

He drew forward a chair for her and stood for a while, leaning his shoulder against the side of the window, where she could not well see his face.

"It is so good of you to trouble about me."

"I don't deserve much credit on that score. Have you been able to get any sleep?"

"Last night not much; but to-night I am *so* tired I think I shall sleep. I believe I have to thank you for all the fruit and the lovely flowers that came to my dear sister. As long as she could notice anything she took a pleasure in looking at those flowers. I wondered who sent them."

There was a pause. Lynford could hardly trust himself to speak.

"Have you anyone staying with you?" he said, at last.

"Oh, no! there is no one to come; but I have a good deal to do. It is very unfortunate that Mrs. Heathcote, the lady who introduced me to Mrs. Garston, is away. I have known her all my life, and she is most kind."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I hardly know,—only I must go away, for they are going to let this house furnished."

"They! Who?"

"Oh, a gentleman who used to manage things for my poor father,—a lawyer; and Mr. Grey, the vicar, thinks he may get me employment in the new Kindergarten school, and——"

"My God! where will you live?" interrupted Lynford.

"I have not thought of that. Things will arrange themselves, I suppose."

Lynford rose, went to the window, and came back to his seat. "You are singularly alone," he said, as if to himself.

"Yes; we never knew many people, but I scarcely realise my loneliness yet. And to think of all the precious time I wasted with Mrs. Garston, when I might have been a help and a comfort to my dear, good sister! Ah, I have been selfish!"

"How so? *I* cannot see it!"

"I do,—plainer every day. I *did* wish to maintain myself,—to relieve Sarah from a burden,—but I was eager for change, for variety, too; I was too ready to leave her. But," with a sudden

break in her voice, "I cannot trust myself to speak of my dear dead, yet——" She stopped abruptly, evidently afraid of laying bare her misery to strange eyes.

Lynford looked steadily at her with infinite compassion.

"You will make yourself ill and unfit for any work if you give up in this way. You want air; you want some mental change. Let me come to-morrow and take you out for a drive. Air and motion will relieve you,—more than anything else, I imagine."

"You are very kind, Lord Lynford," raising her heavy eyes to his, with a look of sad surprise. "Why do you trouble yourself about me?"

"Because——" He stopped. "I will tell you some day; now, it would be selfish and intrusive to talk of my own feelings. You will come with me to-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" she repeated, dreamily, as if she scarcely heeded what he said. "No; I cannot go to-morrow. Mr. Hervey is to call in the morning about some business,—I scarcely know what,—and the vicar wants to see me in the

afternoon, when he expects to know something certain about the Kindergarten."

Lynford cursed them both in his heart.

"The day after, then, I shall call, in any case," he said, feeling that if he stayed he could not keep back the tender, passionate words which were on his lips. "I suppose I ought not to intrude upon you any longer. It is barely four o'clock. What will you do all the rest of the dreary day? You might come out now, only that evening is already closing in."

"Oh, I have a great deal to do! I will not sit down and think; I have much to look over and arrange. There are things to be done in the house and my own belongings to separate, and while I move about I can keep composed."

"Beatrice," he said, taking her hand, "before I leave you give me one little bit of confidence. Promise me, if you want help of *any* kind,"—with emphasis,—"to ask me."

Her pale face flushed. "Thank you,—a thousand thanks! but I have all I need; I assure you I have."

Lynford hesitated, and, pressing her hand gently, said, "Till to-morrow, then," and left her.

Had Beatrice been in a normal condition of mind, the extraordinary solicitude of Lynford respecting her sorrow, her position, her prospects, would no doubt have startled her into some suspicion of what his feelings were; but from the time they first met she had looked upon him as in some vague way engaged to Mrs. Garston, or that he ought to be. Moreover, there was so much of bluntness in his speech and manner to herself that the possibility of his ever considering her anything beyond a simple, insignificant girl, whose frankness and self-assertion rather amused him for the moment, never occurred to her.

Now, stunned as she was by the cruel blow which had so suddenly fallen upon her, nothing seemed strange or wonderful; only the hint of assistance—which, of course, meant money—roused her deeply-rooted self-respect. Please God, she would always support herself, however humbly; and so, for the present, Lord Lynford passed out of her mind, and she returned to her task of sifting and classifying her few possessions.

These effects were, in some cases, a revelation to her. Her sister had from habit treated her always as a child, rarely speaking to her of busi-

ness or family history; and almost the only thing that could and did rouse her to interest in the present was a packet containing old letters, a few rings and trinkets of small value, and a couple of ivory miniatures,—a lady and a gentleman dressed in by-gone fashion, with hair, and initials in gold beneath the glass at the back of the lockets in which they were framed.

On this packet was written in her father's hand, "For Beatrice when she is twenty-one; the property of her beloved mother."

This, at least, was hers. In fact, everything was hers. For Sarah had made no will, and Bea was her natural heir; though she understood but little of all Mr. Hervey, the lawyer, was at the trouble of explaining to her,—only accepting unquestioned his advice and directions.

That gentleman deeply regretted that his poor young client was not old enough to keep up the business that her sister had established, and which, so far, had promised to be successful. He suggested trying to sell the good will of the house, with the furniture, but Beatrice only got confused over the pros and cons, and begged the com-

passionate lawyer to do whatever seemed good in his eyes.

* * * * *

The next day but one was cold and misty, with occasional gusts of wind, and the sympathetic servant, whose month of warning was drawing to a close, had lit a fire in the dining-room without instructions from her young mistress.

Beatrice was faintly surprised to see it; also some beautiful fragrant flowers in a large bowl awaiting the touch of her deft fingers.

"Where did you get the flowers, Emma?" she asked, when she came into the room, after her cup of tea and morsel of toast, administered to her in bed by her humble friend.

"Same as usual, miss,—from Hodge's in the High Street."

"Did all the flowers come from Hodge's?"

"Yes, miss, but not the fruit. A very respectable man, I should say, out of livery, used to bring that."

Beatrice made no further remark, and sat down to answer a note from the mistress of the Kindergarten school, which the vicar had brought her the evening before.

She wrote slowly, and was almost dismayed at the repulsion with which the idea of days occupied by continual struggles with small children filled her. If she could only be quiet and alone in the poor old home, from which she had once been quite glad to get away!

The clock struck twelve; just then the door opened, and Emma said, "The gentleman, miss."

Beatrice coloured quickly; she had forgotten, or nearly forgotten, that Lynford said he would come. Even had she distinctly remembered, she would have thought it a suggestion of passing compassion which probably would fade from his mind before many hours were over.

There he was, however, with a grave look in his dark face and an eager glance which sought her eyes.

"Horrid day!" were his first words. "No use in thinking of going out! How have you been? managed to get any sleep?"

"Oh, yes, I have slept more."

"And what news of your vicar and the other fellow?"

"Mr. Hervey? Oh, he has explained a great many things to me, but I do not seem much

wiser, only that I must leave this in a couple of weeks at furthest. The Kindergarten people are inclined to take me, I think. I am to call on the head-mistress on Saturday."

"Indeed!" he said, vaguely, and lapsed into silence.

"You are looking a shade better than when I saw you before," he resumed, gazing at her as she stooped to rouse the fire, and he noticed the soft curves of her figure, the graceful turn of her snowy throat.

"I have rested a little better," she returned, and they both stood for an instant silent before the fire.

"Do you know if Mrs. Garston is in town?"

"I know nothing whatever about her, and shall know nothing, for I shall soon leave England for a considerable time. That is partly why I want to see you and speak to you. Do you remember I once suggested that your voice might be of some value to you?"

"Yes, I remember. I was very happy then."

"And I trust in God you will be happy again. Well, I want to settle something about it before I start, for I want to get off soon."

"Soon?—are you going soon?" she exclaimed.

There was a sound of sorrowful regret in her voice that completely overthrew the self-control Lynford had so far with difficulty maintained. "Is it possible you care if I go or stay?" he said, drawing closer to her. "Am I of any use or comfort to you? Shall you miss me?"

"Oh, yes; and just now, it is almost too much to part with——"

"Come with me, then!" he interrupted, in a low, deep, passionate tone, and he clasped her suddenly, closely to him. "Leave all this sorrow and misery. Let me watch over you, and make your life fair and smooth. Be my beloved, my dearest companion. I cannot offer you a brilliant existence, but you are not a woman to crave for diamonds and equipages. If you love me, if you will try to love me, you will be content to leave the noisy world and share my wanderings, my life, in shadow and in sunshine. Can you face this with me, my love, my darling?"

Beatrice looked up at him, too startled, too amazed to be shy or embarrassed or self-conscious, or to make any attempt to free herself from his

arms, though she was strangely disturbed by the pale light which flashed from his deep eyes.

"Do you know what you are saying, Lord Lynford?" she said at last, rather breathlessly, while she pushed him gently away.

Lynford instantly released her, and, standing back a step or two, watched her intently.

"I scarcely believe you. You have been accustomed to gratify every whim, and you think you cannot do without *me,* or what you think I am; but you are mistaken; you are indeed. You have more heart than I thought, and I am so sorry, but——"

"Sorry? Why?"

"Because—because I do not feel I could love you as I ought to love a husband, and you have been so good to me. I *must* tell you the real truth. I could not marry you. I am very sorry. And oh, most grateful to you for caring about me! But you see I have always been a little bit afraid of you, a little distrustful, I cannot tell why. I am ashamed to say so. One cannot account for these feelings."

"Distrust me? Why should you distrust me? I should be faithful enough to you!" exclaimed

Lynford, enormously surprised, in fact stunned. "Are you quite indifferent to me, then?" he continued. "Can it be possible that you did not see how soon, how strongly you entwined yourself round my heart? Why do you doubt me?"

"No, I do not exactly doubt you; but I fear I could never be quite at home with you. Then neither of us could be happy; and I should like you to be happy, Lord Lynford. Pray forgive me." She stopped abruptly.

"I have deceived myself," he said, moving restlessly to and fro; "I would have loved you fondly and faithfully. Listen to me! Whatever happens, do not drive me away. Forgive my presumptuous folly,—yes, I *am* presumptuous,—but let me still be your friend, your helper. I am not quite unworthy of your friendship. I will not again offend you,—my eyes have been fully opened,—only don't break with me. I cannot bear to think of your rugged, lonely life and not believe that I may give you some help, some solace."

"Thank you for this real kindness, but it will be better and wiser to go away and forget all about me. Later, when you have forgotten this

fancy, I shall be pleased and happy to see you, for I shall always remember your disinterestedness, your sincerity, with gratitude; but do not stay now."

"I obey you," returned Lynford, not sorry to have an opportunity of reflecting on the extraordinary turn affairs had taken. "Will you promise me to write if any serious difficulty arises? I swear to you I will do my best to serve you, and never intrude my own feelings on you unless——"

"Oh, make no exceptions!" interrupted Beatrice, with uplifted hand. "When you reflect, you will see how foolish it would be to marry out of your own rank of life; you would regret it and so should I. So good-bye for the present. I shall always think of you with gratitude and regard. Good-bye."

Lynford took and kissed her hand gently; then, without another word, left the room and the house.

He was scarcely conscious of the people who passed and sometimes jostled him, so profoundly was he absorbed by the scene which had just taken place. The passion which had thrilled

through his veins seemed chilled and evaporated, —the delicious picture his imagination had spread before him of taking that brave, patient, tender girl from the dreary desolation of her life and surrounding her with love and light and comparative luxury; of giving to the full as much pleasure as he received; of seeing her develop in beauty and intellect; of an existence all ease and freedom and restfulness of heart. With one touch of a relentless hand the rich, clear colours were swept away and only an indistinct mass of dulled tints left on the disfigured canvas.

"What a double-distilled ass I am, to think I could make what I liked of such a girl!" he thought, as he pressed on through the drizzling rain. "I fancied that—alone in her grief, penniless, friendless—she would have been attracted by the warmth and tenderness I offered,—and I would have cared for and protected her lovingly. Once she held parley,—had she been a woman to hold parley in such a matter,—I should have brought her round to my views. I little thought I should be refused as a husband so uncompromisingly. What instinct made her distrust me? If ever there was a being who thought no evil, Beatrice

Verner is that being; and I was too dense an idiot to perceive the unflawed rectitude of her nature! Have I ever been refused before? As a husband, I think not; I have not often tried that line, though. How sweet and fair and bright she is! Why doesn't she love me? And how infinitely awkward it would be if she did. Thank God, she suspects nothing! she never shall! I wonder if I could win her some day? What an impostor I should be! Whatever happens, she must be taken care of and sheltered from the rough life which threatens her. How shall I manage?—she will take nothing from me. I must not offend by obtruding on her."

Here Lynford paused and seemed to come to himself; then he hailed a hansom and ordered the driver to Lincoln's Inn. Arrived there, he told the man to wait.

Mr. Pounceby sat at his knee-hole table in his very comfortable private room; a brisk fire burning in the grate, for October was closing in.

"What! Lord Lynford," he exclaimed, rising in some surprise; "I thought you had gone down to Southampton."

"I did not get off, nor shall I go for a few

days. I think you said Tyrrell was expected in town?"

"Yes; his solicitor, Mr. Parkins, said so. He is, I believe, in a great hurry to get the purchase completed."

"Do you know where he is to be found?"

"No; Parkins, his solicitor, will tell you."

"Where is his office?"

"In Bedford Row, No. ——."

"Thank you. Good-morning; see you again in a day or two."

"This is a hasty peep!" exclaimed Pounceby; but Lynford was gone.

A few minutes brought him to the office of Parkins and Parkins. The reply to his question was, "Mr. Tyrrell is staying at the Burlington; he only came last night." Arrived at the Burlington, Tyrrell was out.

"Did he say when he would be in?"

"No, sir; he said nothing whatever."

Lord Lynford used a little bad language in his own mind, and had begun to scribble a line on his card, when a deep but kindly voice hailed him.

"Lord Lynford! I was just going to look for

you," and the next instant his hand was in the Australian's big grasp.

"I have been hunting you up for the last half-hour," cried Lynford, returning the old man's warm pressure; "I want a little talk with you."

"By all manner of means. Come to my room; come along." He led the way up-stairs to a private sitting-room, and they were soon in full talk.

"How goes the grandson?" asked Lynford.

Mr. Tyrrell explained that he had had a sharp attack of illness after his arrival at Baden, and was slow in recovering his strength,—"Even the little he usually has," added Mr. Tyrrell,—"and I have been strongly advised to take him to Bordighera for the winter. As soon as I see things going properly here I'll go back for him. I left him with Denis at Hyères, and he begins to pick up a little. Then, if all's well, we'll come over to your place in the spring."

"My place?" repeated Lynford, laughing. "Yours, my dear sir."

"Faith," returned Tyrrell, "I wonder you don't hate the sight of your supplanter."

"Come, Mr. Tyrrell! I am not quite so un-

reasonable a blockhead. Exchange is no robbery, and you have given a very fair exchange. The winters in Woodshire are very mild, but it might be better for your boy to get acclimatised in the summer. Talking of him, you remember the young lady Mrs. Garston had with her as secretary?"

"Yes; I was going to write to Mrs. Garston about her. For Val sent a letter to Mrs. Garston's care, and has had no answer."

"Indeed! She has come to grief, poor girl. Her only relative was a sister. The sister fell ill of typhus fever. Miss Verner insisted on going to nurse this sister, whereupon Mrs. Garston forbid her to return. The sister died, and left little or nothing to our young friend, and I am afraid there is rather a rough future before her."

"Where does she live?" asked Mr. Tyrrell, quickly, taking out note-book and pencil.

Lynford told him, adding: "The prejudices of society are so narrow and ill-natured that it struck me *you* could best help me to do her some little service, and I need not appear at all."

"You are a good fellow," said the old man, looking steadily at him. "But this matter is mine.

My boy is happier with this sweet bit of a girl than with any other, man or woman, and she shall stay with him till she finds a good husband. We've wanted her before, but I never liked to interfere with Madame, who must be a cross-grained devil to quarrel with a loving heart for wanting to help her own kith and kin. Leave her to me, Lord Lynford, and when you come back from cruising round the four quarters of the globe you'll find her blooming like a rose."

"I feel sure you will give her a home, my dear sir; but I should like to share——"

"Not a word more, my lord. I said this is my business, and it is."

CHAPTER VI.

"A CURIOUS FIND."

LORD LYNFORD'S surprising avowal made less impression on the mind or imagination of Beatrice than it would have done had she not been so preoccupied and bowed down by grief, for the loss of her only relative and friend, and a painful shrinking from the dark, desolate future which lay before her.

Sorrow and joy alike seem inexhaustible, interminable to the young. For them there seldom exists a to-morrow different from to-day, and to Beatrice only a long vista of loneliness and gloom presented itself.

Even if Mrs. Garston had invited her to return, she felt she could not accept the offer. The impression of unsympathetic hardness made upon her by the charming widow was too strong to be easily effaced; and, in truth, Lord Lynford produced very much the same effect of harshness,

of tyrannical whimsicality, and determination to gratify self, which had made her shrink from him from the first. At times certainly he surprised her by touches of kindness, even tenderness, and of perception as regarded thoughts and feelings, which she fancied must be incomprehensible to him; still, her predominant sensation was fear of him, dread of being alone with him, and a firm conviction that when tired of any toy, he was quite capable of crushing it cruelly.

Still, for the moment, he meant to be tender and loving, so she regretted giving him pain. Had she known more of the world she might have wondered at his accepting rejection so readily. As she was, it seemed quite natural that he should perceive the reality of her "no."

On the whole, she really did not think so much about Lynford as of her own poor little plans for self-support, the pain of letting the old home go and leaving herself without a refuge in the world.

Few as were her possessions, it was a subject for consideration where she should keep them; she could not take them with her wherever she

might find employment. If Mrs. Heathcote were at home——

Here her musings, as she sat in the fireless dining-room sorting and tearing up a number of old, unimportant letters, were broken in upon by Emma.

"There's a gentleman wishing to speak to you, miss."

"A gentleman? What gentleman?" in a tone of surprise.

"A tall old gentleman, miss."

"Tall and old!" cried Beatrice, her heart beating with sudden hope. "Oh, tell him to come in!"

Her hope did not deceive her, for the next moment the form of Mr. Tyrrell almost filled the door-way.

"Ah, *how* glad I am to see you!" she cried, starting forward to meet him with outstretched hands. "You make me feel that I am not quite alone yet." Her voice broke, and she stopped abruptly, striving to master her emotion.

Tyrrell held both her hands warmly in his own.

"It makes my heart ache to read such sorrow

in your young face, my child," he said, with so much compassion in his deep, rich voice that her self-control gave way, and she burst into irrepressible tears.

"I am sorry to be so weak," she sobbed, "but I cannot help it; she was sister and mother both."

"And small blame to you! It's a hard heart that could keep its well-springs sealed when the best and nearest are taken and your house left unto you desolate."

"Ah, yes! how desolate! Thank you,—oh, thank you, for coming to see me! I was so afraid that you and Val had forgotten me."

"No, my poor child; there's not much forgetfulness in either of us. My boy was ill—very ill—when we got to Baden, and *I* rarely write letters; but he *did* write, some ten days ago, and addressed you to the care of Mrs. Garston."

"It was cruel of her not to send it on," said Bea, tremulously; "it would have been such a comfort."

"Come and sit down by—no, there isn't a fire; but sit down and make your servant put on one. It's bad to be chill, and grief is cold. Tell

me all about yourself. Are you going to live on here?"

"No; I cannot. I am advised to let the house furnished and find some employment."

"Then your sister had nothing to leave you?"

"Only this house and furniture and some money I found in her bureau,—not much; I have been paying things with it since,—and there is a little more that was due to my sister and has been paid to Mr. Hervey, a solicitor, who always did things for us,—law things, I mean; so I shall be able to pay the doctor."

"And then? I don't ask from idle curiosity, my child."

"I am glad you care to ask, dear Mr. Tyrrell. Mr. Grey, our vicar, is trying to get me the place of governess in a Kindergarten school."

"I shall offer you an alternative," said Tyrrell. "Come back with me to Val. He always wanted you to be his companion, reader, what you will; only I did not think it right to take you away from Mrs. Garston. Stay the winter with us in Italy, and after we shall be guided by circumstances. Do you think you could be happy with us?"

A gleam of brightness passed over Bea's sad, wan face. "It is the only chance I have of being happy once more," she said.

"Come, then," returned Tyrrell, holding out his hand to her. "I will do my best for you, and if we suit each other we may dwell long together. I have always wanted a young-girl creature in my house, to keep our hearts soft and gentle. I must be nearly a fortnight longer in this wilderness of a town, and you had best wait for me. Can you stay on in this house?"

"I suppose so."

"Tell me where this man of yours lives,—Mr. Hervey. I will see him and tell him what I think is best to be done. Now, my poor child, try and keep up your heart. I'd never ask you to forget your dear dead,—let her live in your memory, in its most loving core,—but don't let sorrow quench your spirit. I'll never believe your sister would be happy even in heaven if she knew you were grieving on earth. Faith, the next world can't be much better than this one if it makes us indifferent to those that loved us and mourn for us here below. Try and believe you are doing well, both for your sister and yourself, by striving

to be happy and making others happy. Now put on your bonnet and come along out with me,—a breath of fresh air will do you a power of good. We'll get away into the country somewhere; the sight of fields and trees will comfort you, though the leaves are well-nigh fallen. I'll go and see if my man has a tolerable horse in his cab, or if I must get another. Go and put on your bonnet, my jewel."

And Beatrice went.

The appearance of Tyrrell upon the scene changed it completely. The true sorrow for the good sister was still poignant, but the shrinking dread of a bleak, desolate future was taken away. To be with Val; to help and to amuse him in his dark hours; to share his pleasure when he was pleased and make the task of managing him a little lighter to his devoted grandfather,—such should be her task.

These people were not strangers to her; they were like kith and kin. It was like going to a real home, and the oppressive dread of the future began to lift its heavy shadow from her spirit.

She was soon ready, and felt surprised at the effect a drive to Hampstead produced. Life once

more seemed possible, though sadly shorn of its brighter beams, its fairer promise.

Mr. Tyrrell bade her a kindly good-bye at her own door, promising to take her out early the following afternoon, and left her to rest with a delightful, soothing sense of kindly protection.

She found a bright fire burning cheerfully in the grate and her tea laid out beside it; so, like St. Paul and his shipwrecked companions, she "thanked God and took courage."

The kind old man drove away to his hotel to send Val a hasty line before post-time. He well knew what good news his would be considered by his invalid grandson.

Though Val was better and stronger than before the attack of low fever which had tried him severely, he was a little irritable and difficult to please. Denis was not so satisfying a companion as he used to be in Val's childish days, and Tyrrell felt that Beatrice was indeed an acquisition. His own heart, too, had gone out to her with a degree of warmth which surprised him, and he felt she was exactly what he would have liked for a daughter.

He had just finished his letter when Lord Lynford was announced.

"You'll think me a tenacious bore," he said, shaking hands cordially; "but I have come from Pounceby, from whom I gather that our confounded business is likely to hang on for another month or more. Now, I really cannot kick my heels in London for all that time; I shall therefore run up to Scotland and have a turn on the moors. There's a cousin of mine—a thorough-bred Highland chieftain—who doesn't worry about large parties or advertise big 'bags'. We are rather chums, so I'll put up with him for a bit; then I shall go over to see my sister and her husband at Arcachon, and run back to London when our lawyers want us. I think of starting the day after to-morrow, and wanted to let you know my movements."

"Thank you; I am glad you did. If matters are to hang on in this way I will return to my boy until things are ready for completion. And, by the way, I have been to see our young friend, Miss Verner. Thank you heartily for telling me where to find her. It made my heart sore to look at her pale, sad face. I think, I hope, I

comforted her a little. I shall take her back with me to keep my poor Val company; and, trust me, we will take care of her."

Lynford did not answer immediately. He beat the carpet softly with his stick, as if in thought, and then said,—

"She is extremely fortunate. I confess it is a great relief to my mind to know she will be under such protection as yours. The world is a bitter, bad place for such a type of girl to be thrown into, fettered, as she would be, by grimmest poverty. To you I confess that I have been a good deal interested in her. You will not misunderstand me?"

"Certainly not," said the old man, heartily; "I see that you are a right-minded, honourable gentleman."

"Thank you," said Lynford, a dark flush rising in his cheek. "As you think so, allow me to accompany you when next you call on our young friend. I should like to say good-bye and wish her God-speed."

"By all means," returned Tyrrell. "I hope you are not going to expatriate yourself indefinitely. Nothing can take from you your splendid position

of an hereditary legislator. You may do good work yet."

"I fancy the only work my division of the legislature can do is to be the useful drag,—keeping the machine from going too fast down-hill. But an impecunious peer is not likely to have much weight in the upper house, nor in any other except the House of Commons; *there* a good fighter is always valuable to his party."

"A good fighter is valuable everywhere."

"A little fighting goes a long way in the House of Lords."

"Still, Lord Lynford, I should like to see you taking a certain position in English society."

"My dear sir, I have taken a very 'certain' position, and I do not see much chance of exchanging it for any other. At present I only want to turn my back on old scenes, old faces,—ay, even old friends. Time and absence may modify my views considerably; I don't believe much in my own steadiness of purpose."

"I don't think you do yourself justice; anyhow, I hope you will do me the favour of coming to see me in your own house."

"It would be a new sensation! Yes, Mr. Tyrrell,

when I return I shall pay you a visit; and,"—a little more seriously,—"believe me, I am grateful for the interest you are good enough to take in my future."

The conversation then turned on colonial matters, and lasted a considerable time, for the old Australian was shrewd and well informed on the subject; nor did Lynford leave him until he had accepted an invitation to dine with him at his club, in order to meet one or two well-known men who happened just then to be passing through town.

Beatrice had a little note next morning from her new old friend, in which he told her of some unexpected engagements which would prevent his seeing her that day; but on the one following he would certainly call and take her out to drive, if the weather was fine. Beatrice therefore girded up the loins of her resolution and sallied forth to call at the vicarage and inform the vicar of the good turn kind fortune had done her.

He was a little doubtful at first, hesitating as to whether such an offer could be as good as it looked; but as he enquired further his doubts vanished considerably, though he expressed a

wish to see Mr. Tyrrell before giving his full approval to the engagement.

Beatrice felt sure her kind patron would be pleased to call upon Mr. Grey, and promised to ask him.

It was very soon after Bea's brief mid-day repast that Mr. Tyrrell arrived in a small, open carriage. She was up-stairs when he came, but quickly descended, and was a good deal startled to find he was not alone, for a step or two behind him stood Lord Lynford.

Her pale cheek flushed for an instant, but she greeted him kindly and calmly.

"I persuaded Mr. Tyrrell to take me under his wing," said Lynford. "I go north to-morrow, and did not like going without saying good-bye, as we are not likely to meet again for some time."

"Thank you; it is very good of you to come," she said, raising her clear, pathetic eyes to his. "I am glad to have a chance of seeing you again; I am sure I have to thank you for telling Mr. Tyrrell where to find me. You know he has offered to take me back with him to Val? It seems the only outlook that makes me care to live."

"I was very glad, indeed, to hear of the plan," he returned, drawing a chair opposite the sofa on which Tyrrell had seated himself beside Beatrice; "I feel sure it is the very best for you."

"And not bad for us, faith," said Tyrrell, good-naturedly. "We'll take good care of her."

"Of that I have no doubt." He paused.

If anyone so socially assured, so perfectly at ease, could be even slightly embarrassed, Lynford was at that moment. He did not find words easily, yet he longed to utter much that crowded to his lips. He ought to have come alone; yet no! He would only have fallen into temptation, and either got himself into a difficulty or been more deeply mortified. How quiet and composed she was! how gentle and sweet! but marvellously unmoved; while *his* memory of the various amours and amourettes in which he had indulged presented him with no picture of equal indifference.

Already he saw a lightening of the heavy shadow which had fallen on her; soon, under happy influences and in new scenes, youth would reassert itself; she would no longer feel desolate, alone, forsaken. He foresaw that she would grow all-important to the simple, natural, manly

patriarch, who had taken the first step towards adopting her, then he would be forgotten, and some fellow, younger, fresher, less tainted with the harshness, coldness, unbelief, which were the outcome of a life such as his had been, would win the heart he could not touch. He felt with impatient surprise how deeply she had impressed him, and for the twentieth time thanked the fates for having suggested a false interpretation to his proposal. How would he ever have faced her again if she had understood him rightly! How dull, how besotted, he had been not to see in this unpretending girl more than his equal!

These thoughts passed quickly through his brain while Beatrice told Mr. Tyrrell that the vicar would like to speak to him on the subject of her engagement to him. Tyrrell observed that it was all right, and proposed calling that afternoon after he had left Beatrice at her own door, Mr. Grey being generally at home at the afternoon tea hour.

By the time he ceased speaking Lynford had quite recovered himself, and began to talk to Beatrice of the pleasures of a first visit to Italy, from which he passed naturally to his own in-

tended cruise to the south seas and his intended visit to Australia. Then Mr. Tyrrell inquired about the tonnage of his yacht, and shook his head at the idea of undertaking so long a voyage in so small a craft. Lynford suggested that they should go down together to Southampton and inspect the vessel, to which Tyrrell assented. Soon after Lynford rose to take leave.

"All good wishes, Miss Verner," he said, and held her hand somewhat lingeringly, while he looked wistfully into her eyes, with a glance that touched her heart and brought the colour again into her cheek.

"It will be long before I see you again, I fancy, and in the interim all things may have become new; so, remember this miserable sinner occasionally in your prayers."

"Good-bye, Lord Lynford; I will always remember you as a most kind friend," she said, with moist eyes. After a brief arrangement to dine with Tyrrell that evening, Lynford left them.

* * * *

This expedition to Southampton occupied two days, during which Beatrice had abundant occupation, as Mr. Tyrrell had told her to be

quite ready to start within the week for Florence, and had also instructed Hervey to take over the house, to engage a care-taker, and make all preparations to set Beatrice free.

It was sad to pack up the few books and ornaments, relics of home which she determined to keep, and which Tyrrell directed should be sent to the repository where some of his own valuables were stored until his permanent abode was ready to receive them.

Beatrice was almost breathless at the rapidity with which things were hurrying on. In two or three days she would quit England and an entirely new page of life would be opened for her. She was more dazed than delighted, as under other circumstances she would have been. Her spirits were still depressed, and her heart was too loving to recover its tone quickly.

She had nearly finished her work of separation and packing, on the fourth day after Mr. Tyrrell's last visit, and was occupied in looking over some letters yellowed by age which were in the packet with the miniatures before mentioned. The contents of the parcel were spread out on the dining-room table, and the sunlight—it was a

bright, crisp morning—shining down caught the glitter of the gold letters "N. C." in a quaint monograph on the back of one of the lockets. The yellow letters bore the dates 1797 and 1798, and were addressed by someone to his "dearest girl" in the earlier ones, to "his beloved wife" in the later. These were signed "J. C."

They were not long, but most loving, and full of regret at the writer's enforced absence.

Beatrice was profoundly touched by this voice from the grave, and wondered by what right these relics had been consigned to her.

She was so much occupied that she did not hear the door open, and was startled to hear Mr. Tyrrell's voice saying, "Well, my child, are you nearly ready for the road?"

"Oh, yes!" she exclaimed, rising to shake hands with him; "all the things you have kindly consented to take charge of are packed and ready to be removed, but I think I should like to take these"—pointing to the table—"with me. They make only a small packet, and I should like to look over them at my leisure. They are interesting old letters."

"Do as you like, my dear. I have brought

you a note from Val; it was in a letter I had from him last night."

"How nice of him!" she cried, eagerly opening it, while Tyrrell drew a chair to the table and took up one of the lockets.

Val wrote in high glee at the prospect of seeing his friend and playfellow so soon and keeping her for always. The warm, unstudied welcome sent a glow through her heart.

A sudden exclamation from Mr. Tyrrell, in a low, unsteady tone,—"My God! where did you get this?"—made her turn quickly to look at him. He was pale, and the hand which held the miniature trembled. "Where, where did you get this?" he repeated, his eyes fixed on the portrait, which represented a beautiful woman, with abundant nut-brown hair, dressed in the loose, tumbled fashion in vogue at the date of the letters, with deep blue-grey eyes, infinitely sweet and thoughtful, and a soft, rosy, kissable mouth. The colouring was still wonderfully fresh, and had the pearly, transparent tint usual in paintings on ivory. The throat and the shoulder shown in the picture were exquisitely moulded, and there

was an irresistible attraction in the pose and the expression.

"I think they belonged to my mother," said Beatrice, awed by the sight of the old man's emotion. "This is the paper they were folded in," and she showed it to him; "that is my father's writing."

But Tyrrell did not hear; he still gazed with all his soul at the picture. After a minute's silence he bent his head and reverently kissed it, murmuring some words which Beatrice did not catch.

"It's a sweet and noble face," he said, solemnly; adding, after a brief pause, "That fair woman was my mother."

"Your mother!" echoed Beatrice, in profound surprise; "then how—how could it have come here?"

"God knows!" murmured Tyrrell; "but it is near sixty years since my eyes rested on it. She was the sweetest, the best of women."

"She is lovely," whispered Beatrice, the tears coming to her eyes, "yet she looks sad; and this one?" taking up the other locket, which held the portrait of an officer,—a good-looking man, not of

a refined type, with much gold lace on his uniform, and dark hair, lightly powdered. He was considerably older than the lady, and the face was less intelligent.

"Ay," said Tyrrell, sternly: "I know that one, too! that was my father. "Look! look, my dear! there may be some clue to the pictures among these papers."

Beatrice immediately sat down and began to turn over the letters, and at the bottom of the packet found an envelope addressed to "Beatrice," in her father's clerkly hand. Opening it, she found a long paper, doubled up and inscribed, "List,—contents of packet;" the number of letters in each year followed, with the heading, "From Captain John Clavering to his wife, Honoria Clavering;" then came a catalogue of the trinkets, —old-fashioned brooches, pins, and clasps of small value; and then the last item, "Miniatures of my dear wife's grandfather and grandmother, Captain and Mrs. Clavering."

Tyrrell read them slowly over, holding the paper unsteadily; then he looked up with wet eyes and said, "If this be true, you are my grandniece!

Tell me!—what was your mother's name before she married?"

"It was Newton."

"And your grandmother's?"

Beatrice shook her head. "That I never knew. I scarcely remember my mother, and no one seemed to know anything about her people; she was the daughter of an officer, I have heard."

"I wish I could find out." He paused. "My dear child," he continued, with great tenderness, "I should like you to belong to me by the ties of blood,—to be a sister to my poor, dear boy,—that I might shelter and watch over you. Ah, if you had a strain of my blessed mother's blood in your veins, you would be a precious charge to me! I will leave you, Beatrice; I am no fit company for anyone to-day. Old sorrows, old wrongs, come back to me. I will take you safely to Val, and then I will go back to Dublin and see what I can find out. You will lend me these miniatures for a little while, eh?"

"Dear Mr. Tyrrell, take them for altogether. These relatives are strangers to me. I am but too glad to give you anything you would value."

"Thank you, my child. I will take my mother's

likeness; for the other I do not care. I begin to think you *must* be the granddaughter of my eldest sister, who married just before I left home. Mind you are ready to start the day after to-morrow. I'll call for you at six; you shall dine with me before we leave. Can you go straight through without too much fatigue?"

"Oh, yes; certainly."

"Well, we'll see." He was folding up the miniature carefully as he spoke. "Thank you for this; it is a real treasure to me. Good-bye; God keep you. This strange discovery will make a great difference in our lives. I doubt if I can see you to-morrow; but here,—I had nigh forgotten this."

He put a thick envelope into her hand. "You will want money."

He then gently, solemnly kissed her brow and was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW LIFE.

THIS curious discovery of the possible, nay, probable relationship between her good old friend and herself, the strong emotion he had shown, the profound attachment to his mother, which still seemed to live so freshly in his heart and memory, drew Beatrice completely out of her own sorrow.

It was such a romantic incident, so far surpassing the events detailed in the novels she had perused, so unlikely to have occurred, that it seized her imagination, and opened a totally new vista in her life. If Mr. Tyrrell proved, indeed, to be her granduncle, she would no longer be friendless and alone. He was ready and willing to admit the claim of a kinswoman, and under his roof she would find shelter and a welcome.

He, too, was somewhat strange and lonely, in what to him was a new world, and she might

be of use, of comfort to him in his declining years.

The evening past swiftly in these musings; and she escaped that sinking of the soul which generally oppressed her when night drew her dark pall over the earth, and silence settled down on little, out-of-the-way "Spring Grove."

She slept soundly,—it was, indeed, the best night she had had since her great loss—and she stayed somewhat longer than usual in bed; so before she left her room a telegram was brought her,—

"Departure delayed; will be with you after twelve. "J. TYRRELL."

Beatrice was a little disappointed; she had grown very weary of the sad monotony life was in the empty home, where her little servant and herself seemed lost. She scarcely herself knew how much she looked forward to the change of scene, to the pleasure of seeing Val. How delightful it would be to call him "cousin"! In what degree *was* he her cousin? Ah! that was too complicated a question.

It was more than half-past twelve when Tyrrell came. Beatrice ran to meet him.

"Are you well?" she asked, earnestly; "did you get some sleep?"

"Not till near daylight, my dear," he returned, drawing her to him and kissing her brow; "I could not keep my thoughts quiet. Long years past kept unrolling themselves before me,—years sad and sweet,—and then I felt I must go at once and seek out the truth of this relationship which I believe exists between us.

"Instead of going with you to Italy to-morrow I shall travel in another direction,—away west, to the land of misfortune; but I will not keep you from my poor Val. I'll tell you what I have planned. The manager of the hotel where I am stopping says there are plenty of respectable women who find employment as travelling maids, —'courier-maid' is the right word, I believe; he knows several who are disengaged. I propose to engage one of these to take care of you and guide you safe to Val. If she is a nice, sensible woman and useful, keep her with you; she may help you and Val to move to Bordighera,—I'm fearful that

Florence will be too cold; and Denis speaks no lingo save his own. What do you say?"

"Of course, dear Mr. Tyrrell, I say 'yes' to anything you are good enough to suggest; but you need not spend all the money this maid will cost. I could manage very well alone; I am not frightened or nervous, and there are interpreters with——"

"Not a bit of it!" interrupted Tyrrell, stoutly; "I'll not let you scramble round by yourself. It makes me deucedly uncomfortable to see how the young women here knock about all alone, and are boastful because they can take care of themselves, —as if *we* weren't made partly for that purpose! No, no! That man, the manager,—and he's a very decent sort of chap,—is to send up two or three of these courier-ladies to meet me here, so that you may have a look at them, too, and choose the one you fancy; then you can set off the day after to-morrow, if you like."

Beatrice hesitated. The idea of setting off on so long a journey with a total stranger frightened her a little.

"Val will be looking eagerly for you," added Tyrrell.

"Oh, yes; of course I shall be quite ready to go on Saturday," said Beatrice, taking courage. "And, oh, I do hope you may find that I am really and truly your niece,—your grandniece, I mean!"

"I firmly believe I shall. Your face always seemed familiar to me, without a distinct likeness to any of my people; but now I see there is a turn in your neck—in the way you hold your head—that comes from my mother. Ah, my child, one day I'll talk to you about her! May God make you as good a woman!"

He stopped, and then resumed: "On Saturday morning, then, if we can find a suitable person to travel with you. I should be glad if you could get off, and I will start the same evening for Dublin. We shall all be dispersed then. Lynford went up to Scotland the night before last."

A little more intermittent talk,—for the old man's heart was full, and he constantly fell into deep thought,—when it was announced by Emma that "A lady has called to see Mr. Tyrrell, and brought this note."

The note was from the manager of the hotel,

stating that the bearer, Mrs. Gilbert, was a person he could particularly recommend.

It was almost amusing to Beatrice to be made of such importance, and she looked with considerable interest at the neat, well-dressed woman who entered.

She was of middle height, with dark eyes and complexion and rather crisply-waved, iron-grey hair. Her bearing was composed and even refined, and it seemed quite natural to Beatrice that Emma should have called her "a lady."

"Mrs. Gilbert?" said Tyrrell, rising and setting a chair for her.

"Yes, sir," with a respectful bend of her head.

"The manager especially recommends you," and Mr. Tyrrell proceeded clearly and in a few words to explain what he required, enquired with whom she had been, etc.

Her replies were satisfactory; she had been long known to the manager of the hotel where Mr. Tyrrell always put up. Beatrice was rather attracted to her, as she conveyed the impression of strength and capability. Matters were therefore quickly arranged, and an appointment made for

the next day at the hotel, when Mr. Tyrrell was to give his final instructions.

"Now, are you sure you have all the fallals and wraps you want, my dear?" he said, when she was gone. "Don't stint yourself. I know you're a prudent slip of a girl, and I like prudence; but, whatever I may find out, I mean to look on you as a kinswoman, for I feel convinced we are of the same blood."

"I am more grateful to you than I can express," faltered Beatrice, her tears overflowing; "I will try to be a loving, useful daughter to you."

"That I believe," said the old man, with feeling.

* * * * * *

What a wonderful experience it was for Beatrice to cross the Channel!—to fly at express speed through the varying scenes between Calais and Marseilles, isolated from the people about her by the strange effect of not understanding a word they said! How thankful she felt to Mr. Tyrrell for his kind forethought in sending a trained companion with her! Alone, the journey would indeed have been a formidable undertaking; as it was, she found Mrs. Gilbert of the greatest use. She

spoke but little, save when spoken to, and then proved intelligent and even interesting. She had frequently travelled over the same route, and knew every point of interest on the road; moreover, she had more than the mere superficial knowledge gathered orally in hurried journeys.

It was early in the afternoon when Beatrice and her attendant reached Florence. The pleasure of recognising the somewhat potatoe-face of Denis, looking eagerly into the carriages as they steamed slowly along the platform to their halting-place, was indeed great after her long immersion among strange people, places, and tongues.

"Ah, sure, the young master will be jumping out of his skin with joy to see you again, miss!" exclaimed Denis, as he opened the carriage-door in haste. "He's outside, waitin' for ye, miss. An' it's pale and weary you are looking, and no wonder. This lady's along with you? Are these all the parcels ye have? Here, Gussipy, you take these! And please give your luggage-ticket to this man. He's from the hotel, and speaks a bit English; he is a decent sort of chap for a furriner."

Still talking, Denis handed them out with effusive care; while the tall, bearded, and decid-

edly graceful Guiseppe, doffing his hat with a profound bow, took the paper and disappeared with an air of importance.

Following Denis, Beatrice soon reached the carriage, over the side of which Val was leaning, his eager eyes watching the passengers as they streamed through the entrance; then stretching out his hands as he perceived Beatrice.

A gentleman was leaning against the carriage-door talking to him,—a man somewhat below middle height, broadly built, with sandy hair and laughing, light-blue eyes.

He stood back as Beatrice ran to greet Val, who, to her surprise, for he was not usually caressing, drew her down to kiss him.

The unusual warmth delighted her; she was, then, genuinely welcome.

"This is my cousin, Miss Verner," cried Val. "Bea, this is a new friend of mine, Mr. Lorrimer."

The gentleman raised his hat with an air of good breeding.

"We have been counting the hours till your arrival, I assure you, Miss Verner," he said, pleasantly.

Beatrice did not correct Val, though she

hardly yet allowed herself to believe in the relationship. Lorrimer opened the door and handed Beatrice and Mrs. Gilbert in. Denis stowed away the lighter *impedimenta* and mounted the box.

"I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow," said Lorrimer, and the carriage drove off.

"I say, Bea, how bad you are looking!" cried Val, with much concern; "but I *am* glad to see you, all the same. Oh, this is such a lovely place; it's a feast to go about in it! I wish gran' would let us stay here all the winter. He says it is too cold, but I don't believe it would do me a bit of harm. There is so much to see and to think about that I forget my aches and pains and the horrid weakness. Indeed, I am ever so much better. Now I shall have to show you everything, and that is even better than seeing them all for the first time myself. Have you ever been in Florence before?"—this suddenly to Mrs. Gilbert; for when Val was in good humour and not suffering pain, he was extremely polite and did not like to neglect anyone.

"Yes, sir; I have been here several times; it is my business to travel."

"And a jolly sort of business, too, if it didn't tire one so. Look, Beatrice! there's a beautiful church; that is S. Maria Novella, but it is spoiled with whitewash inside. We have quite a short way to go to the hotel; it looks over the river, and our rooms are on that side." Here he lifted his cap to a lady with white hair in an open carriage. "There's Lady Lorrimer; she is the mother of the man who was talking to me at the station. They are staying in our hotel. Some very pleasant people are staying there, and they are longing to see you, for I have been talking about you. Here we are! We must have luncheon, and then you ought to go to bed; you look dead beat."

While he spoke, the carriage stopped at the entrance of a handsome edifice, and Denis sprang down to lift Val into his invalid-chair, which was carried by a couple of men to Mr. Tyrrell's suite of rooms on the second story.

It was a delightful apartment, and Beatrice was thankful, after some refreshment, to retire to her pretty, comfortable apartment for the rest she so much needed.

* * * * * *

It was indeed a new life that now dawned

for Beatrice. The ease, the comfort, the fulfilment of all the wishes, the projects, she and Val formed, often made her long that her good and faithful sister might have enjoyed some of these pleasures before the curtain fell on the laborious, self-sacrificing drama of her existence. Sometimes she spoke of her to Val, who listened if he were in a good temper, but who was not interested, as she could not help perceiving. The nobility of such a character is a little above the comprehension of youth, which craves for light, colour, and picturesqueness.

At first Val hardly gave his recovered friend time to breathe. He hurried her from gallery to church, from palace to prison; and if not equal to accompany her himself, she was despatched under the charge of Mrs. Gilbert, who was a fairly capable cicerone, till Bea's eyes ached with looking and her mind was dazed by the profusion of new ideas which deluged it.

Besides these overwhelming occupations, several of Val's female acquaintance in the hotel called upon her. The young, crippled millionaire was rather a pet among the English and American ladies, who made friends with him in the corridors,

or stopped to speak with him as he sat in his carriage listening to the music in the Cascino and inhaling the perfume of the lovely flowers.

Mr. Lorrimer took it upon himself to remonstrate with Val on the surfeit of fine things which he forced upon "his cousin," as Beatrice was universally considered; but neither sight-seeing nor society could divert Bea's mind from its anxiety respecting the success of Mr. Tyrrell's search.

For more than a fortnight, the old man's letters, though regular and showing the deepest interest and satisfaction in the letters he received from Florence, made no allusion to the progress he was making. He began, however, to show uneasiness lest Val should stay too far into the winter at Florence. At last came a glimpse of light.

"I think I have got on the right track, and find I must hark back to the neighbourhood of London to follow it up. I don't think there is much doubt about our relationship, but I want to prove it beyond dispute; of this you shall hear more.

"A letter from Lynford tells me that he is to be in town on the 10th, when I must meet him to finish up our business. I am happy to say I dissuaded him from his yacht voyage to Australia. The attempt in such a craft would have been madness, and a larger vessel would have been too costly. He is therefore going to the south seas in the usual way, returning by Japan, and the Lord knows where!

"I hope all continues well with you. Val seems very happy. Keep him as quiet as you can. However well he may appear, he has no strength worth speaking of. God bless you, my child! Address your next to Parkins's care. I hope soon to sign myself your attached grand-uncle.

"JOHN TYRRELL."

"You may be sure it will all come right, Bea," cried Val, when he had read her letter, as well as one to himself. "It's funny how I always felt from the first as if you belonged to us. You were so plucky about Chang,—nasty little beast! he likes you better than me now,—and then you never gave yourself sentimental airs nor 'poor

dear'd' me, as some of the women here do. I hate them!"

"You are ungrateful, Val. They mean to be and they *are* kind, though they may not show it in the way you like. You are very impatient."

"And no wonder! Just look here!"—holding out his grandfather's letter. "Here's gran' insisting on our moving to Bordighera on or before the 12th! Why, you haven't seen a quarter of Florence, and Lorrimer wants to drive us up to Vallombrosa with Mrs. Griswold. It's rather a long drive, but I could stand it quite well. But the place I want to see is 'La Vernia,' ever since I read about that wonderful fellow, St. Francis of Assisi; I am afraid I could not manage it. No, Bea, I really cannot leave Florence on the 12th; it is so fine still."

"They say you cannot count much on the weather at this season; and, Val, would you not give up something for gran's sake?—he only lives for you; and you can come back in the spring to finish showing me everything. You know gran' never refuses you anything that is not bad for you."

"There is so little I can enjoy that it is cruel

to refuse me what I like, merely because he fancies it isn't good for me. I tell you that, for all his generosity and petting, gran' has a tyrannical temper, and you just butter him up by agreeing with everything he says. He is selfish and unkind sometimes," cried Val, thoroughly out of temper, —the usual effect of contradiction upon him. "I will *not* go on the 12th!"

"It is you who are selfish, Val," said Beatrice, gravely. "You will not sacrifice your fancies to please one to whom you owe so much. You can never be happy if you think always about yourself."

"Don't preach!" cried the boy, flushing angrily. "I am not selfish, but *you* are tiresome," and he struck the bell, which always stood on a table beside him, to summon Denis.

"I wish you would go away, Bea; you can be horridly disagreeable sometimes. Nobody contradicts me so much as you do, and you pretend to like me."

Here Denis appeared, but followed by Mr. Lorrimer, who was not an unfrequent visitor; but Val was too ruffled to speak civilly to him. Lorrimer—a frank, good-humoured young naval

lieutenant—had been very kind and helpful to the crippled boy, and not inexperienced in his variations of temper. He saw at a glance that at present it was east-northeast.

"Jolly day, isn't it?" was his first remark after greetings were exchanged. "I've come to ask if you feel up to our Vallombrosa expedition to-morrow."

"I'm not," said Val, sullenly. "I am not well enough to stay on in Florence; so, of course, I'm not fit for a ten-mile drive."

"Oh, Val! you said only a few minutes ago that one of the reasons you wanted to stay on here was to go to Vallombrosa," cried Beatrice.

"Why, what has put you out of sorts, youngster?" asked Lorrimer. "I'm afraid I must leave this delightful old place soon. The doctor, I am sorry to say, thinks my mother ought to go south before the weather grows cold, which it may do at the next change of the moon; so we must be off next week; that's the reason I want to make our excursion. You'll be game for a start at nine o'clock,—eh, Val, my boy?"

"No, I won't!" said Val, crossly; "I'm tired and done up now, and I'll go to my room."

He struck his bell again and began to roll his chair—which was so constructed that he could move it without assistance—towards the door, through which, as Denis opened it, he disappeared.

"Got out of bed on the wrong side?" said Lorrimer, a note of interrogation in his blue eyes.

"No. He is vexed at having to leave Florence."

"But *you* will come to-morrow?"

"Oh, yes, and so must Val. I daresay he will be very cross with me, but I shall persuade him."

"How the deuce can he be cross with you? You are a perfect angel to him."

"You see he is familiar with me, and he has been led to think that everyone has been created for his use. But he is really warm-hearted and generous. He will, I was going to say, grow out of all this, but, alas! he will never grow. It is the immense compassion we all have for him that makes us spoil him. I am sorry Lady Lorrimer is not so well."

"I don't know that she is worse. It is a measure of precaution, our going to Palermo. As your testy young relative has gone to sulk, I wish

you would come down and see my mother. She is rather tired and dull this morning; it does her good to talk to you."

And Beatrice consented.

As she anticipated, Beatrice succeeded in persuading Val, whose bad temper seldom lasted long, to join the expedition to Vallombrosa, which he thoroughly enjoyed. Their conductor, Mr. Lorrimer, was a kindly, good-humoured, attentive host to all his guests, but with a slightly perceptible balance in favour of Beatrice, whom he amused by his boyish vivacity and sailor-like frankness.

Though so extremely different from Lynford, he suggested him by force of contrast. It seemed to Beatrice that, as the poignancy of her grief wore off, the memory of the interview in which she thought he had asked her to be his wife came back to her more vividly, with a tinge of tenderness which had never mingled with her thoughts of him before. He must have loved her very much —he, proud, scornful, indifferent, as he was—to ask a simple, insignificant girl of lower rank and, worse still, only half educated to marry him,—to share his life and his fortunes, broken though

they were. She gradually began to wish she could have loved him and rewarded him, if her love would have been a reward. But it was weak and silly to let such thoughts dwell in her mind, so she chased them away for the moment; but they returned again and again.

The departure of Lady Lorrimer and her son did more to persuade Val of his grandfather's reasonableness in wishing to have him settled in warmer quarters before the winter was upon them than any arguments of either Beatrice or the faithful Denis. So another week saw the little party settled in pleasant quarters at Bordighera, where if the beauties of art were less abundant, those of nature were endless.

Beatrice had gladly availed herself of Mr. Tyrrell's permission, indeed recommendation, to retain the services of Mrs. Gilbert, who proved to be sensible and companionable, with a useful knowledge of Italy and Italians.

At last the business which had detained them in London was finally settled, and Tyrrell bade Lord Lynford a cordial good-bye, the former going to take formal possession of his new property, the latter sailing for Australia.

A few days later Beatrice received the following letter:

"My dear Beatrice,—I find that you *have* a right to this title, and have the greatest pleasure in giving it to you. For your own sake I am right glad to have you for a kinswoman, and, I confess, especially for my poor, dear lad, who will not now be utterly alone when I am taken from him, but have in you a kind and helpful cousin and sister to befriend him in the weariness which from time to time must be his lot. As you have a right to know, I will tell you the story of my search.

"In Dublin with some difficulty I found some relations of Fenton, the man my eldest sister married. He was a solicitor in a small way, and used to do a good deal of electioneering business when such employment was not the cleanest,—we were by no means distinguished people, my child. It seems my sister had a boy and a girl, and after nearly eight years of marriage her husband died, leaving her a trifle of money, to which a brother of ours, who is dead and gone, added some more, and my sister for some reason removed to London with her children. My informant said he be-

lieved the boy died young, but some years after the daughter appeared in Dublin as the wife of a young English officer, whose regiment was quartered there. Her name then was Newton. She went to see some of her father's people, taking with her a pretty child, her little daughter Honoria; she wrote to them after her return to England in 18—, when her husband had left the army. I even saw the letter, which was addressed from a place in Fulham.

"There I was greatly puzzled, for the house had changed hands several times; but at last I found an old lady, mother of a grocer long established in the neighbourhood, who remembered Captain and Mrs. Newton,—'very genteel people,' only unfortunately the captain was given to drink, and they were reduced in circumstances. He finally succumbed to this habit, and the wife did not long survive. They had a pretty daughter, who used to help in a school; then she went to teach the daughter of a widower, who married her. The old lady remembered the wedding. I went to the church she described, and in the register found the entry of your mother's marriage to William Verner. This is, I think, conclusive;

at any rate, *I* am satisfied, and I hope you are. Having given you this information, I would rather not again allude to the subject; it is full of pain for me; though some day I'll find courage to tell you my whole life. Anyhow you are, after Val, my nearest of kin, and you'll grow nearer and nearer my heart. I saw Lynford yesterday. He sails from Southampton to-day, and charged me to bid you and Val a hearty good-bye. He's a fine fellow. I hope to see you before the week is out; then we'll settle down for a pleasant winter, and gather health and strength to return home next spring.

"Home! Faith, it's many a long year since the word had so pleasant a sound to my old ears, for home isn't home when there isn't a woman in it.

"Your loving greatuncle,

"JOHN TYRRELL."

CHAPTER VIII.

"AT HOME."

SPRING of the next year was peculiarly mild and genial; and Val, who had improved greatly in health and consequently in temper, begged to be indulged by a few weeks' stay in Florence before quitting Italy. Florence was his favourite town; he revelled in its beauty, its galleries, its historical associations. The boy's mind was rapidly developing, and the pleasure of study shared by his cousin and friend grew more and more delightful as he increased in knowledge.

To Beatrice life seemed doubled in pleasure and interest. How often she wished in her heart that her dear, motherly sister could know how happy she was! how fortune had loaded her with good things which she had done so little to deserve.

With her granduncle she was absolutely at home and at ease; and one of the old man's

greatest pleasures was to lie back in his chair of an evening thinking dreamily while she sang his favourite airs; for he was a genuine lover of music, —simple music. He never tired of Irish melodies and one or two real barcarolles which had never flourished in opera.

Beatrice felt what a difference a few months' steady teaching had made in the strength and flexibility of her voice, though she never aimed at ornament or operatic airs.

But Tyrrell began to weary for his new, old English home, and Beatrice pointed out to Val that it would be selfish to detain him longer on the Continent.

A compromise, therefore, was effected, and the end of a beautiful April saw the party in Paris, where they rested for a fortnight to show Beatrice that lovely city, as she had only passed through it on her former journey.

London next arrested their homeward journey; but here Mr. Tyrrell parted from his young people, to be their *avant-courier* at the Hall and see that all things were ready for the arrival of the boy and girl for whom he lived.

The days which succeeded were amply and

pleasantly filled, for Val looked up his former drawing-master, who, in his turn, recommended a teacher of song to Beatrice; and then for the evenings there were new pieces at the theatres, and all things made smooth by the magic of money.

But Beatrice, too, began to long for Lynford. She loved the country, yet she greatly enjoyed London; but there was a secret charm about the old place which drew her heart irresistibly.

Since their return to London she found it more difficult to keep the memory of Lord Lynford from haunting her. It was curious that the farther she floated down the stream of time, the more vividly his image came back to her. When all was dark, when she was poor and lonely, he was ready to take her to his heart, to love and cherish her. It was most extraordinary; and even though merely an impulse, it was a kind and generous one. She wondered what had become of him, as no tidings had reached them since they had parted in London, six months before. Should she ever see him again? She felt that the meeting would be trying and full of pleasurable excitement.

It was a lovely May evening when Beatrice and Val drew near Lynbourne and their journey's

end. Beatrice thought of the wide difference between her first arrival there and the present one,—her luxurious home and assured position.

"Look, Bea!" cried Val; "there's the bay and Lynford woods! It is lovely here,—as lovely, in its way, as anything we have seen abroad. The country on the Continent is always a bit melancholy, I fancy; but there's a look of comfort and cultivation and security about English country that makes one hopeful and contented. I'm glad to come back. Are you?"

"Oh, yes, Val! and I think gran' will be so happy and busy here. We must never keep him so long away again. He wants real work,—idleness is misery to him; and he has so many schemes for the people on the estate. He seems to love the place already. It was a happy day for the tenantry when he bought Lynford."

"Well, the chaps before him had no money; it is very hard to do good without money. If Lord Lynford had plenty he would have been generous enough. He is a very fine fellow, *I* think; and what a figure!" added the poor boy, with a sigh.

"But he is not at all handsome," observed Beatrice.

"He is a good deal better-looking than many a handsome man, and you are rather ungrateful, Bea, to talk like that. I always fancied he thought *you* very nice; he used to look—— Halloo, Bea! there are the sands; there is the place where you saved poor old Chang! That was a good day for us both, wasn't it?"

Here the train dashed into a tunnel, sea and sands being lost to sight for a minute or two, when they emerged in the station. Here they found "gran'" awaiting them with a very smart omnibus and pair of dark roans, with coachman and footman of the most approved pattern.

Never had Beatrice seen the old man look so well. There was a serene light in his eyes; a soft, satisfied expression in the lines of his face. With what warmth he welcomed his "children," as he considered both!

Bea's quick observation perceived the deference with which porters, station-master, and even one or two gentlemen of countrified aspect saluted the squire of Lynford Hall, and she rejoiced that

her dear, large-hearted uncle should be treated as he deserved. What wonderful changes the last nine months had brought about! How tame and colourless invention was to real life!

The luggage was soon on the roof of the vehicle, and they were driving at a good pace towards their beautiful new home.

"Val looks pounds better," said his grandfather, looking affectionately at him. "He is a different creature from the pale, sickly lad I took away last autumn. We have everything in apple-pie order. It was a capital idea, keeping Mrs. Dobbs and the butler; they give me a lesson in high life every day of the week. Faith, they were a trifle too grand for me at first, but I'm getting used to it; one gets used to everything. Mrs. Dobbs will be of great use to you, Bea, my darlin'; she'll show you your way about the fine old house."

"I shall be very thankful for her guidance, gran'. Yes, it *is* wonderful how soon we get used to things, especially pleasant things. I have grown quite accustomed to a carriage instead of a three-penny 'bus, though probably a change the other way would not be so readily adopted."

"Has nobody heard anything of Lord Lynford?" asked Val.

"Not that I know of. I fancy our neighbours intend being very neighbourly. The Dacre Court and Bloxham Park ladies have called already, and a lot of the men round about. They want me to join the county hunt; of course, the season is over, but I'll be glad to subscribe, and maybe I might even follow the hounds a bit. I can tell you few men have ridden harder than I have in the old days,—ay, up to the time I set my face homewards,—for all you may think me an old fogy, — Miss Beatrice."

"I only think you the dearest gran' that ever lived," said Beatrice, with a sunny smile, as she took his brown, sinewy hand and pressed it against her soft cheek.

"Oh, gran'," exclaimed Val, "I want you to ask Mr. Allen down here. Later on, you know. He wants to paint Beatrice and sketch. He did not tell me so, but I know he does. I don't think he sold his picture that is in the Academy. Then I could study with him. I said I should make you write; you will, won't you?"

"Aha! I see I shall not be able to call my house my own," said Tyrrell, in high good-humour. "But let him come, my boy. These young painters have a rugged climb up-hill, and I'm glad to give one of them a leg up if I can."

This cheerful talk shortened the way, and they soon passed the lodge gates. Beatrice did not speak again till they drew up at the entrance of the Hall. Her heart was full of memories. How vividly she recalled her first visit! The well-bred hospitality of the noble owner, the dry little lawyer, the sort of revelation the house, its contents, and its surroundings were to her of a life so far above out of her reach, and of which she could have formed no conception had not accident been the "open sesame" for her into a new world.

Quite a train of servants were in the hall to receive them. Beatrice recognised the solid, common-sense face of Mrs. Dobbs, and, with a pleasant smile, shook hands with her, saying, "I am so glad to find you here!"

Old Tyrrell watched the little scene with satisfaction, one of his own best means of success having been tact in the management of his employés.

How lovely and fresh the old house looked with bowls and vases of flowers everywhere, the wide-open windows admitting the light breeze, laden with the breath of field and wood and garden!

Again Beatrice sat down to dinner in the small dining- or breakfast-room, and almost expected to see Lynford take his place at the head of the table.

Some similar association of ideas seemed to have been working in the master's mind, for as soon as his glass was filled with champagne he raised it, saying, "Lord Lynford's very good health, and I wish he was with us to-day."

"So do I," cried Val, heartily. "I suppose he will come back some time."

"I hope so," returned Mr. Tyrrell, emphatically, and then lapsed into silence.

It was a happy, tranquil evening. Val went all over the house and declared himself not a bit tired; and Beatrice took her own attendant, Mrs. Gilbert, to see her pretty bed- and dressing-rooms, where every convenience for study and writing were set forth.

* * * * *

The sale of Lynford Hall, and the arrival of the Australian millionaire to take possession, created much interest and excitement in the county society. Lord Lynford, who in the early days of his succession had been immensely popular, had lost ground of late years.

His errors were many. He threatened to be a confirmed bachelor; he was a constant absentee; he did not spend enough money in the county. There were doubtful reports of his doings and associates in London, and he turned a cold shoulder to the advances of the Heran Hill people, whose only child, a daughter, was sure of a very fine fortune in "silver, gold, and lands." In fact, no one was surprised that he was driven to sell his family estates to an Australian "digger." "One of the lowest of the low, my dear," as one dowager whispered to another in the interval of seclusion, while the gentlemen lingered over their claret in the dining-room. "The yellow clay still clinging to his boots. Just fancy such a man lording it over the home of the Lynford Claverings! They were always such an overbearing set. Nothing has really gone right with them since that wicked old baron died without a legitimate heir,

forty or fifty years ago, and the great Lynford lawsuit set the county by the ears."

"It is very sad to see how a young man will throw away all his chances here and hereafter as poor Lord Lynford has," purred the other, who was of the comfortable pussy-cat order.

Then came the reports of those adventurous spirits who led the van of the men callers at the Hall.

The verdict on the whole was favourable.

"At all events there's nothing of the tradesman about him. Open-handed enough, and knows a good horse when he sees one."

In spite of this favourable beginning the spring and early summer were peculiarly tranquil and idyllic. Everyone in Woodshire who respected himself or herself went up to town for a portion, more or less, of the season, and after to Trouville or Scarborough or some German bath, so that the country-houses were generally deserted till near the shooting season.

This was, nevertheless, a very enjoyable time to Val and Beatrice, especially the latter, who roamed about the rocks and woods of the picturesque old place and made herself perfectly

familiar with all the nooks, the paths, the recesses of hill-side and moorland.

Then her granduncle gave her a pretty low phaeton and pair of small but spirited ponies; learning to drive them was a delightful diversion, and later the joy of acting charioteer to Val. Then came the artist Allen's visit. While gran', anxious to be impartial to both his favourites, found a very clever musician in the organist of the old parish church, who was engaged to inspect Bea's vocal practice. So the days sped by with such harmonious tranquillity that Beatrice was almost frightened by the extraordinary ease and prosperity of her life. The only cat's-paw that ever ruffled its smooth surface was an occasional burst of irritability and unreasonableness on Val's part, but these were less frequent than formerly. Bea was really fond of the boy and profoundly compassionate towards him, but she did not let him enslave her, and therefore acquired some ascendancy over him. Nevertheless she often liked to steal away for a ramble all alone, when her feet were apt to take her away to the old tower that looked out over the sea.

How vividly every incident of the day on

which she first visited the Hall came back to her mind as she descended the path leading to the moat, and recalled her first *tête-à-tête* conversation with Lynford!

That he should be at the trouble of making himself so agreeable had surprised her in a passing fashion; then she remembered her growing wonder at the charm which pervaded his manner, at the almost tender care with which he had assisted her down the steep path to the little harbour below. Is it possible that even then something of a lover's regard for her was forming itself in his heart? She would not feel so much fear of him as she used were they to meet now. In short, though her life was as happy as a girl's could be, Lord Lynford's presence would be an enormous addition to her happiness.

Of course since the sad time when he asked her to be his wife she had seen a great deal, and mixed more in society, and men's society especially, than in all her life before, and she therefore found less that was alarming in his style and manner; still, she felt that as a lover he would be formidable, even while the memory of the sudden close embrace in which he had held her for a

moment thrilled her with a strange, sweet sense of her own attraction, of the curious power which her fear of Lynford gave him over her. Where was he wandering now while strangers were enjoying his beautiful old home? Should she never see him again? Would he be a homeless wanderer always? She had sat long on the little pier, lulled by the lap of the wavelets, half thinking, half dreaming, when she was startled by the joyous bark of a fine tan collie, one of Val's numerous pets, who had apparently come in search of her, and had now to be rebuked for his rather overpowering caresses.

She rose and looked at her watch. "Nearly four o'clock!" she exclaimed. "I did not think I had lingered here so long. Come, Tyke; we must go back; gran' and Val will be home by this time."

Beatrice roused herself from her dreams, ashamed of her indulgence in them, and resolving for the fiftieth time to banish these useless idle fancies.

Mr. Tyrrell and Val had driven to the country town on some errand connected with the home farm, and had returned a little fatigued by the heat's glare, and longing for a cup of tea.

They had scarcely settled themselves in the welcome shelter of the library when the butler announced with much solemnity that Mrs. Dacre, a gentleman, and another lady were in the drawing-room.

"Hey!" exclaimed Tyrrell, "a lady's visit is a serious matter! Where is Miss Verner? This call is for her."

"Miss Verner is out, sir,—out in the grounds. Shall I send and look for her?"

"By all means!" The old man rose to go and receive his guests.

"Do not bring them here, gran'," said Val. "I'm tired, and I hate fine ladies."

Meantime, Beatrice was a little surprised to see an open carriage standing at the door, as their visitors had been few and far between, and guessing that the visit must be for herself, she laid aside her hat in the hall and went straight to the drawing-room.

A lady whom she remembered having seen with Mrs. Garston just before they parted sat on the sofa facing the door, a gentleman stood on the hearth-rug,—a gentleman whom she at once recognised as Lorrimer,—and a tall lady was

standing in one of the windows beside Mr. Tyrrell, who was pointing out a vista he had had cleared, which gave a pretty peep of the bay and the irregular picturesque little town of Lynbourne as it lay basking in the afternoon sun.

As Beatrice, informed by the butler, addressed herself with quiet self-possession to the lady on the sofa with a polite "Mrs. Dacre, I believe," holding out her hand at the same time, the tall figure in the window turned, and she saw it was Mrs. Garston.

"I only returned last week," said Mrs. Dacre, "and have not had a moment to myself since; but I have wanted so much to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance."

Mrs. Dacre had charming, gracious manners, and would caress you one day and cut you the next with equal facility.

"You are very good. I am so glad I was at home! Ah, Mrs. Garston, I had no idea you were in Woodshire," and she crossed over to shake hands with her ex-mistress, as she considered her, pleasantly, but not warmly.

Mrs. Garston contemplated her dismissed

secretary with undisguised astonishment; she was keenly alive to the great though subtle change which had come to her. Her dress bore the cachet of an artistic modiste, the material, black, silky, gauzy stuff, was, her experienced eye told her, costly, as were her jet ornaments. The freshness of her whole toilette, the skill with which her beautiful hair was dressed, bespoke the care of a deft lady's maid. She looked somehow taller, more set up, and though admitting her good points grudgingly, she owed to herself that the natural easy, composed air, the graceful carriage of the once half-despised secretary, looked well suited to the beautiful room in which she received her visitors.

"Well, Miss Verner," she exclaimed, "this *is* a transformation scene! You can hardly know yourself! Why, it is little more than a year since you and I first visited this delightful old place, when you thought yourself highly privileged to be allowed even to look at it, and now, behold, you rule here as mistress!"

Beatrice smiled and coloured. "Yes, it is a strange metamorphose; but I do not claim to be mistress of the house, Mrs. Garston. I only enjoy,

and it is more than I ever expected, the delightful home my uncle gives me under his roof."

"I don't know what you claim, my jewel," said Tyrrell, quietly. "I only know I consider you mistress of my house."

"I am afraid you hardly remember me, Miss Verner," said the gentleman, who until now had kept rather in the background. He was rather below middle height, broadly and strongly built, with a wide brow, an honest, simple face and light-blue, laughing eyes.

"I do, indeed, remember you, Mr. Lorrimer," said Beatrice, with a ready smile of welcome; "it is not so long since we parted. I had no idea you were in this part of the country."

"I only came the day before yesterday; my cousin, Mrs. Dacre, has been good enough to take me in. We have had a bad time of it at home, as I daresay you have heard——"

"I didn't know you had met," said Mrs. Dacre; "you only mentioned Mr. Tyrrell."

"The greater contains the lesser," said Mrs. Garston, not too pleasantly.

Here tea was brought in, and Beatrice went to "pour out." Lorrimer followed her. "And

where is my playfellow, Val? Not absent, I hope?" asked Lorrimer.

"No; he has had a long drive this afternoon and is resting. But I am sure he would like to see you. I will go and ask him."

"Your grandson, I presume?" said Mrs. Dacre to her host.

"Yes; they were together a good deal in Italy last winter," he returned, as Beatrice left the room.

"I hope he is stronger?" said Lorrimer.

"He is, I am thankful to say. I begin to hope he may stand the winter here."

"We have always considered Lynford very mild. You know poor Mr. Protheroe, your rector, says it is the only spot in England where *he* can winter," observed Mrs. Dacre.

Here Beatrice returned.

"Val will be delighted to see you," she said. "I will take you to him."

Lorrimer immediately rose.

"And me?" asked Mrs. Garston. "We used to be great friends. May I not come, too?"

"I am sorry to say no," replied Beatrice, a faint, wild rose colour mounting in her cheek;

"but we are obliged to guard against excitement, even pleasurable excitement."

"Oh, very well. I did not suppose I was such a disturbing element," said Mrs. Garston, with irrepressible ill humour.

Beatrice did not reply, and Lorrimer followed her out of the room.

"Part of my errand to-day, my dear Mr. Tyrrell," began Mrs. Dacre, as soon as the door was closed, "besides the pleasure of making Miss Verner's acquaintance, was to secure your and her company for Wednesday, the sixteenth,—to-morrow week. It is the last day of the Lynchester Cattle Show, and we generally have the leading members of the Agricultural Society to dine with us."

CHAPTER IX.

THE RETURN OF THE WANDERER.

MR. POUNCEBY sat at his knee-hole table in his private room writing busily one warm but dull day at the end of August. He was trying to wind up certain matters which needed his master's hand before leaving town for his long holiday and was in rather a touchy mood.

"Well, what do *you* want?" he exclaimed, sharply, as a clerk put in his head.

"Can you see Lord Lynford, sir? He is down-stairs."

"Yes, of course; show him up," returned the little lawyer, briskly, his countenance brightening as he rose from his seat and advanced towards the door.

"Ha! my dear Lord Lynford, this is indeed a pleasant surprise. I did not expect to see you for a couple of months yet."

"Nor did I," returned Lynford, smiling, and

shaking hands cordially with him. "I had hardly sent off my last letter, however, when I was seized with an extraordinary desire to return,—a most unreasonable whim,—for I had nearly settled to run down the coast from St. Francisco to Valparaiso, and cross the mountains somehow or other to the salt marshes and pampas at the other side and ride to Montevideo. However, I yielded to the impulse, and here I am."

"I am heartily glad you did; I was growing uneasy lest you should become a confirmed wanderer, which is a useless, worthless sort of life. There are plenty of chances here, if you would look for them. Why, you haven't an ounce of superfluous flesh, and you're as brown as a berry! You are looking older, too,—excuse me."

"Don't be too complimentary," said Lynford, laughing. "I cannot say *you* look particularly brown; you have the regular London pasty tint. You want fresh air, Pounceby."

"No doubt; I hope to be off on Monday. We have taken a little shooting-lodge on the edge of a Yorkshire moor; you must do us the honour of spending a few days under our roof."

"I shall be delighted. Now tell me the news.

I only landed yesterday afternoon, at Liverpool, and did not reach town till eight o'clock; so I have not seen anyone. How is old Tyrrell going on?"

"First-rate! He has taken ten per cent. off most of the rents, is building a lot of capital cottages, has added a wing to the old school-house, and thoroughly repaired it; then he is running a line of rails from the big quarry and improving the old pier at—what's the name of that little port? oh, Portcross! Quite good-sized coasting higher craft put in there for stones now, to build a seawall up for the London and Lynchester Railway. He is a wonderfully energetic fellow. I fancy there's a change already all about Lynford,—more work, better wages."

"Ah! there's some sense in spending money after that fashion," said Lynford, thoughtfully. "It's a great misfortune to a tenantry when the landlord is impecunious. My people have changed for the better. Have you been at Lynford since Tyrrell took possession?"

"No. Mr. Tyrrell was good enough to ask me down, but, in truth, I did not care to see another in your place."

"I should not imagine you guilty of such sentimentality," returned Lynford, smiling; "I have no such feeling myself. If Tyrrell invites me I shall accept."

"I met Dacre, of Dacre Court, at the end of the session, and he told me the county had taken very kindly to the new master of Lynford Hall. He is a first-rate horseman, it seems, and a good shot. That sort of thing goes down with the squires. Then, well-lined pockets are a great recommendation. By the way, your handsome friend, Mrs. Garston, has been cutting a great dash this season. She took a fine house in South Kensington, furnished it in grand style, was presented at the second drawing-room by that knowing old peeress, the Marchioness of B——, and the society papers were full of her entertainments, her beauty, her dress, her rumoured marriage with this or that penniless peer. Dacre told me she was to be one of their house-party this month for the Woodshire Agricultural Show."

"She must be very happy," said Lynford, absently.

"I hear there's a romantic story about that nice girl, Miss—Miss—I forget her name,—who

lived with Mrs. Garston; you remember," continued Pounceby. "Mr. Tyrrell found out she is his niece or granddaughter, or some such thing, and he has adopted her. They say he will give her a handsome fortune; so all the young Woodshire squires are on the scent, as you can fancy."

"The world seems to have gone on apace since I went out into the wilderness. Thanks for all this gossip; now for business," and Lord Lynford proceeded to go exhaustively into his affairs, giving a semi-serious account of his new life and economical lines, and enquiring into the condition of sundry small investments which he had made before leaving England, chiefly on Pounceby's recommendation. The report was satisfactory, and, on his part, Pounceby was truly glad to observe the change in his favourite client's views and ways.

"If only he could find a wealthy wife who would secure his fortune and give him the chance of distinguishing himself in politics! He has brains enough for anything," was his flattering mental verdict on the dispossessed nobleman.

After a long and confidential talk and a promise to dine with him that evening at his club, Pounceby let Lynford go and went to work

more diligently than before to make up for lost time.

Lynford sallied forth and made his way to Regent Street. He was surprised to find how pleased he was to be in "famous London town" once more; to hear his own language about him. Yet the streets were dusty, dreary, empty, and he thought he would be glad to have a day in the Lynford woods with dog and gun; to feel the soft sea-air play on his brow, and to look once more into Beatrice Verner's eyes.

It was strange that he could not put her out of his mind,—not for long. At times, when interested by new and strange places or excited by sport, she ceased to flit across his mental vision; but directly he was alone or thoughtful or asleep, she stood before him,—distinct, impressive, with her pathetic look, her soft, pale face, as he had last seen her, or with the changing colour, the distressed expression she wore when she rejected him; and an intense longing to see her again, to win her, to see the tenderness of love—real, passionate love—creep into those sweet, truthful eyes of hers, would thrill his heart. But this was all folly; he would never attempt such a conquest.

The knowledge of his own unworthiness, of what his intention really was, would make a coward of him, and then he would be sure to fail; besides, he was a poor man.

"If you please, sir, Mrs. Garston wishes to speak to you," and a touch on his shoulder roused him from his thoughts. Looking up, he saw a very first-class footman.

"Mrs. Garston! Where?"

The man pointed to an elegant victoria, drawn up at the door of a famous *modiste,* in which sat a richly-dressed lady, whom Lynford recognised.

"Why, where have you come from?" she cried, stretching out her hand to him. "We fancied you hunting grislies, or diving for coral in the south seas. And what have you been doing to yourself? You must have caught the complexion of the North American Indians, if such a thing is catching; and you are ever so much thinner."

"Yes, I am in splendid condition. And you, my dear Mrs. Garston, you are more dazzling than ever. What an immense success you have had! Wild rumours of the utter subjugation of a whole court, the fascination of numberless victims, reached me at the ends of the earth."

"Ah, *farceur!*" cried Mrs. Garston, shaking her head, "how false you are! If there is a grain of sincerity left in you, come back to my little home and have a cup of tea. Then we can have a nice long chat. I have heaps of Woodshire news, and I want to hear yours."

Though Lynford's first feeling on recognising the handsome widow was decided annoyance, some impulse induced him to accept her invitation. He took his place beside her, and drove away to her dainty abode in South Kensington.

Waverly Crescent, where she had chosen her house, was more pretty than grand, with a large garden occupying the space in front, to which two or three large old trees gave a sylvan aspect. The mansion was not on a large scale, but charmingly decorated and luxurious.

"You see my little place at a disadvantage," said Mrs. Garston, as they crossed the hall to a morning room at the back, where stained-glass windows shut out any ugliness which may have existed in the rear. "But I am only here for a few days *en route* for Trouville, where Lady B—— and I are going to keep house together. What

an uncomfortable fatiguing day it is!" she continued, throwing herself into an easy-chair, "and how detestable London is when 'out of town'!"

"You have a charming house," said Lynford, taking his stand in masculine fashion on the hearth-rug, although the grate was empty. "Just the sort of home I could imagine your organising, full of beauty and replete, as auctioneers would say, with every comfort."

Mrs. Garston laughed. "At least," she said, "I can offer you a really good cup of tea, if you care for such a simple beverage."

"Simple? I should call it complicated. Yes, I have learned to like tea extremely. I drank a good deal of it in Australia, also in Japan, and elsewhere."

"Now tell me what you have been doing in all these long months."

"Oh, there has been a certain monotony in the variety. I have been chiefly sailing, riding, repenting, and economising."

"What a list!" cried Mrs. Garston. "And which was the most disagreeable, my poor pilgrim?"

"Repenting," was the immediate answer.

"Well, I should imagine 'economising' by far the worst."

"By no means. I am surprised to find how much one can do perfectly well without. But the humiliation of repentance, of perceiving what an infernal ass one has been *is* uncommonly disagreeable."

"Still, though you have a more ascetic air than formerly, you really look better,—brighter, I mean."

"Possibly. You see I am delightfully free from debts, duties, and £ *s. d.*"

"The two first may be a good riddance, but the last is always a loss."

"Certainly one needs about twopence halfpenny in one's pocket to make a jingle with the latch-key; beyond that is superfluity."

"The last sentiment I should expect from a grand seigneur like yourself."

"An exceedingly small seigneur at present. Come, Mrs. Garston, I have told you my news, now let me have yours."

Mrs. Garston sighed and cast down her eyes. "If I said I have been trying to make bricks without straw you would laugh at me. Yet there has

been a good deal of that sort of work in my life since we parted. Society has been very nice and friendly, and you know what a high value I put on success in London. Well, I have succeeded, I may say so, and I find it is not worth the candle one consumes to attract it. The women have copied my dresses and damned my character to the best of their ability, and several out at elbows Peers have done me the honour of trying to patch up their fortunes with mine."

"I would not have anything to do with any of them," said Lynford, in a severe tone of sensible friendliness. "You are ever so much better off by yourself."

"That I believe. But I am only human, after all; and loneliness is—well, very lonely. Don't suppose I am avaricious. I refused these noblemen with frayed elbows because they did not attract me. I could sacrifice much to secure the companionship of a man I loved, Lynford," she concluded, in lower tones and with a melting glance.

"I am quite sure you could," he returned, with a kind of cordiality which was rather maddening. "I am sure there is no coldness in your heart—or in your blood."

Mrs. Garston gave him a quick glance, flushing deeply as she did so.

"I have just come up from Woodshire," she resumed. "I have been staying at Dacre Court, where they have had some solid diversion in the shape of a cattle show. I went over with Mrs. Dacre to call on—who *do* you think? Little Miss Verner! It made me sick to see those bush-ranging people squatting in that beautiful old Hall, and my ex-employee doing mistress of the house, —not badly, I assure you. Heavens, what a metamorphose artistic milliners and dressmakers can create! You remember she was a commonplace, insignificant-looking chit of a girl? Well, I assure you she looked quite *distingué,* even pretty."

"I can quite believe it, Mrs. Garston. *You* may remember I never thought her commonplace or plain," returned Lynford, quickly.

Something in his voice and manner startled his hearer, and seemed to reveal the reason of sundry brief passages in the past which had puzzled her for a moment at the time of their occurrence.

Could Lynford be so blind, so besotted as to

have been caught by the sort of originality the girl certainly had,—a man accustomed to beauty and fascination and temptation as he had been?

A kind of moral earthquake seemed to tear fissures in her soul and shake her composure to its foundations. Hitherto her one consolation was that, if Lynford had grown indifferent to herself, he evidently cared for no other woman. No; it was impossible; but the impossibility did not allay the sudden concentration of hatred which hardened her heart against the detested companion.

With a strong effort she recovered self-possession, though there was change in her voice.

"Of course, you have heard the romantic story of old Tyrrell discovering a long-lost grandniece or grandchild in the charming young orphan?"

"Yes; Mr. Tyrrell wrote me an account of his search for proofs and its success in the only letter I had from him during my travels."

"And you believe it?"

"Why should I not? Everything is possible in the history of a man who has broken with his people for fifty years and more."

"No doubt," said Mrs. Garston, with a sweet

smile; "also it would be an admirable screen for some other relations, which *we* know are not impossible."

A dead silence followed this vile speech. Lynford's eyes lit up with the pale light which always had a deadly look, and he laughed a laugh not pleasant to hear. "Which *we* know!" he repeated. "Pray do not honour me by so high a classification. It is hard to say what is impossible, and probably what seems so, chiefly depends on the gauge our own nature supplies; to me the delicate suggestion of your speech *is* an impossibility."

"Dear me, I am quite ashamed of myself. How wicked I must be!" cried Mrs. Garston, playfully hiding her face with outstretched fingers. "However, there may be a happy solution to all doubts and suggestions. Young Lorrimer, Sir Edward Lorrimer's eldest son, who was one of the Dacre Court party, seems a good deal smitten, and I believe there were some love-making episodes in Italy last winter, when Lorrimer was there with his mother; and when we called, the gallant sailor —Lorrimer is in the navy—was taken off to interview that disagreeable, peevish cripple, while *we*

were left to make conversation with the affectionate grandfather. A few days after the Hall people dined at the Court, and Lorrimer was most attentive, while our charming *ingénue* treated him with the same sweet, sisterly frankness *you* admired so much."

"Yes; her manners are remarkably good," replied Lynford, with a provoking air of calm conviction. "Young Lorrimer will be in luck to get so nice a wife."

"Especially as the dear granduncle will come down handsomely to clench so happy an arrangement of all irregularities."

"I'm sure he will, whatever the reason," said Lynford, rising. "And, now that we have poured our mutual confidences into each other's sympathising bosoms, I must go. I have already entrenched on an engagement of some importance."

"But, Lynford," rather eagerly, "will you not dine with me to-day or to-morrow?"

"A thousand thanks! I shall not be long in town, and every day is engaged," he returned.

"Indeed! That is remarkable, considering what a desert town is," said Mrs. Garston, sharply.

"You see I am very popular," replied Lynford, taking up his hat. "Good-bye, Mrs. Garston. We are not likely to meet for a long time, as I shall be in some savage land by the time you return from Trouville."

"It is good-bye really, then?"

"Yes, really." A slight hand-pressure, and he was gone.

"What a spiteful devil!" mused Lynford, as he walked towards the Brompton Road reflectively, and he tried to picture to himself the new life into which Beatrice had passed. What more probable than her marriage with a young fellow fresh and unspoiled like herself, who could give the best of his heart, the best of himself, as an equivalent for what she could bestow on him? "Your world-seared knowing ones may sneer at such sentimental fancies, but there's truth in them,—a deuced deal more truth than in the philosophy of artificial life. I trust in God this young Lorrimer is a good fellow. If she marries him, how heartily and tenderly she will love him! Well, I don't deserve such affection, but I would have appreciated it as few could,—ay, and clung to her through life, ceremony or no ceremony. I'd like

to see Beatrice once more. It would be a bitter-sweet—to say nothing of the temptation to throttle the young lover—if I noticed any marks of liking on her side. Whatever my failings, I have always been open and above board; now accident has betrayed me into profound hypocrisy. In the eyes of Beatrice I am a fine, generous, chivalrous fellow, ready to break down the artificial barriers of caste; whereas *I* know I am a bit of a sneak, ready to hedge my book on the race of life by throwing the risk on her and securing the odds for myself. Well, I am no worse than other men. But why might I not be a trifle better? Anyhow, I feel ashamed to look Beatrice in the eyes again. Sweet eyes! I long to see them once more. Happy the man who may be able to read 'I love you' in them."

* * * * * *

Pounceby enjoyed his dinner that evening extremely. When Lynford chose to take the trouble he could be a delightful companion, and he was fond of the dry little lawyer. The good things provided were also very good, and Pounceby before long took a halcyon view of life and the future.

When at last he remembered to look at his watch, he exclaimed at the flight of time, and said he could not reach his suburban home before midnight.

As they passed a table where a gentleman, who had come in very late, and still sat playing with the dessert, he rose and said, "Lord Lynford, I believe."

"Ah! Admiral Vigors!" he returned. "Very glad to see you! Did not know you were ashore."

"I only hauled down my flag a week ago, and am going up to Scotland to-morrow."

"I shall come back directly, when I have seen my friend off," said Lynford, and passed on. Having made an appointment for the next day with Pounceby he returned to his acquaintance, when they had a pleasant talk over their reminiscence of former meetings when the admiral was in command of the North American station. Before parting, after they had risen from table, Lynford asked, "Do you know anything of a young fellow called Lorrimer of your service."

"Lorrimer," repeated the admiral, trying to recall the name. "Oh!—ah, yes. He was second

lieutenant on board the 'Cynthia.' A very promising young officer and a nice boy. Sorry to say he is heir to a baronetcy and a large fortune. So he is sure to chuck the service as soon as the romance of the thing wears off, unless indeed there's a chance of fighting."

"Then this Lorrimer bears a good character?"

"First-rate! I don't fancy he is a saint, but he is a thorough gentleman; comes of a good stock too."

"Well, good-night. I suppose you are not making any stay in England? You are an inveterate wanderer."

"Just at present I am quite without plans. Hope to meet you soon again. Good-night."

Lynford's last waking thought was, "It is evident that Lorrimer is the right sort."

As he said, Lynford was quite without a plan, and though he had various invitations, for he was a keen sportsman and a favourite with men, none of these tempted him, and he was exceedingly sick of the empty, dusty, shabby metropolis. His indecision, however, was brought to an end a couple of days later by the following letter:

"DEAR LORD LYNFORD,—I have just heard of your return, and send you a word of welcome. All's well with us, only my poor boy does not gather much strength.

"I should like to see you again, especially as I have a communication to make about which I have long hesitated. I wonder if it would give you pain or pleasure to stay with us in your old home? There is no question as to the pleasure a visit from you would give us, still, I shall be quite ready to run up to town and see you if you prefer it, so settle the question as you like. I had a shooting party here last week,—a new experience for me,—and devilish bad shots some of the men are. They are all gone now, and I find the fatigue and excitement of the whole affair was too much for Val, so you will only find our quiet selves, if that is not too dull a lookout. Val is highly delighted at the notion of seeing you. He and my dear niece desire many messages which I forget. Send me your ultimatum soon.

"Yours sincerely,

"JOHN TYRRELL."

To which a reply by return said,—

"Many thanks for your kind invitation, which I accept with unmixed pleasure. I will be with you on Thursday, by the six-fifteen train.

"Best salaam to Miss Verner and your grandson.

"Always yours truly,

"LYNFORD."

CHAPTER X.

"AS A STRANGER IN THE LAND."

It seemed strange enough to be going as a guest to what had been his own house; but, as he had said more than once, Lynford had no early, boyish associations with the Hall,—no real home memories,—and he saw rather the comic than the sentimental side of the position.

His host met him on his arrival and drove him up to the Hall in a dog-cart, keeping the raking chestnut which drew it well in hand and at a good pace.

The old man looked hale and well. His expression was brighter and more peaceful than when Lynford saw him last. How richly beautiful the country looked! The woods were beginning to put on their gorgeous autumnal dress; the sky and sea were brilliantly blue, and the soft salt air breathed health into the lungs and vigour into the veins. But Lynford took small heed of these

things; he was possessed with the prevalent idea that in a few minutes more he would be face to face with Beatrice and hold her hand in his. He did not think the near approach of this meeting would have made his pulses beat so quickly. "Am I growing younger or weaker?" he asked himself, even while he observed to his host how well the crops looked and exclaimed at the number of new houses in progress of construction at Lynbourne.

Never did the old Hall seem so charming. The hand of a wealthy master was visible in all the well-kept details, and Lynford's old butler received him with a welcome that was evidently genuine.

"Come along!" cried Tyrrell; "we'll find the children in their work-room, where they are as happy as doves. I can't help classing them together, though Bea is every inch a woman, and a sensible woman into the bargain."

As he spoke he conducted his visitor up a short, narrow flight of stairs which led to a corner room with an oriel window, which occupied an intermediate stage between the first and second stories.

Here were easels and drawing-materials, a

turning-lathe, globes, books, plaster casts, and many other means and appliances of work and study.

Val was sitting at the table, writing, in his ingeniously contrived invalid's chair, the back of which could be raised or lowered at will; and Beatrice was putting some flowers in a large, deep-blue china bowl which fitted into an ebony stand in the window.

"Here, Bea, Val! here's Lord Lynford!" said Mr. Tyrrell, opening the door.

Val stretched out his hand, exclaiming, "I am *so* glad you have come!" while Beatrice dropped her flowers and came forward a few paces, her clear eyes uplifted with a look of pleasure to his, and a deep blush passing over her cheek, then leaving it very pale.

This flitting blush sent a wild thrill through Lynford's heart. She remembered his avowal, his brief but close embrace. She was not out of sympathy with him.

"I am very glad to see you," was her simple but hearty greeting, and she left her hand in his for an instant longer than was necessary for ceremony.

"And I am delighted to find you here, after the age that has passed since I met you last,—an age in events, I mean, not in time."

"It must seem long to you, Lord Lynford. I hear you have been round the world; that must double the period."

"Yet sometimes a few words spoken in an ordinary drawing-room may make a more important change than crossing wide seas or clambering mountain ranges."

"Faith, that's true!" said Tyrrell, emphatically. "And how has my boy been this long afternoon?" he asked, as he stroked Val's head lovingly.

"Oh, quite—quite well; we have been so heavenly peaceful. I am glad that Lorrimer is gone. He was always bothering us and interfering with our work."

"Well, well, it's an ungrateful boy you are, Val. He was ever so good to you, and didn't he give you a grand case of mathematical instruments?"

"Yes, I know, but he bothered, all the same." A little more talk, and the dressing-bell warned them to separate. Lynford found his own special

room assigned to him, and all the furniture he had been accustomed to in their original places.

It was remarkable how much at home he felt. Yet he could not help a swift conjecture. "What will that poor boy do with it all when he succeeds? He will not probably be long-lived, and he has the power, or will have the power, of bequeathing the property to whom he likes. I wonder if he has any other relations except Beatrice? He may have a legion away in the bush. Ah, I wish I had not put myself at odds with fortune as regards that very human angel, Beatrice. I feel I must always have a hang-dog air in her presence."

Beatrice was already in the drawing-room when Lynford entered it. She wore a very simple but artistically cut demi-toilette dress of thin, black, gauzy stuff, with a good deal of black lace about it, and had in her waistband a couple of deep-red roses, with their polished dark-green leaves. She had more colour than usual, and her pretty wavy red-brown hair was very becomingly dressed. Lynford could not help observing that she looked a *châtelaine* worthy of presiding over such an abode.

She was standing in one of the windows talking with the rector, an old friend of Lynford's, who with his sister had been asked to meet him, and greeted her guest with a smile that seemed to say, "We understand each other."

A cheerful, chatty dinner ensued. Val rarely came to table in the evening, but was ready in the drawing-room to receive them when they rose from table, and Beatrice soon started the rector and his sister in a duet between piano and violin. The rector was very artistic, scholarly, and devoted to music. Liberal in mind, though by no means without aristocratic prejudices, he had deeply deplored the sale of Lynford Hall to a nobody, an adventurer, a mere workman, with the yellow clay still adhering to his digger's or navvy's boots.

As time wore on, and he grew to know the fine nature, the generosity, the common sense of the new lord of Lynford, his views changed considerably, but he never ceased to regret the high-bred, attractive spendthrift who had thrown away his chances and missed his opportunities.

Val was passionately fond of music and listened

delightedly. Mr. Tyrrell sat in a nook by the lamp and surreptitiously read an evening paper. Beatrice had taken a corner of the sofa, where a slant of moonlight came from the window upon her. She was knitting one of the various comforters and cross-overs, which she considered idle work, and of which she prepared a store in anticipation of winter to give away to the poor,—old men and women whose "rheumatics" always needed solace.

Lynford came over noiselessly and placed himself beside her.

"Do you know it was a year yesterday since you first 'broke bread' in this old house?" he whispered.

"Was it?" said Beatrice, in a similar tone. "How can you remember?"

"It is not altogether remembrance. I marked the day with a white stone."

"And why? It was not a good time for you."

"No; it was an exceedingly bad time. Perhaps that is the reason why that one glimpse of blue sky and sunshine impressed itself so deeply on my mind. Now *you* forget all about it."

"I do not indeed. I cannot remember the exact date; but the day I first visited this beautiful old place it seemed to me the most charming I had ever spent; it was a revelation to me."

"And to me," murmured Lynford, in a low tone.

"A revelation of life," she continued, "such I had never imagined. Then Mrs. Garston was in such good humour, and you——" She paused.

"What did I do?"

"I cannot exactly remember; but I know it was the first time I ever talked to you with any ease or comfort."

Lynford did not reply. He looked down, a smile playing round his lips, and they listened to the music for a while. Then Lynford said softly, "What a fine tone the rector draws from his 'Strad'! The violin is quite the most human thing that ever was constructed with inanimate materials. By the way, I hope you have not buried your talent in the earth; that is, I hope you have taken singing lessons and studied?"

"I have indeed. My best thanks to you for suggesting the idea."

"Then will you not reward me by singing?"

"Oh, yes. I am sure to sing. Gran' makes me sing to him every evening. I hope you will find me improved; but whatever you think, pray tell me candidly."

"I will. I fancy one might tell *you* the truth."

Here the duet came to an end,—a discussion respecting the music and the composer following.

Then came the usual request from Mr. Tyrrell, "Give us a lilt, me darlin'." Whereupon Beatrice immediately laid aside her knitting, and, with ready, self-forgetful complaisance, went to the piano, choosing one of her uncle's favourite songs, "Has sorrow thy young days shaded?" Her voice was extremely sympathetic and perfectly tuneful, and Lynford, who had heard all the best singers in the world, found a simple, touching charm in her sweetness and natural expression.

"That's true faith," said gran', with a sigh, when she had finished. "You may win the world towards the end of your warfare, but nothing makes up for the gloom of wrong and defeat that has shadowed your youth."

"But sunsets are glorious sometimes, gran'," observed Beatrice, coming back to her sofa and her knitting.

"And in youth, according to your own poet, 'The light that surrounds us is all from within,'" said Lynford.

"Then heavy must be the cloud that can dim it," returned Tyrrell, gravely; and there was a brief silence, broken by the rector, who began to tell Val of his harvest festival plans. The boy was always greatly interested in schemes of decoration.

"I think you have done very well," said Lynford in an undertone to Beatrice. "I do not mean to say you would take a Philharmonic Society by storm; indeed, there is nothing stormy about you; but your song is soothing, even touching; it disposes me to think that life is not all dust and ashes, nor one's fellow-creatures all hard and hollow."

"If my poor little songs can teach such excellent wisdom, I am indeed satisfied," said Beatrice, laughing low. "Val generally wants me to try all kinds of trills and shakes——"

"For God's sake do not listen to him," inter-

rupted Lynford, hastily. "Be yourself, always yourself."

There was a melancholy earnestness in his tone that echoed in Bea's ear long after he had ceased to speak.

Soon after the rector and his sister said "good-night." Lynford said he would go with them "for the sake," he said, "of a moonlight stroll in pleasant company."

Val went to bed, and Beatrice, after a short delay, to await any inclination on her uncle's part to talk, as he sometimes did, confidentially, when they were alone, said "good-night," and retired to her room. Not to sleep.

She put out the lights, which seemed too strong, too searching, for the secret thoughts in which she wished to indulge, and sat long musing in the moon-beams which came silvery and soft through the open window.

She was surprised and even more, alarmed, at the vivid, palpitating pleasure it gave her to see Lynford again, to hear him speak. She always knew she should be glad to see him; that she was grateful to him; but that the world should seem a new and better place when she met his eyes and

heard him speak to her with something different, indescribably different, in his voice from its tone in speaking to others (though it was no doubt a mere fancy of her own), this was enough to startle and distress her, to disturb her with a different kind of fear from what had made her at first reluctant to have anything to do with him.

Whatever the moving cause of his astonishing proposal, it was not likely to actuate him a second time, and she must be most careful not to seem either expecting or fearing that he should play the lover, but to keep up the most friendly, sisterly bearing, neither seeking nor avoiding him. This she felt would be no easy task. Why did Lord Lynford produce this strange effect upon her? Why was it that a faint tremor, half pain, half pleasure, quivered through her nerves when he looked at her, or lowered his voice to speak to her, as if they two had something in common, unshared by any other mortal? Why was it that a few days ago, when her granduncle, who was deeply interested in the ex-master of the Hall, spoke of his wish that Lynford might find a good and wealthy wife, his words seem to stab? Could she have been so weak, so foolish, as to *think* her-

self into love with a man whom she had unhesitatingly rejected? Oh, yes! she did love him, far too well. Her heart beat quick, and a faint dimness came over her sight as she realised the strange power he had gained over her without an effort on his part. How sweet it would be to know that he still loved her, that she had the right to tell him how much she loved him! How earnestly she would try to make his life smooth and happy! But she must not yield to such dreams. "If she had thought herself *into* love with Lord Lynford she must now think herself out of it. Why should she not?"

She therefore rose up from the long low chair in which she had been lying and went about undressing and brushing her hair in a purposeful manner, repeating bits of verse and maxims which had taken her fancy from time to time. Yet the last words that floated through her fading consciousness were Lynford's, "Be yourself, always yourself."

* * * * *

The two following days Lord Lynford and his host spent together out of doors, and brought home large game-bags. The evenings were de-

lightfully tranquil and home-like,—a pleasant, cheerful talk at dinner about their respective experiences during the day. Then Mr. Tyrrell and his grandson sat down to a game of chess, which the old man understood and enjoyed, while Beatrice and Lynford talked together softly not to disturb the players. Talked of many matters, Italy, music, books, country occupations, and amusements,—all this in the most friendly, nay, brother and sisterly tone.

Yet how sweet it all was! How sure each was of being thoroughly understood by the other! what a restful sense of home and security pervaded the atmosphere! and how heavenly to know that they would meet to-morrow, to live through another blamelessly happy day!

But all the while each viewed the other through a false medium. Beatrice assured herself that having once yielded to a temporary weakness, or perhaps insanity, the fit would never return to Lynford. While he, recalling the shock of her unqualified refusal, though under the impression that he had made her a *bona fide* offer of marriage, thought there must be some underlying antagonism in her nature to his; while conscience,

reminding him of his original design, paralysed him with the sense of baseness and hypocrisy. Nevertheless he was, on the whole, surprisingly happy. Though Beatrice was as little "of the earth earthy" as a woman could be who was human and lovable, being much more tender than passionate, she produced a strong effect on his senses. She was by no means beautiful, yet he longed to hold her in his arms and press his lips to hers, with her own full consent, as he had not longed since his first ardent boyish love. But such a consummation seemed indeed not to be hoped for.

Anything more baffling than her friendly unembarrassed manner could not be imagined. Even if he had perceived something of love veiled beneath this sisterly seeming, it would be unbecoming, undignified, almost unprincipled in him, a poverty-stricken peer, who must be the poorest of men, to try and win as a rich wife the woman he intended to make his mistress!

This secret consciousness put him at a disadvantage such as he had never felt before. He looked upon himself as an impostor,—as sailing under false colours,—and at moments he suffered

torments of humiliation when some phrase or glance from Beatrice suggested to him her belief in his honour, his disinterestedness. If she knew! And it seemed to him that the knowledge must come; that the very leaves, the birds, the breeze, would whisper it to her, the insult he once meditated.

Yet so contradictory is the mental condition of man, moulded as he is by a hundred conflicting influences of teaching, association, example, laws, written and unwritten, that it still seemed to him pardonable enough that a man and woman should live together in unmarried companionship if circumstances, difference of position, or any other reason rendered marriage unadvisable, provided the woman was in no way deceived. Nor did he see the injustice of considering such a temporary tie more of a degradation to one woman than to another.

At first Lynford passed the greater part of his days in shooting with his host. The old man and the young one grew more and more friendly, in spite of the great gulf of difference in class which yawned between them; they understood and appreciated each other thoroughly. But as the

second week of his visit slipped away, Lynford frequently had letters to write, or other things to do, which obliged him to return to the house, leaving his stalwart host to tramp through the woods or across the heather, and ended the day by a stroll with Beatrice, or a drive with her and Val in the pony carriage, which was a great source of pleasure to the crippled boy.

"Where is every one?" asked Lynford, one soft, grey, autumnal afternoon, as he came into the hall from the library where he had been writing.

"Master Tyrrell has gone out driving with Denis, my lord," said the old butler, who was half pleased, half distressed, at having to wait on his former master as the guest of his new one. "Mr. Tyrrell has not come in, and I saw Miss Verner walk across the lawn towards the little wicket a few minutes ago."

Lynford sallied forth and took the same direction. Walking briskly he soon overtook Beatrice, who turned at the sound of his step.

"Are you bound for the ruins?" he asked.

"Yes. I am fond of them in the grey light

of a day like this,—it suits the grim old place and its memories. I often go and sit there."

"You have a good deal of imagination," said Lynford, as if to himself.

"That is rather a big word for my fancies, but I remember how deeply impressed I was by the tower and its surroundings the first time I saw them."

"I also remember. We little anticipated then that in a short year you would be *châtelaine* here and I your guest."

"My granduncle's guest you mean."

"No. You are the lady of the house, as Mr. Tyrrell's daughter would be if he had one."

"I suppose people think so. I know I was surprised at the numbers who called upon me when we came down here first. I could not understand, at least for some time, that I was anything more than Val's companion and playfellow. But one soon gets accustomed to things. It seems quite natural already to have a lady's maid, a carriage and ponies, and all the other luxuries of wealth. It is all very pleasant, and I quite appreciate the pleasantness; but, indeed, the best bit

of it all is having some one to belong to, as I do to my uncle and Val. I could give up everything else with a fair amount of philosophy, but to be alone seems to me the most terrible thing in life."

"And the reason is that you are remarkably unselfish. Why, you could even be sympathetic with Mrs. Garston, who never gave anything without an equivalent in her life."

"She was not bad,—to me at first. But I have noticed, Lord Lynford, that you dislike Mrs. Garston, and I am rather surprised you do; she is very handsome, and can be very nice. You are a favourite with her, too."

"I hate an unwomanly woman, and she is distinctly unwomanly. Now, you are a real thorough woman in the best sense."

"Thank you," said Beatrice, smiling and blushing. "It is delightful to hear of one's own perfections."

"I dare not trust myself to speak of them as they appear to me!" exclaimed Lynford. The words were out before he could stop them, so he tried to qualify his utterance. "Observe, I do not

say that they positively exist, only that I think they do."

"Don't be afraid; I promise not to grow too conceited."

"One reason, perhaps, that I think you rather angelic is that I am such a selfish beggar myself. I want what I want so intensely, that I do not stop to consider what gratification may cost another. I am that worst kind of sinner, knowing, at least at intervals, the difference between right and wrong. I generally choose the wrong."

"What a bad character you give yourself! I do not believe it is true. Yet, curious as it may seem, you gave me that impression when I first met you; but you were not often in a good temper then."

Lynford laughed. "You are cruelly candid," he said, "but also by no means wrong."

"Oh, I have changed my opinion a good deal since," cried Beatrice, anxious to make amends.

"I fear you have no right to change your opinion," said Lynford, gloomily, as if his thoughts were turned inward.

They walked on a few paces in silence till they reached the ruins.

"But in spite of your philosophy and common sense, Miss Verner, changed circumstances have changed you a good deal."

"Is it a case of setting a beggar on horseback?" asked Beatrice.

"What an idea!" returned Lynford, laughing. "No; but I, too, am going to be frank. You are more mature, more developed in mind and, may I say, heart?"

"I have seen so much more, thought so much more," said Beatrice, with a sigh.

"Yes, Italy must have been a great awakening for you."

"It was, indeed. I should like to go there again, only I love this place so much. Oh, there is another person who looks on me as the lady of the house. I had a letter from Mr. Lorrimer by the second post. He wants to come and see us, as he may be soon appointed to a ship and sent away for three years. I must write to him as soon as gran' comes in. Do you know Mr. Lorrimer? He was so nice and kind to Val and myself at Florence."

"No; I have never met him. You saw a good deal of him, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; almost every day. Gran' has asked Reginald Dacre, so they will amuse each other."

"Hum! Young Dacre is rather an ass."

"Oh, Lord Lynford, he may not be clever, but he is most obliging and good-natured."

"That is no especial distinction. I suppose you find most men obliging, Miss Verner," returned Lynford, in an irritated tone.

"I do, indeed."

They had now reached what had been the court-yard of the castle, and sat down on a fragment of broken wall which was built on the edge of a precipitous cliff overhanging the sea.

"These grey days may be picturesque and suitable to these very ruined ruins, but they are deucedly depressing. I think, Miss Verner, I have inflicted myself quite long enough upon my hosts, especially the lady of the house; so I shall move on next week."

"But why?" cried Beatrice, raising her eyes to his with a troubled expression. "Gran' will be so sorry. He likes you so much; he enjoys being with you."

"He is very good. But I, too, have to fix my winter plans, and——" He paused, and

then resumed, abruptly, "I think of going to Russia."

"Not in winter?"

"Russia is not Russia in summer. I have been there before, and know some very pleasant Russians."

"But is there not time enough to settle all you want some weeks hence?" urged Beatrice, timidly. "Stay a little longer with dear old gran'. In spite of his riches, he has not had too much to make him happy. If money has power it is also often useless; there are so many things it cannot buy,—neither love, nor health, nor the capacity to enjoy, nor beauty. But the want of it—real, downright poverty—can neutralise all things."

"You are a rare philosopher, Miss Verner. I, too, must be philosophic,—or, at least, wise enough to resist the temptation to pleasure, however sweet, that will only end in pain. As a friend—which I hope you are—don't you think you ought to counsel flight?"

Beatrice grew a little pale; she hesitated, and then said, in a low voice, "I do not venture to

counsel. You know best what is wisest for yourself." Then, after a moment's pause, she added, "Shall we walk back? Perhaps we may find gran', and I want to speak to him before I answer Mr. Lorrimer's letter."

CHAPTER XI.

"TYRRELL'S STORY."

When they were alone the little party at the Hall usually rose from table together, and went into the library or the drawing-room without the temporary exile of the only lady member. But this was only an occasional occurrence, as Mr. Tyrrell was thoroughly hospitable; he loved to entertain his neighbours, and, though less ready to accept than to give invitations, he felt in politeness bound to dine out not infrequently. These dinner-parties were an infinite bore to Lynford, who was wont to discover engagements or business in distant localities on dates corresponding to those fixed for the intended banquets.

On this particular day, when Beatrice and Lynford had returned to the house and she had written her answer to Lorrimer's letter, Val expressed a wish to partake of late dinner with them,—a sign always of feeling unusually well

and comfortable. Throughout the repast he was very bright and talkative, well seconded by Lynford, but Beatrice noticed that her granduncle was silent and thoughtful.

As soon as coffee had been served, Mr. Tyrrell said, in the grave, commanding tone he sometimes used,—

"Go, children, and amuse yourselves without us. I have some matters to consult about with Lord Lynford. We may not join you till late, so do not sit up if you wish to go to bed. You have had a long drive to-day, Val, my boy; are you not weary?"

"I am pleasantly tired, gran'; I think I'll sleep sound."

"God send you sweet sleep and a happy waking, my son," said the old man, with profound tenderness; "and to you, too, my child," he added, holding out his hand to Beatrice. "Good-night, and God bless you."

She kissed his brown, sinewy hand, and, with a bow and smile to Lynford, left the room, followed by Val.

When the door was closed, Tyrrell pushed the claret towards his guest, and began in deep, quiet

tones, "I have been wanting to speak to you, and after to-day I'll not have a chance for some time, as young Dacre and Lorrimer will be here. Now I am going to try your patience with a long story and your friendship by asking you to do me a service."

"I do not fear the length of the story, and I am sure I shall be ready to do any service you ask from me."

"Thank you. The service is a serious one; but we'll see."

He paused, filled his glass, and resumed:

"You have no doubt heard that I have led a hard, rough life; it is true, and at times it has been bitter as well as hard. But I remember that my early home was the house of a gentleman, though a very poor one. My father was a big, dark man, sometimes angry and violent, sometimes overflowing with joyous good humour. My mother——" he paused, "she was a beautiful woman, at least, so she seems in my memory. She was the idol of my childhood, the friend, the support of my later years. No; I cannot say *all* my mother was to me.

"I cannot say how early I came to know that

we never had enough money; that my mother had to pinch and strive and wear herself out to keep things decent, and in addition had to have a constant watch upon my father, who was inclined to drink: yet I always see her as she was,—composed, firm even in spirits and in temper, never hurried, but always *doing* with a fixed purpose. There's a likeness to her in me jewel Beatrice,—in her kind, quiet ways. I must have been still a mere child when I had grown into the knowledge of her troubles. Well, as time went on my father got less troublesome and flighty. Then he took ill and died. He was a good bit older than my mother, and his life—well, it hadn't been what you might call healthy. Anyhow, he was taken from us when I was about eleven.

"I think some income died with him, for we seemed poorer than ever. My mother then moved into a bigger house, and let the upper part in lodgings. Ah! how she did work! and always found time in the evenings to help me with my lessons,—she *was* anxious about my schooling. I ought to have said that I had two sisters, one older and one younger than myself,—the eldest

was the great-grandmother of Bea,—she was my favourite. The youngest of the family was a boy, Walter,—a bright, dark-eyed little chap full of fun, but not as truthful as one could wish. As time rolled on we seemed to be a little better off. My sister was able to help mother, and we young ones thought things would go smooth for ever. My elder sister grew up a fine girl, and had more than one offer of marriage before she was eighteen. By that time I knew that my father was an Englishman. My mother did not belong to the gentry class, but she herself was far above it. She was a noble woman by right of nature,—a strict Catholic; she brought us up in that faith. When I was little more than seventeen a cousin of my mother's, a man who had been a jocky and had made money over in England,—a man I never liked,—came to Dublin very grand entirely, with fine clothes and a cane, and a cigar in his mouth. When I came in from school one evening he was sitting at tea with the mother and my sisters in a pretty little back parlour she kept for herself. (God rest her soul!—she loved to have everything nice.) As soon as I crossed the threshold he

stopped talking. He'd a voice you could hear a mile off, and ses he, holding out his hand,—

"'Good evening, my lord.' I flushed up, and felt my arm stiffen, and only for fear of vexing my mother I would have given him a black eye. You see I had on my worst suit of clothes for school, and I thought he was mocking me.

"'Good-evening, your grace,' said I, contemptuous. Then I saw my mother was looking white, and her eyes moist. 'What is it, mother?' I asked.

"'My cousin has brought great news, my boy,—my own dear boy that has been the comfort of my life! Your uncle, your poor father's brother, is dead, and you are his heir. You are an English peer. May God give you sense and judgment to guide you in your new life.' With that she rose up and embraced me. I felt she was trembling. I felt as if I was hearing a fairy-tale. Then my sisters began to cry out that it was a shame they were not to be ladyships, and the place was a perfect Babel."

He paused and looked piercingly at Lynford, who was listening with intense attention.

"I must hurry on," resumed Tyrrell, "or I shall keep you all night. Well, after this there was nothing but trouble. My mother and I went, with all the papers and documents she had, to a grand big solicitor, and there was a searching and questioning, and correspondence with the solicitor of the late lord and hunting up of witnesses.

"Cousin Tom before he went back to England gave us a great account of the estates and the house, and I don't know what all. I saw myself in peer's robes, addressing the Lord Chancellor and the House of Lords, and I saw my blessed mother, in diamonds and satin and velvet, entertaining the king himself, and driving in a fine coach with two footmen behind. Oh, what a beautiful world it seemed for a bit! Then a cruel turn came. It seems that when my father and mother first met, he fell desperately in love with her, and thought he had only to ask and to receive, as many another has thought before and since; but he soon found he was all in the wrong. Then he asked her to be his wife, and they were married in the Catholic Church.

"Now, as my father was a Protestant, this was no marriage at all, and in those days there was

no common ground of a registration office where people of different faiths could be legally united. I have always doubted whether my father knew or didn't know if he was satisfying my mother at small cost to himself. Later on she brought her husband over to her own church. Then he married her again, so the only one of the whole family born in wedlock was Walter.

"I'll not tell you how I felt when I found I bore 'the bend sinister,'—even when I knew that my father and mother were not legally man and wife for the first years, I thought that marriage at any time would legalise all the children, as any man with a sense of justice would think. Then came the trials,—there were more than one. We were dragged over to England—to London—to give evidence against ourselves, my mother and I. Well, it killed her. Think of *that* woman—the stay of the family, the protectress, the saviour of her husband—badgered by a keen, cross-examining counsel, treated like a common prostitute, browbeaten, forced to expose every detail of her life, every weakness of her dead husband, whose memory was dear to her in spite of his faults.

"Leaving the heated court the last day of her martyrdom, she met the cruel blast of a cold November evening. It struck to her chest. She had poured out her strength for those she loved, and had little left to help her against the attack of the 'great enemy,' so she lay down on the bed of sickness from which she never rose.

"I cannot speak of that time; my heart seemed turned to gall. My eldest sister, who was a help and a comfort to the last, returned to Ireland to marry the good fellow she was engaged to and took my little sister, and my young brother, Walter, was declared Baron—— Can *you* supply the title?" concluded Tyrrell, breaking off, abruptly.

"I can," exclaimed Lynford, rising, and taking a turn to and fro. "I recognise the story. Your brother was my predecessor. Good God, what a strange history! What is romance compared to reality? But why—why do you call yourself Tyrrell?"

"It was my mother's name, and I only wish to be known as her son. I do not claim kinship with you, my lord."

"But I claim kinship with *you,* my dear sir.

For I, too, think it is an infamous shame that the marriage of father and mother does not legitimise *all* their children. It would have been well for the estate, the country, ay, and myself, had you been decreed your real rights; *you* would have made a good statesman, and I should have made a better career. While you——"

"Early prosperity might have been my ruin, too," said Tyrrell, thoughtfully. "My mother dead, my brother put in my place, *I* had nothing to keep me in England. My favourite sister was soon to be married, and the younger one, as it was arranged, was to live with her. No one wanted me, so I scraped together a few pounds and started for the New World. Australia was a convict settlement then, and America was the Irish El Dorado; so I turned my back on all I loved and knew and plunged into a new, strange, fierce sort of existence, where for a while every man held his life in his hand. It was a cruel, bitter time, and I would gladly undo many a thing I have done. I led a strange sort of life,—no need to go into all that now, and, thank God, I have no great wrong towards another on my conscience.

"Then came the report of the gold-find in Australia, and I made tracks for 'our antipodes.' Here luck came to me. I was fortunate in all I undertook; above all, I met my dear wife. While she was left with me life was too sweet. Thanks to her, I became a new man; the wrath and bitterness that made a desert of my heart and dulled my intellect melted away. But evil fortune had not done with me. *She* was taken from me after some twenty years of heavenly peace; then our boy, in the first spring-time of his manhood. So I have nothing left me but my poor Val! All my care, all my love, are centred on that frail life,—I must not add, my hope. The only bit of blue in my clouded sky is the prospect of so providing for and protecting his future that he may get all the happiness possible out of existence. Now God has sent me another tie—a fresh source of pleasure—in Beatrice, who in so many ways reminds me of my blessed mother.

"I have nearly finished. When, after long years, I came back to England, and Val was ordered to the seaside, I chose Lynbourne, because I wanted to see the home of my forefathers. I can find no words to tell you how my heart

thrilled with wild exultation when I found that your property was in the market. I had not toiled in vain. Mark you, I am not really a millionaire, I am not nearly so rich as men think; but I knew I could afford a long price for the old Hall, and I determined to die master of the lands, the home that ought to have been mine by right of inheritance, and leave my son's son to rule after me.

"It is curious that when I met you, instead of the dislike and repulsion I expected to feel towards you, you attracted me in an unaccountable way. I felt above everything that you were of my blood, and your manner, your frank courtesy, as if I were in every sense your equal, made me friendly at once. Now you understand why I wanted every heirloom, every bit of plate, every picture that had ever belonged to the house of Clavering. The day I took possession of Lynford was the proudest, the saddest day of my long life,—on one side, I had conquered fortune all along the line, on the other, fate had baffled my plans and left my house unto me desolate. I can have no ambition for my sorely-tried boy and my jewel Beatrice. I can provide for her and help her to be happy, but ambition has no material to

build with in a woman. I confess I should like the place to remain in our family. I say 'our,' for I feel I am the head of the house.

"You have heard my story, and I see it has touched you. Now I must make my request.

"I am going to put my affairs in order, then I hope to pass the rest of my time in peace. Before I do this I want your consent to be appointed guardian to my grandson and one of the executors to the will I am about to make."

"Guardian to Val?" repeated Lynford in great surprise. "My dear sir, do you think I am calculated to make a suitable guardian? Do you know that I have the character I have earned? that I am looked upon as a reckless spendthrift and a bit of a scamp?"

"I have heard a good bit about you one way or another, and I know you have done many things that had better been left undone, but I never heard you accused of anything mean, shabby, or dishonourable. Moreover, I *know* you, and I feel I can trust you. I want you to make a place for yourself among your peers, put past follies behind you, be a son to me. Look here, I'll show you the highest confidence: be a man,

and show me you can rise above the weakness of self-indulgence, and I'll leave you heir to Lynford after my poor Val, and your children after you. Marry some nice girl with a little money, and I'll back you up so that you may have a chance of distinguishing yourself. Blood *is* thicker than water, my boy, even though it flows through an irregular channel."

"You overwhelm me!" exclaimed Lynford, again rising to pace the room. "What can I say? If *you* think me worthy of so high a trust, I accept it with pride; you raise me in my own estimation. But as to your generous intention of ultimately giving me back what I threw away, it is not quite just to overlook the claims of your nearest of kin after Val,—I mean Miss Verner."

"A large landed estate would give more trouble than pleasure to a woman, and I am quite sure Beatrice would prefer *you* to hold it than herself."

"But her future husband might not," returned Lynford, smiling.

"Her husband! Ah! Well, that's in perspective, though I have my own views on the

matter. I shall take care of my sweet darlin' girl, but I want *you* and your children to inherit this old house and the old acres,—on one condition." The old man paused, looked very fixedly into Lynford's eyes, and added, "That you take the name of Tyrrell before Clavering."

"You have a right to perpetuate your name, Mr. Tyrrell; your munificence——"

"No, it has nothing to do with me. I want to keep the memory of my mother alive in the records of the race, and therefore I want to link her name with that of Clavering. Therefore, and now, here is the last secret and dearest wish of my heart: it would be the crowning joy of my old age to see you and Beatrice united. Then my mother's blood would run in the veins of the future lords of Lynford, and I would lie down in peace to rest or die."

Lynford returned to his seat, too surprised, too struck to speak, a dark-red flush mounting almost to his brow.

"Mind you, I don't want to make any condition of this. No man can choose a wife for another. But that is my heart's wish."

"And mine!" exclaimed Lynford, suddenly rushing into speech. "I have loved Beatrice almost since the first days of our acquaintance; loved her before I knew it. To give her to me would be the crowning, the divinest gift. But she must not know, she must not in any way be troubled, for, alas, my dear friend and benefactor, I do not find favour in her eyes."

"What!" cried Tyrrell, in evident amazement, "*you* distrustful of yourself? I thought you a most redoubtable lady-killer. Surely *you* are not given to fanciful modesty."

"I don't think I am, but on this matter I am only too well informed."

"The devil you are! Do you mean to say she refused you?"

"It is not pleasant to confess defeat, but she did refuse me,—very kindly, but very decidedly."

Tyrrell was silent for a minute, and then said, in a wondering tone, "Pray when did this take place? since you came down here?"

"No. Had I wished to offer myself to your niece for the first time *now,* I should have spoken to you. No; I found her alone and wretched after her sister's death—and——" he hesitated.

"I understand," said Tyrrell, with a pleased smile. "Your feelings got the better of you, and she said no. Well, it puzzles me."

"I was not so much surprised as disappointed. Miss Verner never showed me the faintest preference, only I thought that in the friendless and unhappy condition she was in I might be a sort of refuge."

"You are a true man, faith," interrupted Tyrrell. "So, then, you came to me? I see I haven't chosen badly in fixing on *you* to guard my children when I leave them. Don't lose heart, Lynford; I fancy you are the sort that women like. Try again, try again. It's not for a rough old fellow like me to breathe on the delicate secrets of a young girl's heart; but I have watched you both, and—it may be only my fancy, but I *do* fancy there's a sort of atmosphere round a man and a woman who love each other,—an atmosphere that can be felt; and, mind you, it does not exist unless it emanates from both. Try again; she'll not find a better than yourself."

"What an infernal impostor I am!" thought Lynford, profoundly perturbed by the curious posi-

tion in which he found himself. "You are too good to revive my almost extinct courage," he said aloud. "I am tempted to follow your advice, but I must have time, and conduct the siege with skill and caution."

"Of course you must; and I give you *carte-blanche.* If you succeed I shall have nothing left to wish for, and shall consider you, in any case, an adopted son. Watch over my precious Val; guard him, so far as in you lies, from suffering and mistakes. He likes you and thinks you the finest fellow in Great Britain."

"I am anything but that," ejaculated Lynford, who had never before felt so humiliated.

"Look!" continued Mr. Tyrrell; "look, how late it is! We'll to bed. I am lighter-hearted this night than I have been for some weeks past, and I believe *all* I wish will come to pass."

"Need I add," cried Lynford, "how ardently I hope it may!"

"She'll not refuse you; she can't refuse you a second time, and she sha'n't!" exclaimed Tyrrell, in some excitement.

"Can you wonder I hesitate," said Lynford, "when a second refusal would mean total defeat?"

"Ay, but she won't!—I somehow feel she won't. Good-night, Lynford; I'll take a look at Val asleep before I turn in. He is always like his father when he is asleep, and it comforts me to think I have done my best for him. Good-night."

CHAPTER XII.

"A PARTING GUEST."

THERE was little or no sleep for Lynford that night; he was feverish from excitement. The prospect opened up to him by the intentions which Tyrrell announced was so amazing, so unexpected, that it seemed to him he had been listening to a fairy-tale. Above all, that Tyrrell should be anxious to see him united to his grandniece appeared the most extraordinary freak of fortune.

"I wish to heaven the gold of this splendid chance were not tarnished by the infernal consciousness of being an impostor!" he thought. "I can't go in and win when I know I am sailing under false colours. Then Beatrice is indifferent, —she must be; she is so deucedly friendly. Only to-day there was something sweet and kind in her voice and manner as we talked together in those

old ruins. I am a blockhead to hang back when I know that my secret is a real secret, for it is unshared; and, whatever my delinquencies, I should be a first-rate husband to Beatrice. She has entered into my soul, and dwells there. But if she does not love me? Why should I not try and touch her heart? Why should she be different from other women? Ay, but she is! There's an atmosphere of truth about her in which evil cannot live; yet she is deliciously soft and human, and free from the marble iciness of immaculate virtue. I wonder if she has any sneaking kindness for young Lorrimer? If so, I am done. Time will show. I suppose he'll be here the day after to-morrow; then I shall soon find out. I hate young men! they are generally blatant, conceited fools. I'll look in the baronetage to see how old he is.

"What an extraordinary piece of good fortune my falling in with this fine old fellow has been! By Jove, I envy him the memory of his life! He has the physical advantages of a good race, the grand record of a self-made man; of mastering, single-handed, the position of which the law so unjustly deprived him. Were I a religious man,

I should say that Providence was always on the side of the illegitimate. There's the dawn! I'll get up; no use in lying here sleepless any longer."

* * * * * *

The day Lorrimer arrived was dark and drizzling, and Beatrice spent nearly the whole of it with Val, who was always cross in wet weather, and as much annoyed by being kept in-doors as if he were a crack pedestrian or a votary of field sports. Lynford and his host went forth, as usual, to tramp over the fields and visit the home farm, the latter looking better and more animated than usual, pointing out all the improvements he had made and explaining those he had planned with the liveliest interest and earnestness, as though anxious to impress his views and intentions on his successor. The old man indeed felt that the land and all it bore was his,—doubly, since he had found what he considered a worthy heir, and of his own blood; so that, after his beloved and stricken grandson, the domains of Lynford should not pass from the Claverings to the stranger, and their name be forgotten,—so mysterious, yet so

strong, is the love of man for the morsels of earth he calls his own. Is it the instinctive consciousness that earth is our mother? for dust, or earth, we are, and unto dust "shall we return."

"It is a goodly heritage," said Tyrrell, meditatively, as he paused on the summit of an upland, from which they could overlook a great part of the woods and catch a glimpse of the grey Hall. "Promise me to care for and keep the place during my poor Val's life and your own. Bring up your children to love it, and consider it a sacred charge to transmit the acres uninjured to theirs."

"I promise," returned Lynford. "I shall value it now as I never did before," and there was sincerity in his voice.

Tyrrell was silent for a minute, and then raising himself from his fit of thought, he exclaimed, "Come, let us get home. We are pretty well wet through, and there's company coming."

Lorrimer was playing a game of chess with Val in what Mr. Tyrrell termed the "work-shop," and everyone else "the studio," and Lynford saw at the first glance that he was no contemptible

rival. There was an air of manliness and common sense about him that seemed to Lynford likely to give him influence with women, an expression of honesty and good humour in his clear blue eyes that suggested an attractive similarity between the nature of Beatrice and his own. No, he was a rival by no means to be despised.

He was very cordially greeted by Mr. Tyrrell, whom he informed that he had seen the "lady of the house," and thought her looking unusually well.

"Now she's gone off to make herself fine," said Val, querulously, "because a lot of stupid people are coming to dinner. I'm going to my own room. I hate people when they are fine! even Beatrice."

"Come, come, Val! Miss Verner is never fine!" cried Lorrimer.

"Yes, she is. She can't help it you know,—she can't help it I know,—she must be like other people I suppose; but I like her best in her morning frock and garden hat."

"Nonsense, boy," said his grandfather; "you

love her in everything. I think it's time to dress," he added. "Good-night, Val; you'll be asleep when I see you again."

The Dacres and Mr. and Mrs. Crewe, of Bloxham Park, with a son and daughter, the rector, his sister, and a man whose yacht, in stress of weather, had put into the land-locked bay, and whose acquaintance Mr. Tyrrell had made in Italy.

The Lynford Hall dinners were excellent, and there was something original and amusing about the entertainment generally. The Tyrrell episode was a break in the monotony of county routine, a boon for which society is always grateful, so refusals were rarely returned to Mr. Tyrrell's invitations.

Beatrice, whose dress of white silk with black lace and jet looked distinguished and becoming, fell to Lorrimer's share, while the host and Lynford conducted the two married ladies.

Lorrimer was evidently determined to make the most of his advantageous position, and had neither eyes nor words for anyone save Beatrice.

"I have a great piece of news!" exclaimed

Mrs. Dacre in one of the pauses, which will occur during the best-regulated dinners.

"What a boon to a community suffering from news famine!" said Lorrimer.

"You must all guess," continued Mrs. Dacre.

"Then give us some data to go upon," asked Lynford.

"Yes," added young Crewe. "What description of news is it, scandalous, or not scandalous, social, political, naval, military, or sporting?"

"You ask too minute particulars," said Mrs. Dacre.

"No, by no means, mother," returned her son.

"Well, then, it is non-scandalous and social——"

"Concerning a man or a woman?" asked Mr. Tyrrell.

"Concerning both."

"A man and a woman and non-scandalous!" exclaimed Captain Grant, the yachtsman. "Then it is a marriage. Whose, Mrs. Dacre?"

"That would be telling. Whose has been most talked about and guessed at this season?"

"Mrs. Garston's," said Lynford, helping himself to an *entrée*.

"Right, Lord Lynford! But no one, I am quite sure, no one will guess the bridegroom elect——

"Balknockie?" "Sir Horace Damer?" "Bertram?" "Colvin?" guessed the men.

"No, no. You'll never guess it! She is going to marry a man whose name has never been mentioned in connection with hers, though it is pretty well known in other directions. Mrs. Garston is going to espouse the Marquis of Avonmore."

"What! Avonmore!"

"That old rip!"

"Why, he is up to the chin in debt!"

"He hasn't an acre unmortgaged!"

"Balknockie is a saint to him!"

"She can't know his character!"

Were some of the exclamations with which the men greeted this announcement.

"Oh, why doesn't someone warn her!" said Beatrice, earnestly, in a low tone to Lorrimer.

"Yes; she ought to be told," he returned.

"She will be terribly unhappy I am afraid."

"I suppose the title tempted her," observed the host, gravely.

"If anyone manages Avonmore, and gets full value out of the rather doubtful position of his marchioness, Mrs. Garston will," remarked Lynford, with an air of conviction.

"I hope Avonmore has a shrewd man of business to look after his interests," said Captain Grant, the yachtsman. "I have had the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Garston some years ago in India, and I don't fancy Avonmore will get too much out of the transaction."

"Quite as much as he deserves," said Lynford. Then Mrs. Dacre said she had her "news from the best authority,—a letter from Mrs. Garston herself, who, it seems, had made Lord Avonmore's acquaintance a few months before, and had then refused him. He, however, persevered, and Mrs. Garston says she is so sick of the unsettledness of her life, and so touched by the devotion of her elderly lover, for, in spite of his errors and mistakes, he is most agreeable and sympathetic, that she has made up her mind to marry him, and

the wedding is to take place in a semi-private way about the end of October."

Then the conversation turned on social gossip, and many characters were torn to shreds. It was a style of conversation that bored the host considerably, as Beatrice well knew. She therefore gave the signal for departure to the drawing-room before they had by any means exhausted the subject; but Mrs. Dacre and Mrs. Crewe continued it with much animation, while Beatrice entertained Miss Protheroe and Miss Crewe, with whom she had many topics in common.

From this conversation she was called by a question from Mrs. Dacre. "Your family and Mrs. Garston's were old friends or connections, Miss Verner, were they not? That was the reason you were staying with her?"

"Oh, no," returned Beatrice. "I was introduced to Mrs. Garston by a mutual friend because I wanted employment and she wanted a companion and secretary."

"Oh, indeed!" and Mrs. Dacre felt that the candour of this reply had delivered Beatrice out of her hands; but Mrs. Crewe continued the

examination: "Was she a pleasant person to live with?"

"She was very nice to me for some time. Indeed, until I was obliged to leave her rather abruptly; that annoyed her."

"I can quite imagine that she did not like to part with you," said Mrs. Dacre, blandly.

Here the precursors of the gentlemen arrived, being Lynford and Lorrimer; both paused beside Beatrice and Miss Crewe.

Then the usual occupations and amusements ensued,—a little music to which no one listened, a little political discussion, a good deal of gossip, and sporting plans for the coming season. During the evening Lorrimer kept constantly by the side of Beatrice with the absolute indifference or even disgust to the society of other women peculiar to the young Englishman when hard hit. Lynford took malicious pleasure in frequently disturbing the virtual *tête-à-tête* between Beatrice and her admirer; for Lorrimer kept up an animated conversation, apropos of their common reminiscences of Florence and Italy.

But guests who have a good many miles to

drive home after dinner do not stay late, so it was comparatively early when the house party only remained in the drawing-room.

"Do give us one of those delightful Sicilian airs you used to sing to Val and to me," asked Lorrimer, seeing Beatrice rise as though going to say good-night.

"Oh, do you sing, Miss Verner?" exclaimed Dacre, for Beatrice kept her music for home consumption chiefly.

"Let them hear, my darlin'," said the host, who took a great pride in his niece's accomplishments; so Beatrice went to the piano, followed by Lorrimer,—to Lynford's disgust,—who leaned on the end of the piano in a state of enchantment.

Then Dacre started to use his eloquence in hopes of persuading Beatrice to try a mare he had lately bought and which he declared was a perfect lady's horse. But she steadily refused, declaring she had not begun young enough and could never feel sufficiently at home in the saddle to be happy.

The next morning Mr. Tyrrell took his guests

for a long day's shooting over a distant piece of moorland where the grouse "most did congregate."

Beatrice was warmly pressed to drive over with the lunch-basket and join them at their midday meal, but Val wanted to drive into the county town to make some purchases on which he had set his heart, so Beatrice refused.

The drive was rather a long one, and on their return Beatrice, who felt tired and, what was very unusual with her, a good deal depressed by an undefinable sense of coming evil or disappointment, saw her uncle standing on the doorstep as if watching for them.

"Is anything the matter, gran' dear?" she asked, as she ran up the steps.

"Well, yes; Lynford is gone. They brought him a telegram at lunch-time from Lady Frederic Ormonde. Her husband has been taken dangerously ill in Paris, where they were halting on their way to St. Moritz. She begged Lynford to go to her; so he left at once, and got off by the three o'clock train, intending to catch the night mail at Charing Cross."

A sudden sense of emptiness seized Beatrice. He was gone,—*quite* gone,—and she had not had a chance of saying good-bye to him, and when could she hope to see him again? He had paid his visit to Lynford, and would now probably go wandering away, and they would drift apart,—perhaps for ever. This idea gave her so much pain that she blushed at her own weakness and folly. Lord Lynford was always nice and pleasant to her, but she had no right to suppose that he had any wish to repeat the offer she had so decidedly rejected.

Val was loud in his regrets, and quite cross into the bargain. "The place wasn't like itself," he said, without Lynford, so he snubbed Lorrimer and was barely civil to Dacre, until his grandfather rebuked him for his want of good manners.

Beatrice was unusually quiet, and Dacre, finding things less lively than he expected, moved on to another house where he was engaged a day sooner than intended. Lorrimer lingered yet another twenty-four hours, and then departed in a very downcast and melancholy mood, bidding a long good-bye to his friendly host, as he intended

to be afloat, he said, very soon indeed; there was nothing to keep him in England now.

"I'm sorry for that poor young fellow, Lorrimer," said Tyrrell to Bea, as they sat together by a wood fire in the library when Val had gone to bed; "very sorry. He looked glum enough when I saw him off to-day. But he'll get over it all right by and by. You must make up your mind, my jewel, and marry some good man, and not be breaking the poor boys' hearts."

"Oh, gran', broken hearts are soon mended."

"Faith, some are, but not all,—not all. When you meet a true and a loving one, keep it carefully, for it's ill to heal."

Beatrice preserved a prudent silence, and after a pause the old man resumed:

"I must tell you a story, me darlin',—one I've wanted to tell you for many a day, and this is a good chance. I want to tell you how Lord Lynford is our kinsman, you must know.—Indeed, I wish everyone to know, now that years have worn out the bitterness and success healed the wounds of the past."

Before she slept that night Beatrice had heard

the strange and romantic family history, and experienced a curious thrill of satisfaction in reflecting that there was a blood-tie—slender, attenuated, certainly—between Lynford and herself.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MIST LIFTS.

THE days rolled swiftly on. Only one letter from Lynford reached Mr. Tyrrell in the course of several weeks, and in that he gave an indifferent account of his brother-in-law's health. He had had a feverish attack brought on by overfatigue, and was greatly reduced. He could not, therefore, let his sister undertake the journey to St. Moritz alone with the invalid, so had promised to escort them there.

The fine weather which had prevailed to the middle of September broke up about this time, and a succession of wet and stormy days kept Val a prisoner and added to the sense of gloom, —of standing still at "the parting of the ways," —which oppressed Beatrice in spite of her efforts to throw off the feeling, her remonstrances with herself for yielding to such unreasonable depression.

Early in October Val was not very well. He took a slight chill, and was more than usually troubled with his old enemy,—a pain in the back.

As Mr. Tyrrell was anxious to consult with his lawyer about the provisions of his will, and would hold several consultations on the subject, he proposed that they should all go up to town for a month, or longer if necessary, where Val could have the benefit of his favourite doctor's advice; so his grandfather wrote to secure rooms at the hotel he always frequented.

Beatrice was rather sorry to be taken away from the home she had already grown to love dearly; but she knew how necessary she was both to Val and gran', and cheerfully assented. Town was not too lively at that season; still, it had recovered from the period of utter emptiness. Men of business, of law, of literature, had returned to their labours; and their wives and daughters shopping with diligence, lent animation to the streets.

The change seemed to do Val good, and they enjoyed an occasional visit to the theatre,—an amusement which Val loved, in spite of the difficulties

of going in and coming out. On this subject he and Beatrice were profoundly sympathetic, and used to discuss their favourite actors and characters with intense interest.

One morning Mr. Tyrrell had accompanied Val to see the doctor, as he always did, and Beatrice had just returned from an hour of shopping with her maid, and was putting some flowers she had brought back with her in water, when a card was presented to her inscribed "Mrs. Garston," and that lady followed almost immediately.

She was looking pale, and had a restless look in her fine dark eyes; but her lips were smiling, her manner cordial, as she held out her hand, exclaiming, "My dear Miss Verner, will you forgive me for calling on you in this unceremonious manner? but, as you may imagine, I am desperately busy."

"I am very glad to see you," returned Beatrice, kindly. "I did not know you were in town."

"I only came up two days ago, and heard from Mrs. Dacre last night that you were here. Do you make any stay?"

"I do not exactly know,—a week or two more, perhaps."

"Do you know you are not looking as well as one might expect from a country girl? You are pale, and rather droopy about the eyes. How is your grandfather?—your granduncle? I never remember which it is."

Beatrice laughed good-humouredly. "My uncle is very well, thank you. Indeed, he always is."

"And the grandson always is ill. He can't live very long, dear. If he dies I suppose Mr. Tyrrell will leave all his wealth to you? Excuse the question, but you know I always took a great interest in you, and you must forgive me for entreating you to be very careful whom you marry. Do not spoil your life with romantic ideas on the subject."

"I hope I shall not," returned Beatrice, smiling.

"After all," Mrs. Garston went on, "youth and looks and love and everything pass away, but a solid income and a high position last to the last. If Mr. Tyrrell would take a house in town next season and entertain, you might make a brilliant match."

"But I am quite sure he will not. Neither Val nor I care for coming to town, except for a

few weeks at a time. After all, Mrs. Garston, it is enough to be happy."

"Yes, but what do you require to make your happiness? You see I speak quite frankly to you, for you were always a favourite of mine," concluded Mrs. Garston, caressingly.

"You are very good," said Beatrice.

"Would you like to come and help me to choose some of my things? I find Avonmore wants to be married on the 25th; so it is rather a rush, though I am not getting much now. I shall complete my trousseau in Paris. By the way, when does Lord Lynford return?"

"I do not know. He has gone to St. Moritz with Lord and Lady Frederic Ormonde. *He* has been very ill."

"Yes, I know; I thought it was not quite like Lynford to do sick-nurse to his brother-in-law; but, of course, everyone knows the reason now."

"I am sure *I* do not," said Beatrice, with a puzzled look.

"Then it is time you did," with a harsh laugh. "You know Lord Frederic's cousin, Lady Mary Sherrard, is with them; she is a great catch, and

besides, is considered a very charming, accomplished woman."

"Yes, I have heard of her. It would be very nice for Lord Lynford. Lady Mary would be a suitable companion to him, I fancy." Beatrice said this so naturally, with such unruffled composure, such a clear, steady look into her visitor's eyes, that Mrs. Garston felt she had launched her dart in vain.

"Oh, Lord Lynford doesn't want much companionship in a wife; a harem style of beauty woman is what he likes. His sister is trying to make up the marriage for him; she is devoted to her brother, and has been a good, useful friend to him. You know he would have come to terrible grief in that affair with Mrs. Segrave but for her help. She asked colonel and Mrs. Segrave up to a shooting-lodge they had in Scotland, and as Lady Frederic has rather a high reputation in many ways, she managed to float Mrs. Segrave."

"I know nothing about it," returned Beatrice, simply and quietly. She was really unmoved. Lord Lynford might be going to marry Lady Mary, that was all right and natural enough, but that he had ever done anything really bad or

dishonourable, *that* her mind refused to accept. After a little more gossip and an offer to be her chaperon if Mr. Tyrrell would only take a house in town, Mrs. Garston took her departure, Beatrice refusing her repeated invitation to assist in the choice of her wedding garments, alleging as an excuse that she never liked to absent herself long from Val when they were in London.

"I did not imagine that you accepted the post of nurse when you went to live with Mr. Tyrrell," returned Mrs. Garston, with a sneer. "Do persuade him to fix a day to dine with me; though I am living in rather picnic style, I want to introduce you both to Avonmore."

Beatrice promised to ask Mr. Tyrrell, and felt no small sense of relief when Mrs. Garston at last actually departed.

Mr. Tyrrell was out almost the whole of that day, and Val came back in good spirits from the doctor's, and wished for a drive. It was not till they all met at dinner that Bea had an opportunity of mentioning the visit she had had from Mrs. Garston, adding her news respecting the possible marriage of Lord Lynford to Lady Mary Sherrard.

"Marry?" repeated Val. "I never thought Lynford would marry. What a horrid nuisance it will be to have a stiff fine lady coming in among us!"

"I am told she is very delightful and good," said Beatrice.

"No matter; she cannot help being fine, and so she will spoil everything," repeated Val.

"She is not here yet," observed his grandfather quietly, with a keen glance from under his heavy eyebrows at Beatrice. "At any rate, it is what is called a suitable marriage, and that's good." Then he changed the subject, and no more was said. But he wrote a rather long letter after dinner, and rang for Denis to post it directly. Then he devoted himself to Val and chess for the rest of the evening. Beatrice tried to read, but could not somehow gather the sense of the page before her. She had no right to feel the pang she did when the full force of Mrs. Garston's announcement penetrated to her mind. It was mean-spirited of her to expect Lord Lynford to make any advances again; she ought to abide by her first decision.

* * * * *

Nearly a week later Val was again to visit his doctor, and Mr. Tyrrell said at breakfast that he had an appointment with his lawyer afterwards, "so I'll drive there from Dr. J.'s, and then Val can return for you, my dear."

"Very well, gran'. It promises to be a fine mild day, we might take a nice long drive into the country as soon as Val has had something to eat," said Beatrice, who had been extremely quiet for the last few days, and seemed more disposed to read aloud than to talk to Val.

"I hope you'll soon have done with your tiresome business, gran'," exclaimed the boy. "For I am dying to go back to Lynford. Bea, I'd rather go to Allen's studio than take a drive today. I want to buy that picture of his, 'The Water-mill.' Will you give me money, gran'?"

"Maybe I might. Anyway, you and Bea might have another look at it. Mind, you are ready by quarter to eleven, boy,—the doctor has fixed eleven to see you," and Mr. Tyrrell retired to smoke his pipe in his own room, as he was possessed with the idea that to smoke in a lady's sitting-room was low and ungentlemanlike.

Beatrice had seen that Val's tie was properly

arranged, and had given him a fresh pair of gloves, for the poor boy was dandified in his way; she had given him a parting kiss before Denis and one of the hotel porters carried him off to the carriage, and began to set forth her writing things, intending to give the rector's sister their latest news, when Mr. Tyrrell came into the room with a radiant look on his fine old face, exclaiming, "Here's an unexpected visitor, me jewel," and immediately following him was Lynford.

Beatrice felt her cheeks glow, and her heart give one great bound and then stand still for a second.

"An unpardonably early visitor, I fear, Miss Verner," he said, shaking hands with her. "But I was afraid you might have started for Lynford, and I wanted a glimpse of you first."

"I am very glad to see you," was all Beatrice could command herself to say.

"And so am I, faith!" exclaimed Tyrrell, heartily. "How did you leave your sister and her sick husband?"

"He is certainly better, which implies that she is considerably more herself. I was glad to see

Val looking so bright, though he *is* going to see his doctor."

"Ay, and I must not make him late. Remember you have promised to wait here till he returns. I could hardly get him to keep his appointment till Lynford promised to stay. Good-bye for the present. You'll dine with us? Oh, by the way, we are to congratulate you, I believe, on your approaching marriage with a very charming lady."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lynford, with a frown. "I should like to know her name."

"Lady Mary Sherrard."

"What! Lady Mary?" repeated Lynford, with a smile.

"I can't stay to hear more," cried Tyrrell; "tell your news to Bea; so till we meet." He was out of the room before he ceased to speak.

Lynford and Beatrice stood looking at each other.

"Pray who is the author of this report?" he asked.

"I do not know. It was Mrs. Garston who mentioned it to me."

"Ah! Did you believe her?"

"Why should I not?" was the counter-question, and Beatrice laid her hand on the back of the chair beside her, for she trembled so much she could hardly stand. "It seems a perfectly suitable marriage, and I have heard more than once that Lady Mary is charming and good and —rich."

"She is all that. She is a girl I admire and esteem, but she is not the woman I want to marry." Beatrice was silent. "You must know that." She was still silent. Lynford drew nearer. "You must know that *you* are the woman, and you only, whom I wish to call wife, whom I love with all my heart,—more fondly, more passionately, than when you refused me. Are you still afraid of me? Do you still distrust me? Has the love you have inspired never touched you?"

Beatrice clasped her hands and unclasped them; a smile quivered on her lips.

"I do not distrust you any more. I am only sorry, so sorry, I ever gave you pain. You must forgive me."

"Forgive you!" cried Lynford. "I deserve but little at your hands." He drew her to him

gently into an embrace that grew closer and closer. "If you can endure the idea of my companionship through life," urged Lynford, "give me one kiss. You do not know how passionately I have longed to feel the touch of your lips."

"I do love you," said Beatrice, almost in a whisper, with the sweet frankness that had always charmed him.

"And when did you begin to think you might find me not so bad a fellow, after all?" he asked, when at last he let her draw breath.

"Almost as soon as I had refused you," returned Beatrice, smiling even while tears of emotion hung on her long lashes.

"Why did you not let me see a little glimpse of light and hope, to lend me courage and shorten the bad time I have been passing through?"

"How could I possibly know you still cared for me?"

"How could you possibly fail to know it?"

But it is useless, unfair, to follow further the excusable tautology of a lover's dialogue, so ineffably sweet to the speakers, so exceedingly foolish to the readers.

Gran' and Val returned amazingly soon, in

Lynford's opinion, though, besides keeping Val waiting at Parkins's office, Mr. Tyrrell drove to Allen's studio and bought the picture his grandson fancied before they returned to luncheon.

At the first glance at the pair who awaited them Tyrrell exclaimed,—

"Well, my children, are you going to give the old man his heart's desire?" Whereupon Beatrice ran to embrace him with happy tears.

* * * * * *

It was a very happy Christmas-tide at the Hall that year, and early in the new one Beatrice entered on a happy married life, through which she was always more or less puzzled by the curious humility which characterised Lynford's estimate of himself whenever he spoke confidentially of their comparative merits, which only added to her profound affection, her unlimited trust in the man she considered a model husband.

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