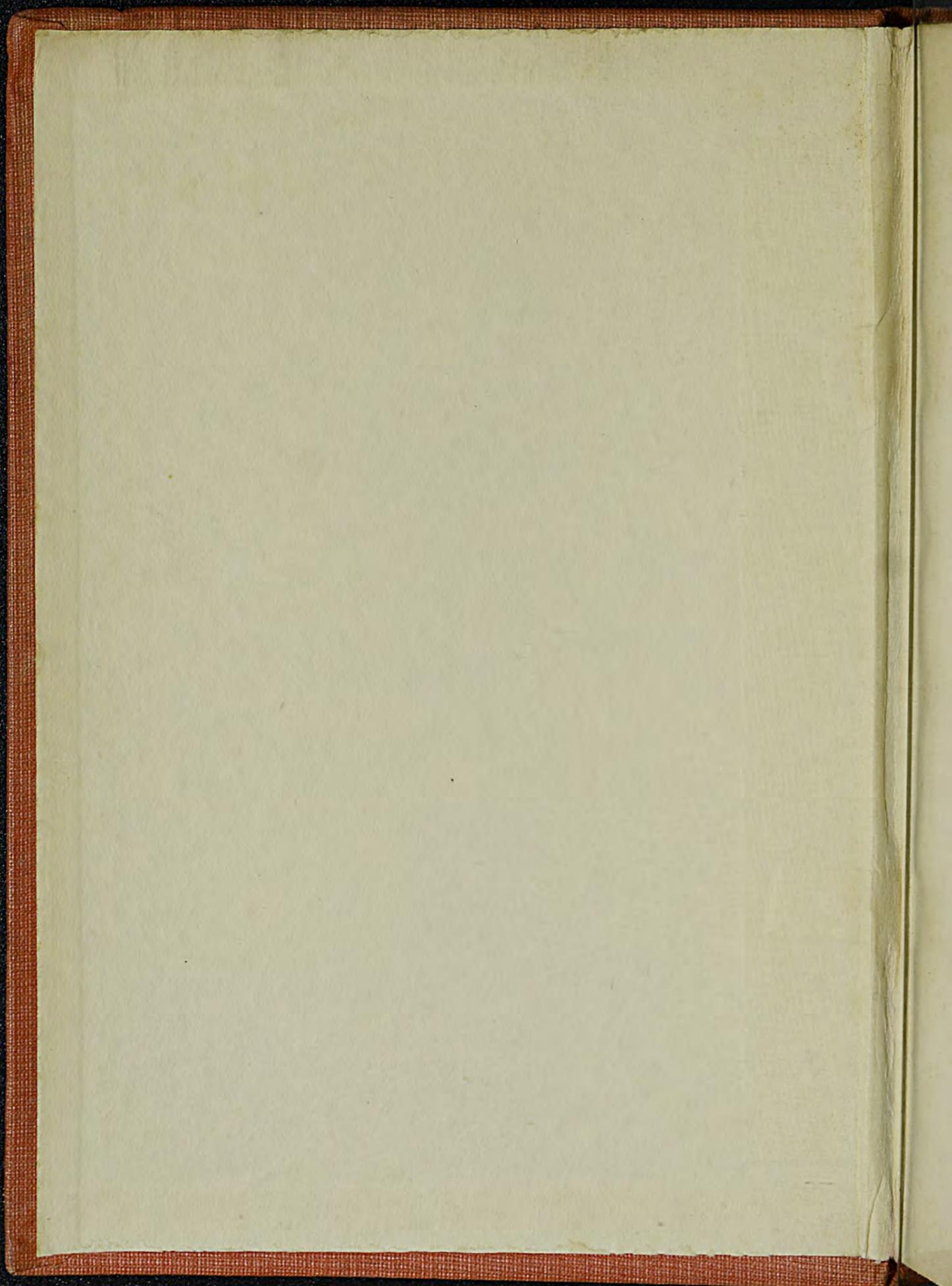


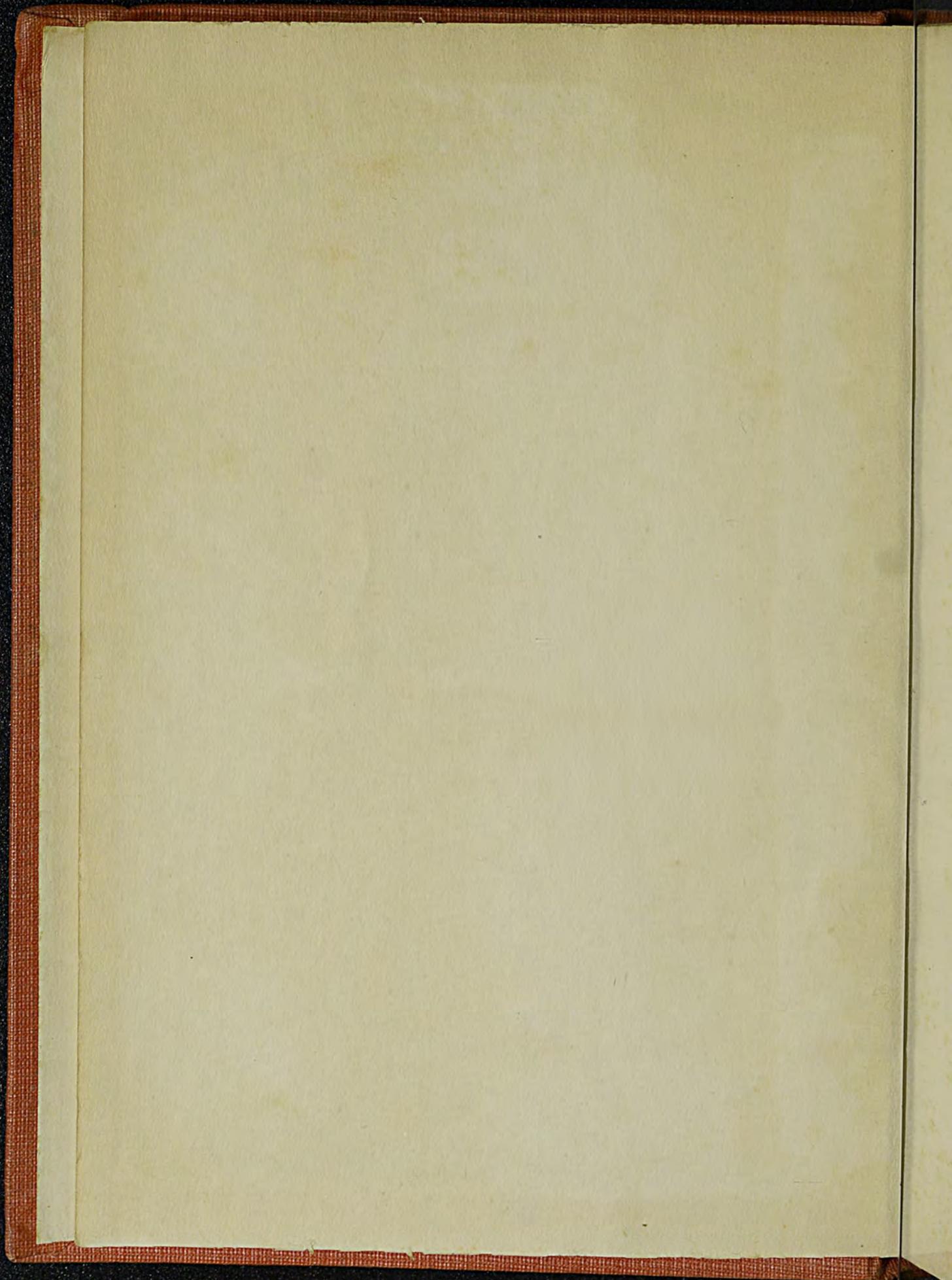
GRACE LATOUCHE
AND THE WARRINGTONS

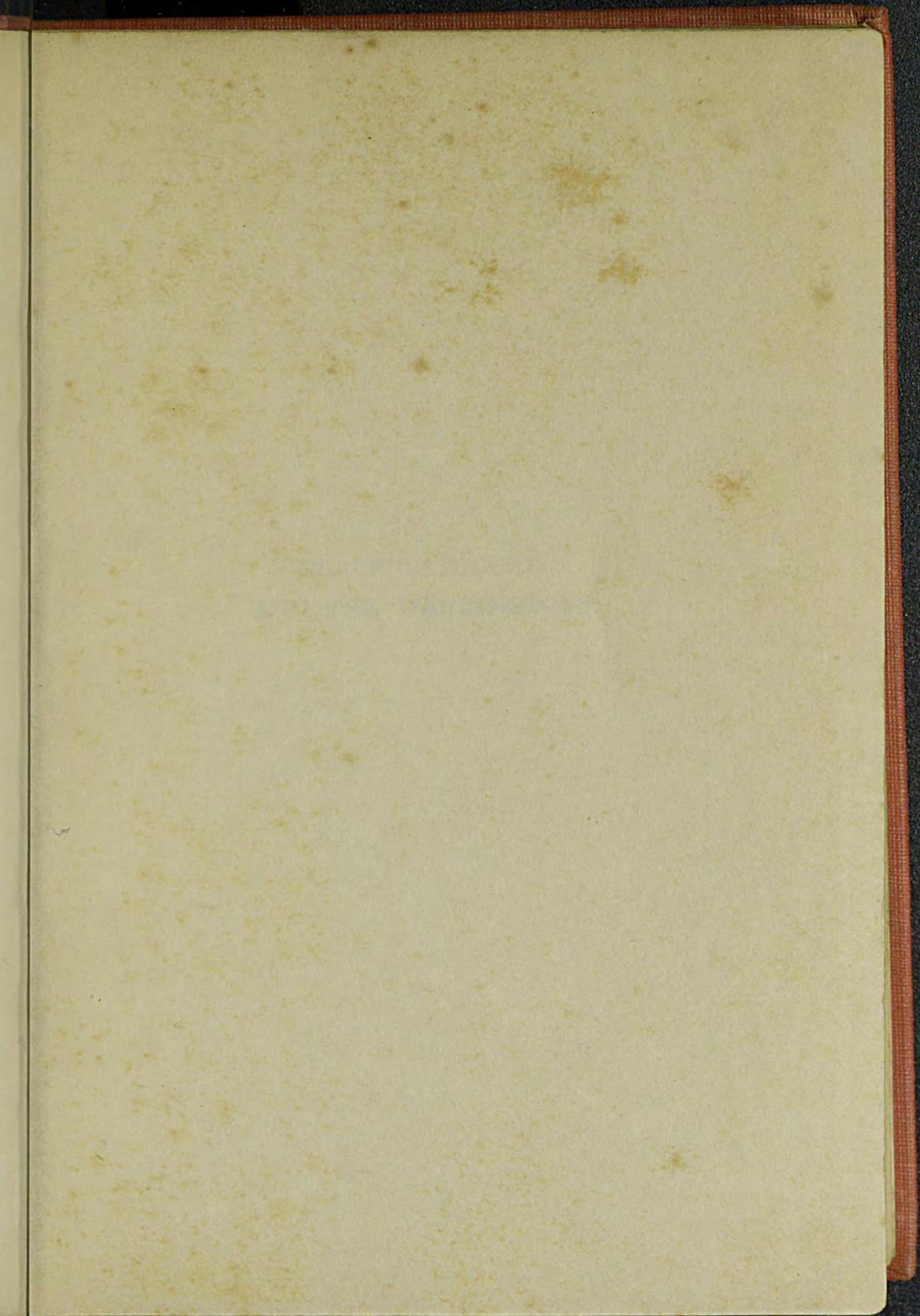
MARJORIE BOWEN

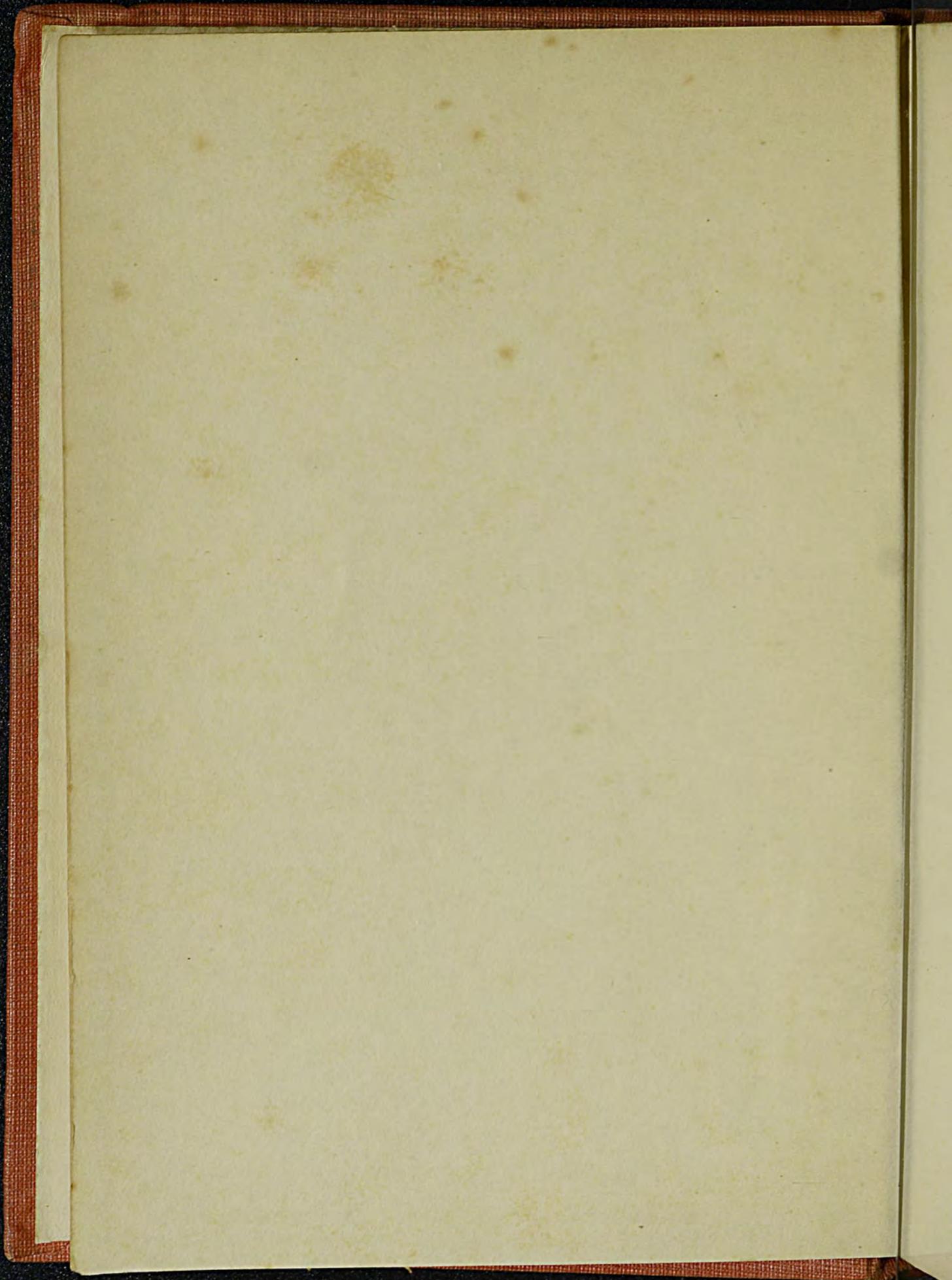


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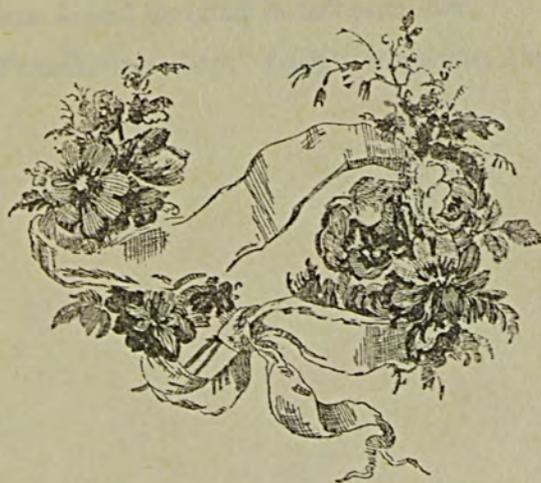


GRACE LATOUCHE
AND THE WARRINGTONS

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON

GRACE
LATOUCHE
AND
THE WARRINGTONS:
SOME NINETEENTH CENTURY PIECES
(Mostly Victorian)

WRITTEN BY
MARJORIE BOWEN.



LONDON:
PUBLISHED BY
SELWYN AND BLOUNT.
MCMXXXI

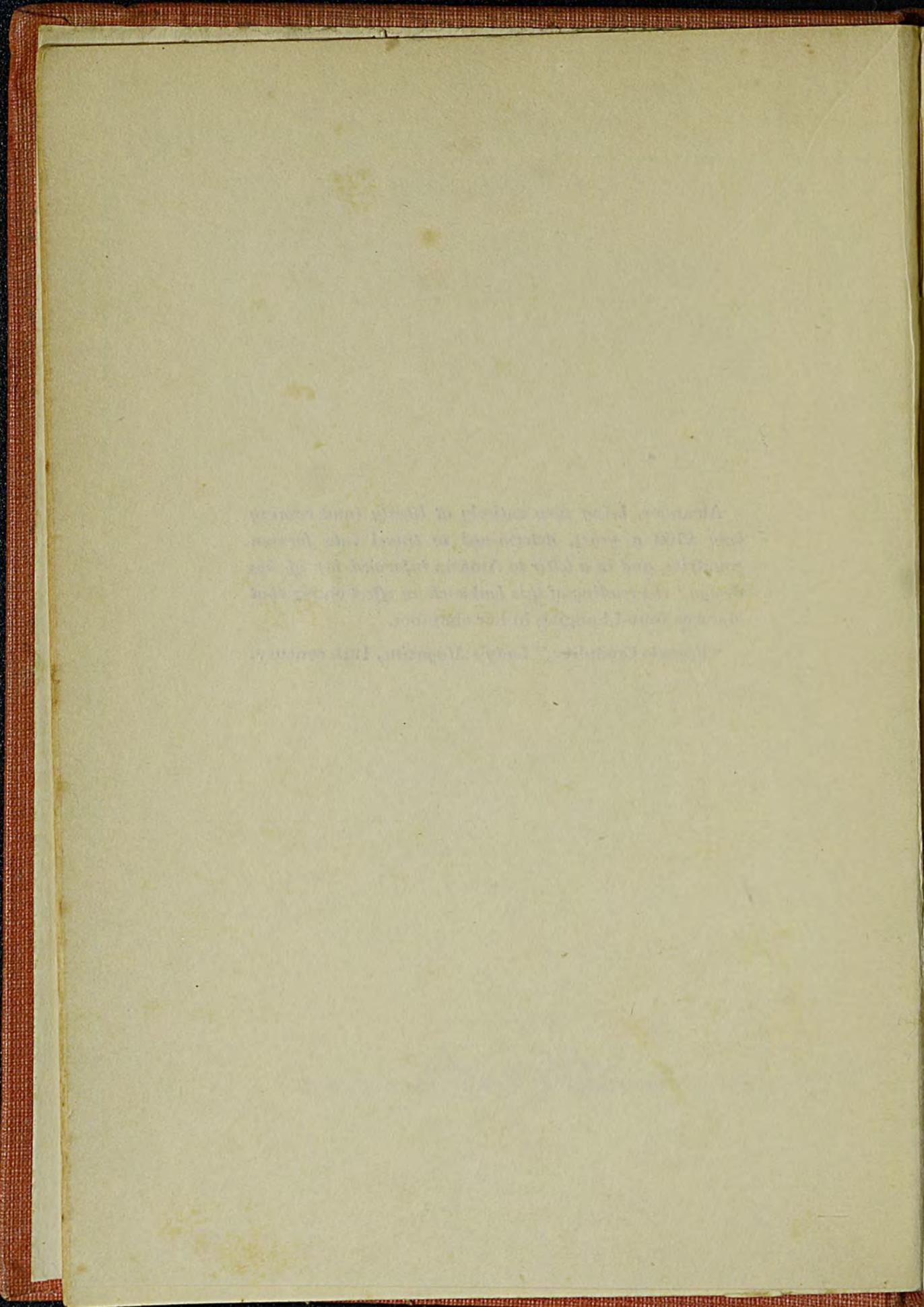
THE WARRINGTON
SOME KINETIC THEORY PAPER
(1911-1912)

WARRINGTON

Printed in Great Britain at
The Mayflower Press, Plymouth. William Brendon & Son, Ltd.

Alcander, being now entirely at liberty (and coming into £700 a year), determined to travel into foreign countries, and in a letter to Amasia informed her of his design; the reading of this had such an effect on her that she was found hanging in her chamber.

“Female Credulity,” *Lady's Magazine*, 19th century.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Grace Latouche and The Warringtons</i>	A STUDY IN MANNERS—1850 11
<i>Miss Lucy's Two Visitors</i>	A MIDSUMMER PICNIC—1810 30
<i>The Crown Derby Plate</i>	"HOUSE TO LET"—1900 51
<i>The New Housemaid</i>	A LONDON MANSION—1870 65
"— <i>The Way the Wind Blows</i> "	A MORAL TALE OF AN ENGLISH YOUNG LADY —1830 89
<i>The Avenging of Ann Leete</i>	PORTRAIT OF A LADY WITH A ROMAN SCARF —1845 111
<i>Heliotrope</i>	A RECIPE FROM GRANDFATHER'S DAY-BOOK —1860 127
<i>A Family Comedy</i>	A DAGUERRETYPE GROUP—1840 149
<i>The Confession</i>	A SOUVENIR OF A STAY IN SWITZERLAND— 1880 177
<i>Marwood's Ghost Story</i>	A PUZZLE-PIECE—1890 189
" <i>Illusion d'Hyacinthe Blanche</i> "	A PARISIAN IDYLL—1890 198
<i>A Traveller's True Tale</i>	THE EDUCATION OF A MAN OF QUALITY—1800 211
<i>Kecksies</i>	A PATCH OF MARSH WEEDS—1800 231
<i>Raw Material</i>	STRANGE HAPPENINGS AT PECKHAM RYE— 1900 247
<i>The Reverse of the Medal</i>	A HOLIDAY IN ITALY—1912 265
<i>Colonel de Pomenars and Two Ladies</i>	A SCENE IN A FRENCH CHÂTEAU—1918 . 275

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	1
2	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	2
3	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	3
4	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	4
5	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	5
6	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	6
7	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	7
8	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	8
9	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	9
10	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	10
11	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	11
12	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	12
13	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	13
14	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	14
15	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	15
16	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	16
17	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	17
18	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	18
19	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	19
20	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	20
21	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	21
22	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	22
23	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	23
24	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	24
25	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	25
26	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	26
27	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	27
28	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	28
29	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	29
30	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	30
31	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	31
32	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	32
33	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	33
34	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	34
35	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	35
36	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	36
37	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	37
38	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	38
39	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	39
40	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	40
41	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	41
42	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	42
43	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	43
44	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	44
45	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	45
46	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	46
47	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	47
48	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	48
49	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	49
50	A SHORT HISTORY OF THE	50

N
 an
 ge
 wit
 ba
 It
 a p
 spe
 ligh
 cou
 sha
 em
 Hal
 C
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GRACE LATOUCHE AND THE WARRINGTONS

A STUDY IN MANNERS—1850

MRS. LATOUCHE dropped the green damask curtain between herself and the sleeping youth. The nurse and doctor had departed with a discreet hush of step, look and gesture, which distinctly conveyed—"He had better be alone with you when he wakes, if he wakes at all. . . ."

Grace Latouche folded her small hands in her lap and leant back in the low chair ; her movements were naturally graceful. It was a summer afternoon, and this woman had always found a peculiar quality of tedium in English summer afternoons spent in the country. The blinds were drawn in the spacious, light and exactly furnished bedchamber, but Mrs. Latouche could see on the pale squares of holland the lightly moving shadows of the trees without, and she visualised perfectly the empty space of the sunny park that surrounded Warrington Hall.

Custom, order, tradition and conventionality lay over the whole place like spells—to Grace Latouche like a blight ; as she mused in the stately quiet of the solitary mansion set in the large austere landscape she felt as if nothing occurred in this establishment that had not been sternly regulated for generations. She was sure that the servants had been in the family from father to son, from mother to daughter, that the clocks were all wound at a set hour, that no picture or piece of furniture had been moved within living memory, that Mrs. Warrington knew exactly what she possessed in her china closet, her linen cupboard and her still-room ; even a great

tragedy, even a possible sudden death, had not been able to disturb the immemorial tedium of this English mansion on an English summer afternoon.

Grace Latouche sighed. She had listened with decorum to the doctor's solemn talk.

"It is the crisis of the illness, we must be careful, his life may depend upon your presence."

These sentences hung in her mind. She knew that the doctor and nurse had thought her too composed; they and the servants had, of course, all been hostile. The master of the house she had neither seen nor expected to see; of the mistress she had had one glimpse. Mrs. Warrington (and Grace Latouche could estimate what the effort had cost her) had received her in the formal hall. Repelled by the cold atmosphere of the mansion, by the absence of the master, Grace Latouche had almost returned to her chariot and driven back to London, but the other woman's look had induced her to remain. Mrs. Warrington had been weeping, and her face was hideous with terrible grief.

"Her son," thought Grace Latouche, "and I suppose he's dying."

While the footman took (with disdain she was sure) her parasol and her shawl, Mrs. Latouche had gracefully played with the buttons of her pearl-coloured gloves which fastened at the wrist, and, her lovely face shrouded by the plumes of her bonnet, had listened courteously to Mrs. Warrington's difficult words. But the only one of the broken sentences that Mrs. Latouche answered was:

"You will understand that we could do no less than send for you."

To this she had replied: "And you will understand, Mrs. Warrington, that I could do no less than come. Shall I go upstairs and wait?"

"If you will be so good," said the poor trembling mother.

And Grace Latouche thought: "How cowardly of the husband to leave it all to her!"

Alone in the pale shadowed bedroom Mrs. Latouche watched those delicate waving shadows on the opaque holland blind and the languor of her tedium nearly overcame her high spirits. She was a woman who loved activity and abhorred the kind of life typified in Warrington Hall. Never could she recall any time passing so slowly as this time measured by the porcelain clock on the mantelshelf—five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, half an hour, and still the pale young man had not stirred; his outline showed rigid beneath the quilted and flourished-satin coverlet.

Grace Latouche moved the curtain again. He lay as the nurse had arranged him, sunk in the flounced pillows. On his handsome face was that look of illness and dishevelled fatigue that is so pathetic on the countenance of extreme youth. His left arm and shoulder were swathed in bandages.

They had told her that he had shot himself for love of her; the bullet had been extracted but pleurisy was feared.

"It would be a fight"—the doctor had used the conventional phrases—"for his life." And it was supposed that the best chance of safety lay in the presence of the woman for whose sake he had committed—Grace Latouche again in her mind quoted the doctor—"this desperate act."

"One never knows," that had always been her philosophy; but she was surprised and startled that Harry Warrington, of all people, should have committed this—Mrs. Latouche substituted for the doctor's words another—"folly." She had known him quite well—in Paris, in London, as she had known also quite well dozens of such young men. She was very sorry when the agonized appeal of the distracted mother had come to her little house in Cork Street; she had never hesitated a moment in her response. She was extremely grieved, she was also extremely bored, and she asked herself—Would she be expected to sit for hours in this sick chamber?

They were treating the whole affair as if it were sacred and required a kind of ritual, and she smiled to herself, having an unfortunate kind of wit, and wondered, "Was she the priestess or the victim of these solemn rites?" Would the family continue to ignore her? The Honourable George Warrington shut in his study—the Honourable Mrs. Warrington shut into her boudoir. . . . And what—she could not help a further smile at that—did they intend to do if the beloved Harry recovered?

A maid brought in tea, an elaborate refreshment which she arrayed in decorous silence on a rosewood table.

"Mrs. Warrington, ma'am, thought you'd rather have it here than come down to the drawing-room."

Grace Latouche smiled.

"Naturally," she replied, and thought: "I suppose I am good enough for Harry's bedroom but not for his mother's drawing-room."

The maid was subdued to utter decorum, but Mrs. Latouche caught in her eye a feminine flash over the pearl-grey French gown garnished with knots of sarcenet ribbon, the heavy lace cuffs and fichu, the bonnet, the silvered feathers, the carved cornelian garniture—all so different from anything the girl would have seen before at Warrington Hall.

"Thank you, I shall do very well," said Mrs. Latouche.

"And you are to ring the bell, ma'am, if you require anything more."

"I'll not be likely to require anything more."

The tea was lavish—exquisite cakes, hothouse fruits, filigree silver, embroidered linen; but she was to eat it alone. Mrs. Latouche was not offended. The maid, at the door, said very respectfully:

"Mrs. Warrington will be joining you, ma'am."

Mrs. Latouche's surprise was hidden under a casual "Thank you." She noticed then that there were two cups and two plates, and she was curiously touched. It was always difficult for her to see anybody forfeit something they cherished, and

she knew that Mrs. Warrington, in coming to drink tea with her, was forfeiting something highly valued indeed.

The mistress of the house entered, the other lady rose, and they gave each other a small curtsy. Mrs. Warrington looked steadily at her son, pulled the curtains a little further on the poles as if shielding him from some visible annoyance, flicked at a speck on the coverlet and joined Mrs. Latouche at the tea-table.

"You have had everything you require, Mrs. Latouche, the maid has shown you into the other room where you can make your toilet and repose yourself?"

"I have everything I require, thank you, Mrs. Warrington, but I have preferred to remain here."

"That I can understand, I also should prefer that we remain here. If we drink our tea quietly I do not think we shall disturb Harry, and I should like to be quite near, you know, in case——"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Latouche.

Their glances just brushed each other. They were both too well-bred for their curiosity to have any offence in it. Mrs. Latouche thought, "She has never met a woman like me before, and I really cannot remember now when I last met a woman like her. Yet I understand her so well. She looks fifty, but I suppose she is not so very far from my own age."

Mrs. Warrington wore a dress of steel-blue bombazine, a matron's cap, collar and cuffs, a gold chain across her bosom. She was the type of whom people say vaguely—"I should think she was handsome once."

"It was good of you to come, Mrs. Latouche."

"Not at all, Mrs. Warrington, I could do no less, as I remarked before."

"You will understand, Mrs. Latouche, that this has all been a very great shock to me and must excuse any defect in your reception." She poured out the tea and added, above the other woman's murmured acceptance of these apologies, "You will

excuse my husband, he would have wished to receive you, but he is entirely overcome and has shut himself in the library since—since the accident.”

“Pray do not concern yourself,” replied Mrs. Latouche; “I came here for one purpose only, that which you desired of me.”

Mrs. Warrington handed her the cup of tea and took this occasion to look at her straightly—at the lovely face, the bare throat, the upper bosom above the rich lace, the auburn curls rolling over the fine shoulders, at the delicate fingers which glittered with too many and too large jewels.

“It must have been a great shock to you,” she remarked.

“Of course, Mrs. Warrington, I was very distressed; I knew Harry”—fearful of giving offence she slurred that over—“your son—well, we had met in London, in Paris, and, two years ago I believe, in Rome.”

“My son travels a great deal,” said Mrs. Warrington, flatly. “He is very young and has distressed his father on many occasions——”

“I understand,” interrupted Mrs. Latouche, gently. “When I received your note this morning I knew I could not do otherwise than come immediately, but I am afraid that you do not quite understand the situation between myself and your son, Mrs. Warrington.”

The mother glanced at the bed, the other woman was almost afraid before the courage and the resolution that showed in that look.

“I must tell you, Mrs. Latouche, exactly what happened.”

“Is there any occasion, Mrs. Warrington, to give yourself pain?”

“My pain is of absolutely no moment,” replied the other woman with a quiver of her lip. “I have to tell you what occurred. My son, Harry, interviewed his father on the question of yourself. He wished, as you must know, Mrs. Latouche, to marry you.”

Mrs. Latouche shook her head.

"No, I did not know that." She was aware that the other woman thought she was lying.

Mrs. Warrington hurried on with her narrative.

"It seems, from what his father tells me, that he became quite frantic and violent at the first hint of opposition. This is difficult to put to you without offence."

"I never take offence," murmured Grace Latouche; "it is hardly ever worth while."

"My husband is a man of most rigid principles; I dare say"—and this was spoken with an effort—"to you and your world, a narrow-minded and hard man, Mrs. Latouche. He considered that—he and I had decided"—proudly she associated herself with her husband—"that this marriage was altogether unsuitable; Harry is only nineteen and you, Mrs. Latouche——"

"I suppose," said that lady, gently, "your husband, Mrs. Warrington, described me 'as old enough to be his mother.' I was born in eighteen-ten, the year famous for the comet, the vintage and for myself, perhaps——"

"You are older than my son, Mrs. Latouche, that is admitted, and of a different experience——"

"I wish you would not disturb yourself with this recital. I can comprehend the whole interview so well. . . . Poor Harry, I am very grieved. His father, I suppose, gave him the most absolute refusal?"

"I must admit that he did, Mrs. Latouche. There was a quarrel between them; I could hear angry voices, that is very uncommon for my husband is of a most controlled disposition. Harry left the room in an extremely agitated condition. I entered soon after to soothe his father. There was a miniature of yourself on the table——"

"There are many about," said Mrs. Latouche, "I fear even they may be purchased from various artists—against my will, but there it is. I have never given Harry a miniature."

Again she knew that the other woman thought she was lying. "She will believe, I suppose, that creatures like myself always lie," she thought, wearily, "so I had best be silent and listen to what she has to say."

"Harry went straight to the gunroom," continued Mrs. Warrington; "before I could get the brief facts from his father someone—one of the grooms—heard the shot——"

"I beg you, Mrs. Warrington, do not thus discompose yourself. You must have had a most terrible, a most exhausting experience; believe me, you have my intense sympathy."

Mrs. Warrington held herself rigid.

"That sounds grotesque," she said, breaking through her own formal decorum.

"I'm afraid it does," said Mrs. Latouche. "The situation is a little grotesque, is it not? I am doing my best, but I also must explain something to you. Harry has never asked me to marry him, and if he had ever done so I should have refused." She saw a look of blank incredulity and offended horror in the matron's face; she added, in a deprecating tone: "Indeed, Mrs. Warrington, I suppose it seems very peculiar to you that women like myself do receive offers of marriage and do refuse them. You see, it is rather difficult for me to get back into your world, though it is one that I was bred in. I am, by birth, a gentlewoman and I can, therefore, understand your point of view. No doubt the least name that you would give me is 'the notorious Mrs. Latouche.'"

"We tried to think of you," said Mrs. Warrington, in an unsteady tone, "as a woman whom my poor Harry loved, adored."

"It is very ingenuous and charming of Harry to adore me, but, well—he is not the only one. I have known others recover."

"I suppose, Mrs. Latouche, there have been no other young men committing suicide for you?"

"Heaven forbid!" said the lady, gravely. "And this—this

accident—I cannot understand. I have given your son no encouragement, but I suppose I shall have difficulty in persuading you of that. He was no more to me than one of the companions of a companion, one of the young men who came to my salon, a friend of a friend—I hardly believe that we had three interviews alone——”

“What does any of that matter?” cried Mrs. Warrington. “There is the fact.” She looked again towards the bed.

“But I cannot understand why Harry should have gone to his father for his consent to a marriage which had never been even suggested to me,” said Mrs. Latouche. “The poor boy must have completely lost his sense of—of humour, shall we say, Mrs. Warrington?”

For the first time since this strange interview began Mrs. Warrington showed definite hostility towards her guest.

“Harry could hardly have supposed that he would have been refused,” she said; and behind her was all the force and majesty of rank, money, position and an honourable name. She contrived in the tone in which she uttered that brief sentence to name Mrs. Latouche “outcast” as plainly as if she had spoken the words, but the other woman’s equanimity was not disturbed, she had the perhaps fatal gift of always seeing the other person’s point of view and she could very well put herself in Mrs. Warrington’s place. She thought to herself, not without tenderness: “Poor woman, to her I am an adventuress, a Jezebel, why, I suppose she doesn’t know the name she thinks I ought to have, and she’s his mother and has no other child, and I dare swear her husband is a black tyrant, cold and violent; yet, why should I pity her? After all, she thinks herself so much my superior and knows very little of anything. She’s his mother—but, what’s that but a mere animal function, yet she stakes so much pride on it? I’ve been a mother, too, but was I any the better for it? My baby is in a Roman cemetery—she’s never had that experience, why should I pity her?”

Mrs. Warrington was looking at her guest with her pale formidable eyes, at once cold and eager.

"You have overthrown all my plans," she said. "I intended—yes, Mrs. Latouche, this will surprise you very much—but I intended to ask my husband for his consent to this marriage."

"That would have meant a great sacrifice on your part, I am sure," replied Grace Latouche, quietly, "and I am obliged to you for the compliment, I honour you for your self-abnegation. Believe me, I could not, in any circumstances have married your son."

"But why?" asked Mrs. Warrington.

"Must I give you my reasons? He is too young, he—well, I don't love him, Mrs. Warrington."

"But love," stammered the matron, as if she had not taken that word over her lips for many years; "but love, Mrs. Latouche, is this a question of love?"

The other lady interrupted these stammerings: "I suppose you think, Mrs. Warrington, that with women like me love does not enter into our—shall we say, without offence—our bargains? Marriages can be bargains, too, you know. I have been married twice, but each time for love. Love does not always last, you know; but that does not say that while it endures it is not genuine. But I speak of affairs which have not been marriage, but which have had in them love and, while they lasted, fidelity. I do not want to hurt you, I wish to make it clear why I should not marry your son."

"You will find it difficult to convince me of that," replied Mrs. Warrington, and her tone was now stern as if she were aware that she dealt with a sly and subtle adventuress.

"How can I convince you?" smiled Grace Latouche. "I must convince you, there can be no false pretences about this. I have come to be near your son until he recovers consciousness, I want myself to make him see reason; I want him to tell you before me that I never encouraged him; there was never talk of any entanglement."

"This is extraordinary," murmured Mrs. Warrington.

"Believe me, Mrs. Warrington, I find it most extraordinary. I am deeply distressed, I wish to assist you, but you must believe me. Perhaps," she added, "you will believe me if I tell you that I am in love with someone else."

Mrs. Warrington flushed a dull unbecoming red.

"There was another name mentioned," she muttered, looking aside. "I heard it—Count Alexis . . ."

"Count Alexis Poniatowski," said Mrs. Latouche; "yes, his name has been connected with mine. You will have heard, perhaps, that he has stayed at my cottage, Villa Violetta, outside Parma!"

Mrs. Warrington appeared to shudder and Mrs. Latouche smiled.

"I suppose that all sounds very gaudy and theatrical to you? But, really, there *are* violets there, you know, fields of them, that is how the Villa gets the name. I know," she added, in a tone of sympathy, "when one is in England on an afternoon like this or, even more so, on a Sunday, these things seem quite impossible, but they are there. I believe you would really like the Villa Violetta and the violets. They have the three colours in two varieties—double and single; white, deep purple and light mauve. And, as for Count Alexis Poniatowski, he is most interesting and cultured—you must not think of him, please, because of his name—as I know English people do—as quite a cheapjack, you know. . . ."

Mrs. Warrington was silent, she seemed to wither and withdraw into herself.

"But it is not of this gentleman I would speak, there is another man; I have met someone who, if the chance offered, I would marry."

"But he has not asked you to marry him?" asked Mrs. Warrington, who seemed to feel her way stiffly about an alien and hostile world.

"No," said Mrs. Latouche, "he has not asked me. I met

him in romantic circumstances, in France ; I have entertained at my little house in the rue du Bac ; we have corresponded. It is quite a delicate little affair I am telling you of, Mrs. Warrington ; I want you to know where my heart lies."

Mrs. Warrington rose.

"Mrs. Latouche," she said, sternly ; "I cannot conceive how Harry could have been so mistaken. You must excuse me for troubling you—I had no conception that this could be the truth ; you must forgive me if I doubt, even now, it is the truth."

Mrs. Latouche also rose.

"We must not dispute," she said, sweetly ; "we might awake your son."

"But what am I to say to him," exclaimed Mrs. Warrington, "when he does wake ? It is almost better that you went, that he did not see you."

"That is as you please. I came here on your urgent summons and also because I had to tell you that there was some mistake."

"And I suppose," said Mrs. Warrington, leaning against one of the posts of her son's bed, as if unable any longer to stand upright without support, "that it was stupid of me to expect any candour from you."

"I suppose you've heard dreadful things of me, Mrs. Warrington ?"

"No," replied the other woman, "I have heard nothing at all, except your name, and that is quite the worst, you understand, when one hears nothing of a woman but her name, and just notice how people look. . . ."

"I see," replied Mrs. Latouche, thoughtfully, "that is how it is done, is it ? I have often wondered how ideas about women like me are conveyed to women like you ; now I understand—just the name and a look."

"We—we do not discuss you or your companions at all," said Mrs. Warrington, breathing quickly.

"No, I understand, I was brought up like that myself, Mrs. Warrington. Now, I am afraid we disturb your son, he is beginning to move a little. Do you want me to go or stay?"

In an instant, Mrs. Warrington was all maternal terror.

"No, you must stay, indeed you must; your name was his last word." She hurried to the door, whispering in the pompous doctor and the officious nurse, who were waiting in the ante-room.

Grace Latouche moved to the head of the bed. The young man was stirring as if from a natural sleep. She ventured to touch his hand, then his brow—surely of a normal coolness? The hastening doctor confirmed her hopes, the fever had fallen, the young man had sunk from the last swooning delirium of illness into a healthy sleep. He opened his eyes, conscious, clear-headed; he smiled at his mother and Mrs. Latouche. In tones of guarded tenderness Mrs. Warrington said, bending over the pillow:

"You see she is here, Harry; I sent for her at once. She came and has been waiting by your bed."

Mrs. Latouche despised herself for noticing the accomplished way in which Mrs. Warrington dropped into the part of the ministering angel, and the delicacy with which she stressed her own sacrifice in sending for the outcast.

"Thank you, Mother, I'd like to speak to her," whispered Harry.

"Not now, my dear boy, you are not strong enough."

"I'm quite strong enough, thank you, Mother, and I'd rather get it off my mind."

"Perhaps you could tell me in a very few words," said Mrs. Latouche, looking with soft compassion at the pallid face and shadowed eyes; she was thinking of herself, too, for was she not quite indifferent to the young man save as regarded pity? And how impossible to spend the night in Warrington Hall, with a master who would not see her and a mistress who had to

make an effort not to draw her skirts aside ! The young man, Mrs. Latouche admitted reluctantly to herself, must be, what she had never suspected him to be, a fool.

With her (no doubt unconscious) air of renunciation and sacrifice the mother tiptoed away, followed by the solemn doctor and the blank-faced nurse.

Grace Latouche's manner became more natural when relieved of these formal presences. She sat down by the bed, reached for the sick youth's hand and said, reprovingly :

" Why, Harry, how did you come to be so foolish ? I would hardly have believed it. I thought you was so sensible."

Harry smiled and not, as she noticed instantly, in any languishing or lovesick fashion.

" What have they been telling you ? " he asked.

" That you asked your father's permission to marry me, that when he refused you went off in a pet and shot yourself. Your poor mother is in torment and, I suppose, your father is too ; though for him I have less pity. And what were you doing with my miniature ? I never gave you one."

" They have got the whole thing wrong from beginning to end. They sent for you ? " whispered Harry.

" Yes, but ought you to talk, my dear ? "

" I must talk. You won't wish to stay, will you ? "

" Well, I don't want to if I can get away. But, do tell me what it all means ? You don't look to me as if you were dying of love."

" The shot—that was an accident—a confounded accident. I was in a temper and went to the gunroom, started cleaning a pair of pistols and didn't notice that one was loaded. . . . That's all there is to that."

Mrs. Latouche laughed with relief.

" Why, let us have your mother in and tell her immediately." She reached out her hand for the bellrope. But the boy said in a thick whisper :

" Don't, please don't ; I've got something else to tell

you—I'd rather she went on thinking that I did it because of you. You see, my father and I did have a quarrel, and about you——”

“ About me ? ”

“ Yes, won't you please come closer to the bed ? I'm not very strong yet and I feel that I shall go to sleep again, but I want you to help me——”

“ Of course, I'll help you, Harry, I came here to help you ; but I feel so relieved that you didn't do it intentionally, and because of me. Tell me now, honestly, Harry, I didn't lead you on and make you fall in love with me, did I ? ”

The dark head on the sumptuous pillow shook “ No.”

“ Oh, I am so relieved, I never wanted to do that to anyone. I have told your mother, and I'd like to tell you, Harry, there's someone else whom I met in Paris——”

“ I don't want you to tell me about that,” said the boy. He closed his eyes and appeared exhausted, but his words though low were distinct.

“ Why ? ”

“ Well, Mrs. Latouche, you see I know all about it.”

“ You know all about it—about my little romance in Paris ? ”

“ Yes, and that was what the quarrel was about. You did give a miniature to that man, didn't you ? ”

“ Yes, in a little violet morocco case.”

“ Well, if you were to go into the library now you'd find it there, unless he's destroyed it. You see, Mrs. Latouche,” he moved his head so as not to see her, “ that man is my father. He was staying at the Embassy in Paris and he met you in the Luxembourg—someone told me about it. He didn't give you his real name. My mother knows nothing at all.”

Grace Latouche laughed quickly, she could always pick herself up quickly after she had been thrown : she said swiftly to herself—“ After all, is the marriage of this boy's mother so much ? I guessed he went under an assumed name and was married. But, how infinitely more charming and interesting

than Harry—Harry's father! the man whom I imagined to be a dull provincial tyrant!"

"But what had it to do with you?" she asked, "and how did you venture to speak to him about it?"

"I don't know—it came up—I made an occasion . . . then there was the miniature and one or two other things. I could see that he was really—well——"

"In love, I suppose?" said Mrs. Latouche.

"I don't like to think that."

"What were you considering?"

"Just one person—my mother."

"That woman," whispered Mrs. Latouche.

"Well, she's also in love—if you like to put it that way—and has been for the last twenty-five years. I suppose he and I are all she's got, and—I'd rather she thought I was a confounded fool, infatuated with you, and shot myself, than know——"

"——that he, perhaps, came to stay with me in the Villa Violetta?"

"Yes. You won't let him do it, will you?" he added with a childlike accent.

"Your mother is a stranger to me, Harry, and I don't know you very well. I have long since ceased to be bound by—just convention, tradition."

"I thought you'd be sorry for her."

"Why shouldn't she be sorry for me?"

"I don't think there's been anybody else, and if you were to leave him alone. . . . You see, he's really fond of her. They've been extremely happy until now." His voice was becoming very faint.

Mrs. Latouche rose.

"You mustn't talk so much," she said.

She put on her bonnet over her smooth fashionable curls and tied the sarcenet ribbons under her chin.

"I'll go now. I suppose he excused himself, when she found the miniature, by putting it on to you?"

"Yes. What are you going to tell my mother?" he asked, drowsily.

She did not answer but touched the bell.

Instantly, Mrs. Warrington, the doctor and nurse were on the threshold.

Mrs. Latouche swept up to them.

"Harry and I have had a candid talk," she said. "He is quite cured of his folly, his illness has effaced his—whimsey. It often does, you know—a kind of fever that passes with a little bloodletting. He will not disturb you with his 'infatuation' any longer, Mrs. Warrington. He is quite sensible."

A flush and tremble of joy broke over Mrs. Warrington's features and by that the other woman could gauge how deep her sufferings had been, how hard the restraint she had put on herself. She held out a hand which she had not done before. She followed Mrs. Latouche to the door, while doctor and nurse decorously bent over the bed where their patient was again falling into a natural drowsiness.

"Thank you, Mrs. Latouche."

They were out on the landing. Mrs. Warrington added, impetuously:

"I am sure you are a good woman at heart."

"Thank you, Mrs. Warrington, and please don't take my hand if you'd rather not. . . ."

"I should not like to hurt you——"

"I'm afraid I've hurt you, Mrs. Warrington."

"Well, after all, there's a good deal I don't understand. I should like to take your hand, and, please, may I wish you good luck and felicity with whomever it was—the man you said you would marry if you had the chance?"

"Thank you, again."

They clasped hands and dropped a little curtsey.

"Please go back to your son, Mrs. Warrington."

Grace Latouche went alone down the stairs. Behind her tinkled the bell to summon a footman. She walked slowly. On

the next landing were two large doors. The footman waited for her before one of them. She asked him coolly :

“ Where do those doors lead to ? ”

“ One, ma'am, to the library, the other to Mr. Warrington's study.”

Mrs. Latouche paused, slowly buttoning her short pearl-coloured gloves at the wrist.

How easy to scribble a line on a leaf torn from her tablets, to send the footman away on some excuse to fetch her shawl or parasol, and slip a message under the door. Or, again, how easy to hand it to the footman, saying, “ Pray take that to your master.”

But what would that message be ? “ I have found out who you are, it makes no difference, meet me in the rue du Bac or in the Villa Violetta.” . . .

Easy to let him know that she was not outraged, or shocked, or frightened ; that, in brief, she really loved him beyond all such considerations. Did she not owe him so much outward compassion ? Had he not, enclosed in there, suffered more than his wife, or Harry, or herself ? Harry would recover. Mrs. Warrington would always have Harry.

Grace Latouche took a long time to button her gloves. She told the footman to go ahead of her, to get her parasol, her shawl, to see if her chariot were ready. Poor Mrs. Warrington had wished her, with what pain and effort she, Grace Latouche, could value—“ Good luck ” in her love affair, and she had said, “ I believe you are a good woman at heart.” Mrs. Latouche knew what Mrs. Warrington meant by “ a good woman.”

She leant against the door, a charming figure in her frivolous Parisian dress of flowing silken folds, her furbelowed bonnet and rich laces. She seemed a butterfly that the lightest breeze would blow to its destiny. She did not touch the handle of the door, nor write a note to slip underneath. She said, very low, an echo of a whisper :

"Good-bye, my dear," and went downstairs, got into her chariot and drove back to Cork Street.

When she arrived there she lowered her veil for her face was as disfigured from weeping as had been Mrs. Warrington's face when she had met her that morning.

MISS LUCY'S TWO VISITORS

A MIDSUMMER PICNIC—1810

WHEN she could no longer hear the last echoes of the departing carriage-wheels, a sense of desolation overcame Lucy's already drooping spirits. She was pierced by the childish pang of "being left behind," that indescribable regret which comes from seeing off a gay party of pleasure from which you are the only one omitted. Even most of the servants had gone on the picnic and Lucy was alone with Mrs. Bartlet and a maid. Three carriages and the light wagonette, laden with laughing people and baskets of provisions, had driven off merrily to Okestead Woods to hold there the great picnic for Emily's birthday.

Only Lucy had been left behind.

Lucy stood at the window of the drawing-room and looked on to the long terrace. It was early morning and already very warm. To-day would be cloudless and very sunny, everyone had predicted that, as amid laughter and merriment they had entered the carriages, all eager for the picnic. Lucy had helped to pack the baskets and tie the ribbons round the birthday cake. She had felt rather like a heroine, for everyone was so sorry that she was not able to join them in the long-anticipated festival. Her sisters, Caroline and Emily, had clung round her neck, almost with tears in their eyes amid their kisses.

"Dear Lucy! Sweet Lucy! what a pity! How unfortunate! Are you quite sure you cannot come?"

Then her mother, so tender and regretful, and her father

disappointed in the midst of his pleasure, and Mary Fenwicke, her close friend, protesting that she would not go but stay behind to keep Lucy company; and Kate Sorrel, offering to return at midday and "see how Lucy did"; and Aunt Charlotte who had had to be almost pushed into the carriage, so desirous was she of remaining with Lucy; and Uncle Ambrose, with hearty kindness declaring that it was all nonsense and that he was sure Lucy could come with them. Then the young men, Mr. Matchet, Mr. Lemoine and Mr. Gray, all declaring that the picnic would be robbed of its brightest lustre if Miss Lucy did not condescend to keep them company, until Emily began to pout in pretence of a jealousy and all laughed together; but Lucy continued to excuse herself. Really, she could not come; yes, she had felt like a heroine then, the centre of all that love and tenderness, affection, consideration and kindness.

Now that they had really gone without her, now that the last farewells had been waved and there was silence in the house, in the gardens and on the terrace, and the long sunny summer day quite empty of events was before her, Lucy felt no longer like a heroine, but rather like a naughty child who, for some misdemeanour, has been deprived of a treat. She began to wonder why she had refused to go. Certainly, last spring—that late, long cold spring—she had been quite seriously ill, but now she was completely recovered and, though the doctor had said she must not exert herself or become excited or fatigued, she had not given much heed to that mandate until to-day. But this morning, after waking up early and joining the chattering group who were congratulating Emily on being nineteen years of age, and after presenting the beloved sister with a sarcenet bag exactly flowered by herself, she had felt a sudden languor and a complete inability to join the picnic, a panic terror at the thought of being in the midst of all that cheerful good company and overcome by sudden illness; so she had confided to her mother that she

did not feel able to go and Mrs. Middleton had anxiously agreed that it would be far better for Lucy to remain quietly at home with Mrs. Bartlet.

The picnic was to be at Okestead Woods and the drive was long ; the day, too, would be long, for they intended to stay until the full moon was high. Two of the gentlemen had flutes and there would be dancing and singing, perhaps a charade. Yes, it would all be very exciting and fatiguing, and it would be far wiser for Lucy, if she felt nervous or languid, to remain at home.

Lucy did not really want to remain and she disliked very much the idea of giving herself any importance, or, possibly, clouding the pleasure of others. Yet there was an ominous throbbing in her temples, a sense of faintness over all her limbs, a palpitation in her bosom which warned her that if she joined the picnic she would be but a burden to others and a misery to herself.

Well, the question had been decided and she had been left behind, standing on the terrace in the sunny early morning, with silence about her and a long empty day before her ; presently this same warmth and silence began to soothe her. Her wave of disappointment passed and she was grateful that there was this long spell of quietness ahead ; she would have nothing to do for hours and hours, but sit in the warmth, or perhaps sleep, or gossip a little with Mrs. Bartlet, her old nurse. Yes, after all the regrets had gone, she was glad that she had found the courage to say that she could not face the picnic.

She felt very languid and fatigued, it was delicious to be alone and know that there was absolutely nothing to do. The sun would go on shining for hours and after that there would be the moon. There was no cloud in the sky nor any care in her mind ; even that piece of needlework for Emily, which had rather weighed on her (for she was often weary and had to force herself to do the fine embroidery), even that was

finished. She had learned, too, her new piece on the harp, which had been of some difficulty ; no need to worry any more over that. No one would come near her all day, for everyone knew that this was Emily's birthday and that the whole family always went on this fourth of August to Okestead Woods.

Mrs. Bartlet would give her the luncheon she most liked ; afterwards, perhaps, she would go and lie in the *chaise longue* under the cedar trees, or wander into the warm garden where the peaches bloomed, or, perhaps, if she felt strong enough, go as far as the wishing-well in the woods of Ruslake Manor.

Mrs. Bartlet brought a chair out on to the terrace and without fussing, folded a long white silk shawl with a heavy fringe round Lucy's frail shoulders.

" Oh, Mrs. Bartlet, but the sun is warm ! "

" Never mind, my dear, it's possible you might get a chill, even on a day like this. Now you don't feel moped and melancholy, do you, the others being gone ? "

" Well, I did a little at first," confessed Lucy shyly, " but now somehow I feel glad that there's nothing to do ; isn't it delicious here, Mrs. Bartlet—like one of those places in a fairy tale, under an enchantment, you know."

She settled herself into the comfortable chair and drew round her muslin gown the silk shawl, she liked the feel of it on her bare arms and the warmth of the sun coming through the silk. She folded her sandalled feet on the footstool Mrs. Bartlet had brought and smiled at her kind attendant.

" It seems a sad shame, miss, that you should be denied the pleasure of the picnic after such a long preparation and looking forward to it. That was it, you did too much and overtaxed your strength. You know the doctor said that you'd got to be careful."

" Well, I am being careful to-day," smiled Lucy ; " I am just going to lie here and do nothing."

Mrs. Bartlet looked at her with tender affection and thought,

with a swelling pride, how beautiful this young nursling of hers was—Miss Caroline and Miss Emily were pretty girls, but Miss Lucy was like an angel, the old nurse believed. She had clusters of pale hair, a complexion so delicate and with such a wild-rose stain in the cheek, features of so pure an outline and eyes of such a radiant blue. . . . Mrs. Bartlet considered, with a kind of satisfaction, that probably the picnic had been spoilt for all the young gentlemen by the absence of Miss Lucy. She had seen Mr. Gray's look when he heard the news. . . .

"Well, they weren't any of them good enough for Miss Lucy; there was no one in the whole neighbourhood good enough for Miss Lucy, and that was the trouble of it—no one good enough."

"Shall I bring you your needlework, miss, or a book?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Bartlet, I'll just do nothing; for a while, at least."

Alone on the terrace Lucy also was thinking of Mr. Gray. She knew then, what she had not been quite sure of before, that she was glad to be rid of Mr. Gray and his little timid attentions; she "half"-liked him and she tried to puzzle out why only "half." She had had of course insistent and secret dreams of what a young man should look like and how he should behave, and, to a certain extent, Mr. Gray had fulfilled the ideals exacted by those dreams, but only if she looked at him glancingly, sideways; if she ventured (and it was not often that she had so ventured) to gaze at him directly, or to consider him seriously, not only had he not fulfilled her ideals, but there was something about him that irritated, almost disgusted, her—little imperfections which, to her fastidiousness, had been distasteful, just a look, or an accent, or a line wrong, and she had wished to flee him for ever. Yes, she was glad to be rid not only of the excitement, hurry and confusion of the picnic, but also of the courtesy and attention of Mr. John Gray.

As the sun grew stronger, rising in a steady blaze behind the old red-brick manor-house, Mrs. Bartlet brought out a parasol and fastened it cleverly above the chair; Miss Lucy did not yet care to move, but lay there languidly.

Large single red roses spread their petals over the brick front of the house. She gazed at these two shades of colour close together—the hard, purplish bricks and the frail crimson roses; even as she looked some of the petals fell from the golden stamens and dropped on the terrace; white butterflies, the quintessence of summer luxury and idleness, floated past. When the faint sweet summer breeze stirred the heavy blue air, a waft of perfume of fruit and flowers was borne to Lucy's nostrils.

She could not remember the house ever having been so empty before; when she turned her head she could see through the long windows into the drawing-room—all the familiar possessions, her little desk, her harp, Emily's workbox, the portrait of their grandmother, the marble chimneypiece, the shelves with all the books she had known since childhood—never before could she remember the drawing-room empty like that.

Then all the rooms above—the bedrooms, the little sitting-room—all empty! their windows open on the summer air. She began to muse on how old the house might be, and how many generations of Middletons might have passed up and down those shallow stairs from the drawing-room now empty to the bedrooms now empty. . . .

How old was the climbing rose tree, glowing against the bricks? How many years since those steps had been laid down which led to the stone-flagged garden, and the sundial amidst bushes of myrtle and rosemary? For the first time in her life Lucy Middleton did not seem herself to belong definitely to her own time and generation, but to be part of the silent empty house, the silent empty garden, and one of the company of all those other people who had once crossed this terrace.

She fell asleep, and when she awoke felt much better and declared to the watching Mrs. Bartlet that she was indeed quite recovered and that if the picnic had been starting now she would have been ready to join them. She looked indeed, the gratified nurse thought, not only well but blooming . . . for a long while she had not coughed.

Lucy went into the empty drawing-room where the blinds were drawn against the sun and ate some of the carefully-prepared luncheon, specially set for her there. Mrs. Bartlet remained to keep her company and they began talking about Okestead Woods. That, apart from Lucy's absence, had been the one blot upon a charming day. Mr. Middleton had long wished to purchase Okestead Woods which had been the scene of all the family's picnics and which lay exactly on the borders of his estate.

"I do think Lord Weybourne might sell them to the master," lamented Mrs. Bartlet.

And Lucy said: "Well, he might answer—Father has written twice, you know, but there has been no reply. Of course Lord Weybourne is always in London, but there's the steward. I suppose there is an explanation."

"I suppose so, miss; the master would have been delighted if to-day, Miss Emily's birthday, he could have said the woods were his. And, after all, they're not worth anything, and with all the land there is belonging to the Hall one wood or less wouldn't make any difference."

"I expect it's all right," smiled Lucy. "Father will hear soon, but, as you say, it would have been much pleasanter if he could have heard to-day."

After luncheon she went upstairs, according to the dainty habit of a lifetime, to change her morning dress. She put on (though she was alone and to gratify what whim she knew not, for she was very free of vanity) a fine figured silk with a broad blue ribbon fastening under her breast. Then she came downstairs and, taking out her harp, played over her piece;

then went to the harpsichord and sang over the song that she had been diligently learning :

“ Angels ever bright and fair,
Waft, O waft me to your care ! ”

“ It's a sad thing, that, Miss Lucy.”

“ Yes, I suppose it is in a way, but it's pretty, too, and father likes it. I think I'll go for a walk now.”

“ I shouldn't do that, Miss Lucy ; every time you get a bit of strength you mustn't use it up. You sit out on the terrace again and I'll get you presently a dish of tea.”

“ Why, I've only just had luncheon.”

Lucy went out on to the terrace. The sun was very strong and she was glad of the parasol, even in the shadow of the house there seemed a dazzle of light. The perfume of fruit and flowers was stronger and she could smell the box and laurel, the rosemary and myrtle growing in the flagged garden. Her heart was quite free—empty as the house and the day ; she mused impartially.

Mrs. Bartlet, finding solicitous occasion to pass through the drawing-room and look at her young mistress, thought resentfully : “ It's a pity there's no one—not anyone good enough.”

Lucy came in from the terrace and asked for the white kittens. Mrs. Bartlet brought them and she played with them on the cushions of the long sophy between the windows.

“ Do you know, Mrs. Bartlet, I do think I ought to go for a walk ; I am quite well now and I feel it was so silly of me not to have gone to the picnic.”

Mrs. Bartlet did not answer ; her quick trained ear had heard a footstep outside and she said, with the utmost surprise :

“ Why, there's someone here ! ” and stepped out of the tall French window, expecting she knew not whom, but prepared, with stern dignity, to send away any possible intruder.

A young man had crossed the terrace and stood directly fronting Mrs. Bartlet. He was, in the housekeeper's eyes, a

very manly and splendid figure ; he wore a uniform, tagged and braided ; he was dark, handsome and agreeable. He said, smiling pleasantly :

“ Why, I thought everyone was out ; I’ve been round to the front entrance but could make no one hear. Could I see Mr. Middleton or Mrs. Middleton ? ”

“ The family is out sir,” replied Mrs. Bartlet, “ and most of the servants. This is Miss Emily’s birthday and everyone has gone on a picnic.”

“ How odd that I should have chosen to-day,” said the young man, with an even more charming smile. “ I have come with a message from my uncle, Lord Weybourne ; it’s about Okestead Woods. Two letters have been unaccountably overlooked and Lord Weybourne was very anxious that Mr. Middleton should have an answer to-day. I am staying there and offered to come over in person.”

Mrs. Bartlet knew perfectly well that she should have taken this message and courteously dismissed the young man, repeating her assurance, “ The family is out, sir, there is no one at home,” but Mrs. Bartlet hesitated. She knew who he was—Captain the Honourable Simon Greeve, Lord Weybourne’s heir—the man who would be master of that great name and that great estate, a soldier on the famous Duke’s staff, a hero, too, no doubt, and handsome as the prince in the fairy tale.

Mrs. Bartlet’s thin face flushed. How odd that Miss Lucy should have stayed behind just to-day ! Why, he made all those other gentlemen, Mr. Gray, Mr. Matchet and Mr. Lemoine, look like so many broomsticks.

Captain Greeve, seeing the housekeeper’s hesitation, said :

“ Well, perhaps you would give that message to Mr. Middleton, and say that he will hear from my uncle to-morrow ? ”

Mrs. Bartlet moved aside from the window ; she replied :

“ There’s Miss Lucy at home, sir, if you would like to speak

with her ; she understands all about the Okestead Woods. You see, they used to play there as children, and it's become like home to them." And she added, with an unconscious note of invitation in her voice, "Wouldn't you care to see Miss Lucy, sir ?"

"Of course," smiled Captain Greeve, "I should be absolutely delighted to speak to Miss Lucy. Will you ask her if she would care to receive me ?"

Mrs. Bartlet went inside the drawing-room where Lucy was playing with the two white kittens on the long sophy.

"Here's a visitor for you, Miss Lucy."

"Oh, Mrs. Bartlet, I couldn't see anybody to-day. I heard you talking—it's a man, isn't it ? Please send him away—with compliments, you know, and say that my father will see him to-morrow."

"But, Miss Lucy, it's Captain Greeve from the Hall and he's come about the Woods."

"Let him leave a message with you," whispered Lucy; "do not let us talk here so long, it seems discourteous."

"It is discourteous," said Mrs. Bartlet, firmly; "that's just what it is, miss. It's a hot afternoon and he's walked over from the Hall, and you can do no less than ask him in and give him a dish of tea."

"Do you think so ?" asked Lucy, doubtfully.

Mrs. Bartlet had always been a firm model of all the decorum, the proprieties and the conventionalities, and her advice surprised and impressed her charge.

"You'll like him, Miss Lucy," whispered the housekeeper.

"Well," smiled Lucy, "I'm bound to see him now after this long delay, for it would seem as if you had described him and then I had refused; so ask him to come in, please."

She stood up, putting the kittens down on the sophy, and came forward as Captain Greeve entered through the tall French windows. Mrs. Bartlet repeated:

"A visitor for you, Miss Lucy, Captain Greeve !"

The girl dropped a little curtsey, the young soldier bowed. She had never seen a man like this and was too innocent to disguise her wonder, and he had often heard of absolute loveliness but never before beheld it . . . they looked, therefore, at each other for a second without speaking ; both given a certain ease by the sense of the empty house and the empty garden and park about them and the languorous sweetness of the full summer afternoon.

"I'll bring a dish of tea, miss," said Mrs. Bartlet, with a tone of triumph in her voice.

"Please, will you be seated," said Lucy, "and tell me—you have come about Okestead Woods?"

He said yes, and how strange it was that he should have chosen the day when all the family were abroad at that very place.

"Indeed," smiled Lucy, "and it is strange that I was not there, too ; but I was ill last spring with a cough and to-day felt languid, but now I am completely recovered."

"You would like me to go?" he said. "I intrude upon your kindness ; it is but a matter of leaving a message."

"Please stay," said Lucy, "and please be seated."

He took carefully the satin chair by the hearth and she sat again on the sophy, and she thought how the whole room, nay the whole house, the whole manor, seemed but a background for his personality.

"Lord Weybourne, Miss Lucy, is very willing to sell the Woods ; he is sorry that there has been a delay in answering the letters."

Lucy flushed :

"Oh, father will be delighted. We have always wanted them, you know."

"Why?" smiled Captain Greeve, "are they different from any other woods?"

"Well, they are to us ; we have always gone there for

picnics, there is such a splendid view, and little groves, and certain trees that we know so well and even call by names. You," she added shyly, "you are not often here, you would not know the places, I think."

"No, I have not often been here; once or twice as a child, but I do not think we met."

"No, we have never met before."

"Miss Lucy, isn't that odd?" asked the young soldier. And as her gentleness, her loveliness, her simplicity further enchanted him, he could not keep some tenderness from his voice. "Is it not odd that we do meet at last, like this? I thought, even as I left the Hall, there was some magic in the afternoon."

"Is there," asked Lucy, "some magic abroad? It has been very still here. I have been alone all day, but not lonely." She added in her heart, "It was this that I was waiting for and, therefore, was quiet and content." Aloud she said, "I watched the roses, just a few petals fell, it was so warm."

"The very height and crown of summer," said Captain Greeve.

Mrs. Bartlet carried in the tea and Naples cakes; Lucy noticed that she had brought in the Crown Derby service and the best silver as if this were a festival, and that her face was set in lines of rare satisfaction and pleasure.

Miss Lucy had never been alone with a young man before, but she was not shy nor frightened, for this seemed some familiar friend. Her face flushed to a more delicate rose blush and her blue eyes sparkled with an even more radiant brightness.

With ease, with grace, with a half-compassionate, half-admiring tenderness the young soldier allowed her to entertain him. They talked together of little things—of music, of flowers, of the long, sweet, fair summer that had followed the desolate winter and spring, of Okestead Woods, of the picnics, the

games and plays that had been held there by happy children, and of all other trivial, charming matters which, on their lips, were neither tedious nor insipid. Soon, all that they said had a delicious interest for each other. When she spoke, he listened as if all her words were as new as charming; when he spoke, she was silent to hear, as if her ears were ravished by new and unheard-of delights.

When Mrs. Bartlet came to remove the tea equipage Captain Greeve told Lucy that he was home for a long leave and that he must plan a dozen excursions for her to recompense her for the picnic missed to-day. Did she know this and that? Would she go here and there?

"But, 'tis I who must guide you," laughed Lucy; "we have some charming places in the Manor grounds."

"How easily they talk together," thought Mrs. Bartlet, with a swelling heart; "they look like accepted lovers already. Why, this has been a sheer stroke of Providence, that she should remain behind and he see her by herself like this, not surrounded by those chattering misses, Kate Sorrel and Mary Fenwicke, or even by her two sisters, Emily and Caroline—but, all by herself, in her beauty, her dignity and her grace—the sweetheart!" Here, at length, was a lover worthy of her, who had walked in out of the still summer afternoon just like the prince in the fairy tale who came to wake the Sleeping Beauty.

Mrs. Bartlet had given the gorgeous young man many shrewd looks. She knew, and there was a pang in that, that he was Miss Lucy's superior in birth, wealth and fortune, but she had never heard any evil of him and she trusted him; he had honest eyes, a serious manner; she could swear he was not one "of your young 'flyaways,' who make a play of catching maidens' hearts like butterflies in a net. No, there was respect in the way he looked at Miss Lucy and, more than that, a breath-catching surprise." He seemed to Mrs. Bartlet's triumphant, piercing gaze, like a man amazed at the extent of

his own good fortune, and Miss Lucy—Miss Lucy was transformed; Mrs. Bartlet herself had not guessed how gay, how charming, how lovely she could be . . . she had bloomed like a flower, long-closed, suddenly struck by the sun and opening wide to the golden heart.

"Oh, Mrs. Bartlet, I am going out! I am going to show Captain Greeve the beech grove and the wishing-well and the little stream with the forget-me-nots, though it's rather late to see the flowers!"

"Well, miss, don't tire yourself," smiled the housekeeper. "You know you were supposed to rest to-day."

"But, indeed I am quite recovered now."

"You must not let me take her," said the young man, "if she should remain indoors."

And he looked humbly at the housekeeper as at the lawful possessor of this new-found treasure. But Mrs. Bartlet was not going to interfere with Providence, nor do anything to mar this sudden and perfect idyll.

She hurried upstairs and fetched her mistress's straw bonnet with the white sarcenet ribbons, the azure shawl which matched the blue ribbons round Miss Lucy's waist, a little reticule with handkerchief and vinaigrette within, and the long white silk gloves and brought them down, that Miss Lucy might not lose a single moment of Captain Greeve's company by going up to fetch the things herself. The usual cautions were on her lips but not in her heart as she bade them "Godspeed!" as if they were going on a long magic journey.

"You won't go far, and you won't tire yourself, Miss Lucy. You'll be back before it's dark, and I can trust you, Captain Greeve, sir, for indeed she's not very strong yet."

"Oh, but I could walk miles!" laughed Lucy, "and I am absolutely weary at being penned up in the house. If I had a carriage I would go off to Okestead Woods and join them all and tell them the good news!"

Mrs. Bartlet watched the two figures crossing the terrace.

How well matched in youth and grace and joyous pleasure in the summer day! Slowly, side by side, they walked, he accommodating his step to hers, she laughing. Mrs. Bartlet could not remember when she had heard Miss Lucy laugh like that. Twice she turned back to wave, her sweet face shadowed beneath the deep bonnet, her sweet figure shadowed by the parasol.

When they came to the steps Mrs. Bartlet saw that he tenderly took her elbow to guide her little feet.

“Ah, well, if ever there was a match made in Heaven that was; maybe he could marry a fine lady with a pot of money for dowry; but he’s seen the world and knows a sweet face when he sees it, and he’s not likely to find a sweeter than Miss Lucy’s; and she, God bless her! has found somebody worthy of her at last.”

They crossed the garden and paused to mark the time upon the sundial, he lifting his fob to set his watch by it, and then they went on across the flags, and she was conscious of a most delicious warmth—the sunshine penetrating her thin dress on to her limbs. She must show him the kitchen garden, the peaches and the plums behind the netting, or preserved in linen bags, and the slow, lazy buzzing bees and wasps; the withering currant bushes gave out a pungent sweetness, the large black fruit hung under the curling yellow leaves; and then, like a child enjoying unobserved mischief, she must peep into the greenhouse and show him the exotic plants growing there and the frames for winter violets. Then into the park and to the beech grove, a spot she had always loved where the shade was thick and golden.

It was like a temple—the floor paved with last year’s beech-mast, the roof the interlaced leaves of the trees through which the sun poured, rendering them transparent yellow-gold like cloudy amber.

The young man could hardly believe that she was mortal. She had caught his heart and his fancy; the suddenness of

their meeting, the loneliness of their meeting-place, the off-chance that had brought them thus together—all this combined to give her a glamour of which he was almost afraid; he believed that if he put out his hand to touch her she would vanish. He tried to use his reason and analyse her coldly, but this he could not do, there was certainly something about her which eluded him; she was, he could have sworn, different from any other girl or woman he had ever met; her pure gaiety, her extraordinary high spirits, something crystal clear and radiant in her person and her manner, her light joyousness, and yet the utter absence of even a trace of coquetry. So could he have imagined a goddess or a fairy treading the earth for a few hours.

They passed through the beech grove into a deeper wood where the sun could scarcely penetrate and came to the wishing-well in a deep grove with ivy, maidenhair and harts' tongue.

"In the summer, earlier, there are violets," she said; "this is called Diana's Wishing-well, or, sometimes, the Nuns' Wishing-well. Diana was, in a manner, a nun, you know."

She found the cup chained to the rock amid the tangled ferns.

"See, you must drink, holding it in both hands, and wish."

She dipped it into the water and held it, brimming full, up to him, their hands met beneath the bowl and the pure drops fell upon their fingers.

"I wish that I may never be less happy than I am to-day, Miss Lucy, but that is perhaps asking too much of the most indulgent of gods."

"Now you have spoilt your wish, for you must tell none what it is."

"May I not have another, Miss Lucy?"

"No," she answered, "there is only one wish for each, and, if you speak it, it is lost."

"You have yours, Miss Lucy; your luck has not been broken."

"Why, I had mine long ago, sir, when we were all children. We came here on our several birthdays and had our wishes."

"And what was yours—but I suppose you must not tell it me, even after so long?"

"Yes, I may tell it now—after a year or so one may speak; but it was nothing, or something foolish—I think it was that I might not live to grow old."

They went on into the wood—O lovely day! O serene afternoon!

They did not know where they went or of what they spoke, neither cared to measure the extent of their enchantment. On several occasions he did force himself to remember the housekeeper's injunction.

"You are sure you are not fatigued, Miss Lucy, I do not overwalk you?"

But she seemed at the zenith of good health and spirits.

"Indeed, I was never less tired than now."

All her childhood's haunts, all the glades she had peopled with youth's brightest fairies, they visited together. In a Grecian temple on a little height they paused and looked over the rolling countryside below the park, saw the wheat-sheaves piled together in the lowlands and the church beyond, its delicate spire rising above the elms and oaks, and over all the blue cloudless sky; the shadows were long when they turned homewards, the full, generous day was nearly ended when he left her on the terrace. He lingered so long in his farewell and spoke so often and so passionately of their next meeting:

"To-morrow, Miss Lucy, soon?"—that it might be as if he feared never to see her again.

Mrs. Bartlet was waiting for her, not anxiously or with any regret, Miss Lucy was safe with him—the honoured damsel with the chosen knight.

At length he was gone, but not the brightness he had brought with him.

"Why, Miss Lucy, there's adventure! Never have you had such a thing happen to you before, have you?"

"Oh, Mrs. Bartlet, I took him to all the places—you know, the Wishing-well—though he spoilt the wish by telling it me—the beech grove and the little temple where you can see the lowlands and the church, and all the other happy places; oh, Mrs. Bartlet, I think he loves me!"

The old nurse drew the girl to her bosom.

"And I'm sure he does, my dear."

"And he's coming again to-morrow, Mrs. Bartlet, and the day after that. And do you think anyone will be displeased? And, hush! you must not say I told you—I don't know how it came that I spoke the words, for he never said anything of it to me."

"But looks are enough, my dear; the being together and his finding you like that. And who would have thought, Miss Lucy, you being alone here would have had a visitor like that?"

"Love," thought Lucy. "Love itself—that's who my visitor was!"

"You're not shivering, Miss Lucy, you're not overtired? I've got some supper for you."

"Oh, Mrs. Bartlet, I couldn't eat anything, but I will wait up till the others come home to tell them." And she laughed.

"I must tell them about Okestead Woods, must I not? And, you know I had forgotten about them until this moment—and yet that was the cause of his coming—O blessed, happy woods will they always be to me!"

The picnic party were late; the moon was high and glorious, but Lucy Middleton would not go to bed, she sat in the lamplit drawing-room, looking out on to the moonlit terrace. What had he said—how had he said it—how had he moved and glanced? She could neither eat nor drink and Mrs. Bartlet,

listening to more confidences, found her clinging hand hot.

"Oh, Miss Lucy, you've never taken a chill! Did you go into the beech wood? It's always cool, on a sunny day."

"We went into the beech wood, Mrs. Bartlet, but I never took a chill. I am well, I never felt better——"

"Yet, my dear, you must not sit up for them any longer; they're late—who knows how later they may not be? The young people enjoying themselves and the master and mistress not wishing to interfere with their pleasures, and all thinking you abed and asleep hours ago, Miss Lucy dear."

"They don't know what's happened to me," said Lucy, "they never can guess what's happened to me."

She turned suddenly, and peered past the circle of lamp-light.

"Why, surely that's someone outside! Do you think he's come back, Mrs. Bartlet, do you think he's forgotten something?"

The nurse turned; she, too, thought she had heard a footstep, like an echo of that manly step of the afternoon on the terrace without. She thought she discerned in the moonlight the shape of a figure.

"Why, there wouldn't be another visitor for you to-day, Miss Lucy, at this time of night."

No, it was all fancy, they had not seen or heard anything.

"People sitting alone, and being excited, as you might say, Miss Lucy, waiting for others to come home, between the moonlight and the lamplight on a summer evening like this, often think they see and hear things."

"And maybe they do, just happy fancies come, as it were, to life."

Her high spirits dropped from her, she seemed suddenly fatigued.

"I certainly thought there was someone there," she added, vaguely. "Queer that you should have said 'another visitor

for you, Miss Lucy'—have I had two visitors to-day or one?"

"One, and one only, and that's enough, my dear. But you *are* tired and you are coming upstairs now with me."

"Yes, I am tired, I don't think I'll wait up any longer. I suppose I walked farther than I knew. My head's beginning to throb again, and I have got that pain in my side. Yet, I don't want to go to sleep." She struggled to shake off languor. "Shall I play the harp a little, Mrs. Bartlet, or sing 'Angels ever bright and fair'?"

"You'll do nothing, Miss Lucy, but come up to bed. If you've over-fatigued yourself, Miss Lucy, I shall never, never forgive myself for letting you go."

The girl went upstairs slowly, the kind old nurse behind her, and into her little bedroom, the white, precise room, with the oval pictures and the dimity bed, which the moonlight filled with silver.

She stood musing, swinging her bonnet by its strings.

"Oh, this is a lovely night, Mrs. Bartlet, don't let's have the candles yet!" Then, "Oh, I am so happy. He's coming to-morrow, you know!"

She sat down by the bed.

"I shall be asleep when they come back, but don't tell them about Okestead Woods—I want to do that myself."

"No, Miss Lucy, I won't tell them. That's a piece of news for you to give them, and you've got something else, too, haven't you?"

The girl continued to swing her bonnet to and fro.

"I am so happy," she repeated. Then, suddenly: "Oh, I am going—there *were* two visitors, I thought someone came for me!"

"What do you mean, Miss Lucy?" cried the nurse, in swift and deadly panic.

But Lucy had fallen lightly across the bed, her beautiful

hair encircling the pale face; she murmured again—"I'm going . . . someone has come to take me . . . I can't stay."

As Mrs. Bartlet lifted her she had ceased to sigh or smile.

Along the moonlit drive came the gay sounds of the picnic party returning.

THE CROWN DERBY PLATE

“HOUSE TO LET”—1900

MARTHA PYM said that she had never seen a ghost and that she would very much like to do so, “particularly at Christmas for, you can laugh as you like, that is the correct time to see a ghost.”

“I don’t suppose you ever will,” replied her cousin, Mabel, comfortably, while her cousin, Clara, shuddered and said that she hoped they would change the subject for she disliked even to think of such things.

The three elderly, cheerful women sat round a big fire, cosy and content after a day of pleasant activities ; Martha was the guest of the other two who owned the handsome convenient country house ; she always came to spend her Christmas with the Wyntons and found the leisurely country life delightful after the bustling round of London for Martha managed an antique shop of the better sort and worked extremely hard. She was, however, still full of zest for work or pleasure though sixty years old, and looked backwards and forwards to a succession of delightful days.

The other two, Mabel and Clara, led quieter but none the less agreeable lives ; they had more money and fewer interests but nevertheless enjoyed themselves very well.

“Talking of ghosts,” said Mabel, “I wonder how that old woman at Hartleys is getting on, for Hartleys, you know, is supposed to be haunted.”

“Yes, I know,” smiled Miss Pym, “but all the years that we

have known of the place we have never heard anything definite, have we ? ”

“ No,” put in Clara, “ but there *is* that persistent rumour that the house is uncanny, and for myself, *nothing* would induce me to live there ! ”

“ It is certainly very lonely and dreary down there on the marshes,” conceded Mabel. “ But as for the ghost—you never even hear *what* it is supposed to be.”

“ Who has taken it ? ” asked Miss Pym, remembering Hartleys as very desolate indeed, and long “ shut up.”

“ A Miss Lefain, an eccentric old creature—I think you met her here once, two years ago——”

“ I believe that I did, but I don’t recall her at all.”

“ We have not seen her since, Hartleys is so un-get-at-able and she didn’t seem to want visitors. She collects china, Martha, so really you ought to go and see her and talk ‘ shop.’ ”

With the word “ china ” some curious associations came into the mind of Martha Pym ; she was silent while she strove to put them together, and after a second or two they all fitted together into a very clear picture.

She remembered that thirty years ago—yes, it must be thirty years ago, when, as a young woman, she had put all her capital into the antique business, and had been staying with her cousins (her aunt had then been alive) that she had driven across the marsh to Hartleys where there was an auction sale ; all the details of this she had completely forgotten but she could recall quite clearly purchasing a set of gorgeous china which was still one of her proud delights, a perfect set of Crown Derby save that one plate was missing.

“ How odd,” she remarked, “ that this Miss Lefain should collect china too, for it was at Hartleys that I purchased my dear old Derby service—I’ve never been able to match that plate——”

“ A plate was missing ? I seem to remember,” said Clara.

"Didn't they say that it must be in the house somewhere and that it should be looked for?"

"I believe they did, but of course I never heard any more and that missing plate has annoyed me ever since. Who had Hartleys?"

"An old connoisseur, Sir James Sewell. I believe he was some relation to this Miss Lefain, but I don't know——"

"I wonder if she has found the plate," mused Miss Pym. "I expect she has turned out and ransacked the whole place——"

"Why not trot over and ask?" suggested Mabel. "It's not much use to her, if she has found it, one odd plate."

"Don't be silly," said Clara. "Fancy going over the marshes, this weather, to ask about a plate missed all those years ago. I'm sure Martha wouldn't think of it——"

But Martha did think of it; she was rather fascinated by the idea; how queer and pleasant it would be if, after all these years, nearly a lifetime, she should find the Crown Derby plate, the loss of which had always irked her! And this hope did not seem so altogether fantastical, it was quite likely that old Miss Lefain, poking about in the ancient house, had found the missing piece.

And, of course, if she had, being a fellow-collector, she would be quite willing to part with it to complete the set.

Her cousin endeavoured to dissuade her; Miss Lefain, she declared, was a recluse, an odd creature who might greatly resent such a visit and such a request.

"Well, if she does I can but come away again," smiled Miss Pym. "I suppose she can't bite my head off, and I rather like meeting these curious types—we've got a love for old china in common anyhow."

"It seems so silly to think of it—after all these years—a plate!"

"A Crown Derby plate," corrected Miss Pym. "It is certainly strange that I didn't think of it before, but now that

I have got it into my head I can't get it out. Besides," she added hopefully, "I might see the ghost."

So full, however, were the days with pleasant local engagements that Miss Pym had no immediate chance of putting her scheme into practice; but she did not relinquish it, and she asked several different people what they knew about Hartleys and Miss Lefain.

And no one knew anything save that the house was supposed to be haunted and the owner "cracked."

"Is there a story?" asked Miss Pym, who associated ghosts with neat tales into which they fitted as exactly as nuts into shells.

But she was always told—"Oh, no, there isn't a story; no one knows anything about the place, I don't know how the idea got about; old Sewell was half-crazy, I believe, he was buried in the garden and that gives a house a nasty name——"

"Very unpleasant," said Martha Pym undisturbed.

This ghost seemed too elusive for her to track down; she would have to be content if she could recover the Crown Derby plate; for that at least she was determined to make a try and also to satisfy that faint tingling of curiosity roused in her by this talk about Hartleys and the remembrance of that day, so long ago, when she had gone to the auction sale at the lonely old house.

So the first free afternoon, while Mabel and Clara were comfortably taking their afternoon repose, Martha Pym, who was of a more lively habit, got out her little "governess" cart and dashed away across the Essex flats.

She had taken minute directions with her, but she had soon lost her way.

Under the wintry sky, which looked as grey and hard as metal, the marshes stretched bleakly to the horizon, the olive brown, broken reeds were harsh as scars on the saffron-tinted bogs, where the sluggish waters that rose so high in winter were filmed over with the first stillness of a frost; the air was cold

but not keen, everything was damp ; faintest of mists blurred the black outlines of trees that rose stark from the ridges above the stagnant dykes ; the flooded fields were haunted by black birds and white birds, gulls and crows gleaming above the long ditch grass and wintry wastes.

Miss Pym stopped the little horse and surveyed this spectral scene, which had a certain relish about it to one sure to return to a homely village, a cheerful house and good company.

A withered and bleached old man, in colour like the dun landscape, came along the road between the sparse alders.

Miss Pym, buttoning up her coat, asked the way to Hartleys as he passed her ; he told her ; "straight on," and she proceeded, straight indeed across the road that went with undeviating length across the marshes.

"Of course," thought Miss Pym, "if you live in a place like this, you are bound to invent ghosts."

The house sprang up suddenly on a knoll ringed with rotting trees, encompassed by an old brick wall that the perpetual damp had overrun with lichen, blue, green, white colours of decay.

Hartleys, no doubt ; there was no other residence of human being in sight in all the wide expanse ; besides she could remember it, surely, after all this time, the sharp rising out of the marsh, the colony of tall trees, but then fields and trees had been green and bright, there had been no water on the flats, it had been summer-time.

"She certainly," thought Miss Pym, "must be crazy to live here. And I rather doubt if I shall get my plate."

She fastened up the good little horse by the garden gate which stood negligently ajar, and entered ; the garden itself was so neglected that it was quite surprising to see a trim appearance in the house, curtains at the window and a polish on the brass door-knocker, which must have been recently rubbed there, considering the taint of the sea damp which rusted and rotted everything.

It was a square-built, substantial house with "nothing wrong with it but the situation," Miss Pym decided, though it was not very attractive, being built of that drab plastered stone so popular a hundred years ago, with flat windows and door, while one side was gloomily shaded by a large evergreen tree of the cypress variety which gave a blackish tinge to that portion of the garden.

There was no pretence at flower beds nor any manner of cultivation in this garden where a few rank weeds and straggling bushes matted together above the dead grass; on the enclosing wall which appeared to have been built high as protection against the ceaseless winds that swung along the flats, were the remains of fruit trees; their crucified branches, rotting under the great nails that held them up, looked like the skeletons of those who had died in torment.

Miss Pym took in these noxious details as she knocked firmly at the door; they did not depress her; she merely felt extremely sorry for anyone who could live in such a place.

She noticed, at the far end of the garden, in the corner of the wall, a headstone showing above the sodden, colourless grass, and remembered what she had been told about the old antiquary being buried there, in the grounds of Hartleys.

As the knock had no effect she stepped back and looked at the house; it was certainly inhabited—with those neat windows, white curtains and drab blinds all pulled to precisely the same level.

And when she brought her glance back to the door she saw that it had been opened and that someone, considerably obscured by the darkness of the passage, was looking at her intently.

"Good afternoon," said Miss Pym cheerfully. "I just thought that I would call to see Miss Lefain—it is Miss Lefain, isn't it?"

"It's my house," was the querulous reply.

Martha Pym had hardly expected to find any servants here,

though the old lady must, she thought, work pretty hard to keep the house so clean and tidy as it appeared to be.

"Of course," she replied. "May I come in? I'm Martha Pym, staying with the Wyntons, I met you there——"

"Do come in," was the faint reply. "I get so few people to visit me, I'm really very lonely."

"I don't wonder," thought Miss Pym; but she had resolved to take no notice of any eccentricity on the part of her hostess, and so she entered the house with her usual agreeable candour and courtesy.

The passage was badly lit, but she was able to get a fair idea of Miss Lefain; her first impression was that this poor creature was most dreadfully old, older than any human being had the right to be; why, she felt young in comparison, so faded, feeble and pallid was Miss Lefain.

She was also monstrously fat; her gross, flaccid figure was shapeless and she wore a badly cut, full dress of no colour at all, but stained with earth and damp when, Miss Pym supposed, she had been doing futile gardening; this gown was doubtless designed to disguise her stoutness, but had been so carelessly pulled about that it only added to it, being rucked and rolled "all over the place" as Miss Pym put it to herself.

Another ridiculous touch about the appearance of the poor old lady was her short hair; decrepit as she was, and lonely as she lived she had had her scanty relics of white hair cropped round her shaking head.

"Dear me, dear me," she said in her thin treble voice. "How very kind of you to come. I suppose you prefer the parlour? I generally sit in the garden."

"The garden? But not in this weather?"

"I get used to the weather. You've no idea how used one gets to the weather."

"I suppose so," conceded Miss Pym doubtfully. "You don't live here quite alone, do you?"

"Quite alone, lately. I had a little company, but she was

taken away. I'm sure I don't know why. I haven't been able to find a trace of her anywhere," replied the old lady peevishly.

"Some wretched companion that couldn't stick it, I suppose," thought Miss Pym. "Well, I don't wonder—but someone ought to be here to look after her."

They went into the parlour, which, the visitor was dismayed to see, was without a fire but otherwise well kept.

And there, on dozens of shelves, was a choice array of china at which Martha Pym's eyes glistened.

"Aha!" cried Miss Lefain. "I see you've noticed my treasures! Don't you envy me? Don't you wish that you had some of those pieces?"

Martha Pym certainly did and she looked eagerly and greedily round the walls, tables and cabinets, while the old woman followed her with little thin squeals of pleasure.

It was a beautiful little collection most choicely and elegantly arranged, and Martha thought it marvellous that this feeble ancient creature should be able to keep it in such precise order as well as do her own housework.

"Do you really do everything yourself here and live quite alone?" she asked, and she shivered even in her thick coat and wished that Miss Lefain's energy had risen to a fire, but then probably she lived in the kitchen, as these lonely eccentrics often did.

"There was someone," answered Miss Lefain cunningly, "but I had to send her away. I told you she's gone, I can't find her, and I am so glad. Of course," she added wistfully, "it leaves me very lonely, but then I couldn't stand her impertinence any longer. She used to say that it was *her* house and her collection of china! Would you believe it? She used to try to chase me away from looking at my own things!"

"How very disagreeable," said Miss Pym, wondering which of the two women had been crazy. "But hadn't you better get someone else?"

"Oh, no," was the jealous answer. "I would rather be alone

with my things, I daren't leave the house for fear someone takes them away—there was a dreadful time once when an auction sale was held here——”

“ Were you here then ? ” asked Miss Pym ; but indeed she looked old enough to have been anywhere at any time.

“ Yes, of course,” Miss Lefain replied rather peevishly, and Miss Pym decided that she must be a relation of old Sir James Sewell. Clara and Mabel had been very foggy about it all. “ I was very busy hiding all the china—but one set they got—a Crown Derby tea service——”

“ With one plate missing ! ” cried Martha Pym. “ I bought it, and do you know, I was wondering if you'd found it——”

“ I hid it,” piped Miss Lefain.

“ Oh, you did, did you ? Well, that's rather funny behaviour. Why did you hide the stuff away instead of buying it ? ”

“ How could I buy what was mine ? ”

“ Old Sir James left it to you, then ? ” asked Martha Pym, feeling very muddled.

“ *She* bought a lot more,” squeaked Miss Lefain, but Martha Pym tried to keep her to the point.

“ If you've got the plate,” she insisted, “ you might let me have it—I'll pay quite handsomely, it would be so pleasant to have it after all these years.”

“ Money is no use to me,” said Miss Lefain mournfully.

“ Not a bit of use. I can't leave the house or the garden.”

“ Well, you have to live, I suppose,” replied Martha Pym cheerfully. “ And, do you know, I'm afraid you are getting rather morbid and dull, staying here all alone—you really ought to have a fire—why, it's just on Christmas and very damp.”

“ I haven't felt the cold for a long time,” replied the other ; she seated herself with a sigh on one of the horsehair chairs and Miss Pym noticed with a start that her feet were covered only by a pair of white stockings ; “ one of those nasty health fiends,” thought Miss Pym, “ but she doesn't look too well for all that.”

“ So you don't think that you could let me have the plate ? ” she asked briskly, walking up and down, for the dark, neat, clean parlour was very cold indeed, and she thought that she couldn't stand this much longer ; as there seemed no sign of tea or anything pleasant and comfortable she had really better go.

“ I might let you have it,” sighed Miss Lefain, “ since you've been so kind as to pay me a visit. After all, one plate isn't much use, is it ? ”

“ Of course not, I wonder you troubled to hide it——”

“ I couldn't *bear*,” wailed the other, “ to see the things going out of the house ! ”

Martha Pym couldn't stop to go into all this ; it was quite clear that the old lady was very eccentric indeed and that nothing very much could be done with her ; no wonder that she had “ dropped out ” of everything and that no one ever saw her or knew anything about her, though Miss Pym felt that some effort ought really to be made to save her from herself.

“ Wouldn't you like a run in my little governess cart ? ” she suggested. “ We might go to tea with the Wyntons on the way back, they'd be delighted to see you, and I really think that you do want taking out of yourself.”

“ I was taken out of myself some time ago,” replied Miss Lefain. “ I really was, and I couldn't leave my things—though,” she added with pathetic gratitude ; “ it is very, very kind of you——”

“ Your things would be quite safe, I'm sure,” said Martha Pym, humouring her. “ Whoever would come up here, this hour of a winter's day ? ”

“ They do, oh, they do ! And *she* might come back, prying and nosing and saying that it was all hers, all my beautiful china, hers ! ”

Miss Lefain squealed in her agitation and rising up ran round the wall fingering with flaccid yellow hands the brilliant, glossy pieces on the shelves.

“ Well, then, I’m afraid that I must go, they’ll be expecting me, and it’s quite a long drive ; perhaps some other time you’ll come and see us ? ”

“ Oh, must you go ? ” quavered Miss Lefain dolefully. “ I do like a little company now and then and I trusted you from the first—the others, when they do come, are always after my things and I have to frighten them away ! ”

“ Frighten them away ! ” replied Martha Pym. “ However do you do that ? ”

“ It doesn’t seem difficult, people are so easily frightened, aren’t they ? ”

Miss Pym suddenly remembered that Hartleys had the reputation of being haunted—perhaps the queer old thing played on that ; the lonely house with the grave in the garden was dreary enough to create a legend round.

“ I suppose you’ve never seen a ghost ? ” she asked pleasantly. “ I’d rather like to see one, you know——”

“ There is no one here but myself,” said Miss Lefain.

“ So you’ve never seen anything ? I thought it must be all nonsense. Still, I do think it rather melancholy for you to live here all alone——”

Miss Lefain sighed :

“ Yes, it’s very lonely. Do stay and talk to me a little longer.” Her whistling voice dropped cunningly. “ And I’ll give you the Crown Derby plate ! ”

“ Are you sure you’ve really got it ? ” Miss Pym asked.

“ I’ll show you.”

Fat and waddling as she was, she seemed to move very lightly as she slipped in front of Miss Pym and, going slowly up the stairs, conducted her from the room—such a gross odd figure in that clumsy dress with the fringe of white hair hanging on to her shoulders.

The upstairs of the house was as neat as the parlour, everything well in its place ; but there was no sign of occupancy ; the beds were covered with dust sheets, there were no lamps or

fires set ready. "I suppose," said Miss Pym to herself, "she doesn't care to show me where she really lives."

But as they passed from one room to another, she could not help saying :

"Where *do* you live, Miss Lefain ? "

"Mostly in the garden," said the other.

Miss Pym thought of those horrible health huts that some people indulged in. . . .

"Well, sooner you than I," she replied cheerfully.

In the most distant room of all, a dark, tiny closet, Miss Lefain opened a deep cupboard and brought out a Crown Derby plate which her guest received with a spasm of joy, for it was actually that which was missing from her cherished set.

"It's very good of you," she said in delight. "Won't you take something for it, or let me do something for you ? "

"You might come and see me again," replied Miss Lefain wistfully.

"Oh, yes, of course I should like to come and see you again."

But now that she had got what she had really come for, the plate, Martha Pym wanted to be gone ; it was really very dismal and depressing in the house and she began to notice a fearful smell—the place had been shut up too long, there was something damp rotting somewhere, in this horrid little dark closet, no doubt.

"I really must be going," she said hurriedly.

Miss Lefain turned as if to cling to her, but Martha Pym moved quickly away.

"Dear me," wailed the old lady. "Why are you in such haste ? "

"There's—a smell," murmured Miss Pym rather faintly.

She found herself hastening down the stairs, with Miss Lefain, complaining, behind her :

"How peculiar people are—*she* used to talk of a smell——"

"Well, you must notice it yourself."

Miss Pym was in the hall ; the old woman had not followed

her, but stood in the semi-darkness at the head of the stairs, a pale shapeless figure.

Martha Pym hated to be rude and ungrateful but she could not stay another moment; she hurried away and was in her little cart in a moment—really—that smell——

“ Good-bye ! ” she called out with false cheerfulness, “ and thank you *so* much ! ”

There was no answer from the house.

Miss Pym drove on; she was rather upset and took another way than that by which she had come, a way that led past a little house raised above the marsh; she was glad to think that the poor old creature at Hartleys had such near neighbours, and she reined up the horse, dubious as to whether she should call someone and tell them that poor old Miss Lefain really wanted a little looking after, alone in a house like that, and plainly not quite right in her head. . . .

A young woman, attracted by the sound of the governess cart, came to the door of the house and, seeing Miss Pym, called out, asking if she wanted the keys of the house?

“ What house ? ” asked Miss Pym.

“ Hartleys, mum; they don't put a board out, as no one is likely to pass, but it's to be sold. Miss Lefain wants to sell or let it——”

“ I've just been up to see her——”

“ Oh, no, mum—she's been away a year, abroad somewhere; couldn't stand the place. It's been empty since then, I just run in every day and keep things tidy——”

Loquacious and curious, the young woman had come to the fence; Miss Pym had stopped her cart.

“ Miss Lefain is there now,” she said. “ She must have just come back——”

“ She wasn't there this morning, mum; 't isn't likely she'd come, either—fair scared she was, mum, fair chased away, didn't dare move her china. Can't say I've noticed anything myself, but I never stay long—and there's a smell——”

“ Yes,” murmured Martha Pym faintly, “ there’s a smell. What—what—chased her away ? ”

The young woman, even in that lonely place, lowered her voice.

“ Well, as you aren’t thinking of taking the place, she got an idea in her head that old Sir James—well, he couldn’t bear to leave Hartleys, mum, he’s buried in the garden, and she thought he was after her, chasing round them bits of china——”

“ Oh ! ” cried Miss Pym.

“ Some of it used to be his, she found a lot stuffed away ; he said they were to be left in Hartleys, but Miss Lefain would have the things sold, I believe—that’s years ago——”

“ Yes, yes,” said Miss Pym with a sick look. “ You don’t know what he was like, do you ? ”

“ No, mum—but I’ve heard tell he was very stout and very old—I wonder who it was you saw up at Hartleys ? ”

Miss Pym took a Crown Derby plate from her bag.

“ You might take that back when you go,” she whispered. “ I shan’t want it, after all——”

Before the astonished young woman could answer Miss Pym had darted off across the marsh ; that short hair, that earth-stained robe, the white socks, “ I generally live in the garden ”——

Miss Pym drove away, breakneck speed, frantically resolving to mention to no one that she had paid a visit to Hartleys, nor lightly, again, bring up the subject of ghosts.

She shook and shuddered in the damp, trying to get out of her clothes and her nostrils—that indescribable smell.

THE NEW HOUSEMAID

A LONDON MANSION—1870

MRS. NANGLE, slowly and comfortably, descended from the hackney cab in front of the large mansion facing the park. The coachman climbed down from his box and between them they carried down the basement steps the corded hair trunk belonging to Jenny, who followed them cumbered with small boxes and parcels.

It was late September and late afternoon; there was a gentle fall of dry dusty leaves from the plane trees in the small garden at the back of the closed house. A mist crept up from the park.

A glance, as she descended from the hackney coach, had shown Mrs. Nangle that the houses to right and left of the mansion were still uninhabited; the gentry had not yet returned to town. She paid the coachman sufficient to secure his goodwill and told Jenny to light the fire in the huge kitchen grate.

"A bit lonely, isn't it?" said the girl, and shivered in the damp, spacious basement-room.

"You've got back early," commented the coachman, "as far as I can see there's not a soul in the whole of the Lane."

"I've got to get the house ready," replied Mrs. Nangle; "me and Mrs. Withers what comes to-morrow—she's the housekeeper bringing a new housemaid—will soon have things cosy and comfortable."

At this Mrs. Nangle, who was very cosy and comfortable herself, drew out a penny which she gave to the coachman

for the blue-toed urchin she had seen holding his horse's head, and so dismissed him, and taking off her bonnet and shawl looked round with the air of an old campaigner delighted to be back on the field of action.

Mrs. Nangle, a good woman and an excellent cook, had been in service with the Hambletons for many years and knew intimately every crevice of the handsome, solid mansion in the lane by the park; but Jenny, her niece, was new to London and overawed, between giggles and tears, as she stood with the end of her shawl in her mouth and her bonnet strings untied, staring round the vast kitchen.

"We needn't have come up till to-morrow, auntie, need we?" she asked, "when the others would be here. It's fearsome lonely; I never knew the house'd be so big."

From a huge cupboard Mrs. Nangle fetched out an apron which she tied round her large waist.

"Well, for one thing," she said good-humouredly, "the trains don't run to please you and me, Jenny; if we hadn't come up to-day we should have had to stay till Thursday—that'd have been two good days' work lost, and the master and mistress coming back on Monday. Now, you light the fire, that's a good girl; there's been provisions ordered in and there's all that stuff we've brought up with us in the baskets."

"Didn't you say there was a caretaker, auntie?" Jenny asked, not moving.

"Yes, there's a caretaker all right, that's Mrs. Claypole, but she'd have gone by now; you wouldn't catch her waiting. She's got a long way to get home, right up Hampstead, and we're late."

"Yes, it's getting dark," said Jenny.

The cook, capable and serene, had soon found all she needed, lit the fire, brought out the candles and laid a cloth on the kitchen table.

"Why, it's all closets and cupboards!" cried Jenny, peeping out into the passage.

“What did you expect in a mansion like this?” asked Mrs. Nangle, not without pride. “You was all for a place in London, my girl, and now you’ve got it, and if you don’t like it I can soon pack you home to your mother.”

Jenny did not answer.

When her aunt had come to spend her holiday with them she had thought that it would be a tremendously fine thing to go to London as kitchenmaid in a great gentleman’s house; now, on this chill autumn evening in the empty basement of the large mansion, she wished herself back in the comfortable Buckinghamshire cottage—father coming home from work, children sitting up to their tea, and mother busy with the kettle. Of course, the firelight made a great deal of difference; in such a short time had Mrs. Nangle got a good fire burning, and four candles lit in brass candlesticks! Really, Jenny tried to persuade herself, the kitchen was quite cheerful; but then there were all those passages and closets outside which were quite dark.

“We won’t bother about the lamp to-night, Jenny, the candles’ll be good enough for you and me.”

“Where are we going to sleep?” asked Jenny, unpacking the baskets that were full of the last anxious gifts of her mother.

“When everyone is here,” said Mrs. Nangle, taking down the tea-canister, “we sleep right up in the attics; but, to-night as we are alone and you seem a bit fearsome, we can sleep down here in a room that two footmen use—there are two beds in it and all clean and proper.”

“Oh, yes,” agreed the girl, “that will be much better, auntie. Then we wouldn’t have to leave the fire.”

“Why, I had no idea you were so timid, Jenny!” laughed Mrs. Nangle. “Why don’t you go and have a look round and get used to the place while I get the tea?”

Secretly Jenny thought she would never get used to it; she had no wish whatever to take a look round the empty house which, to her country imagination, stretched above and beyond

her in an endless succession of large, dark, fathomless rooms. She did, however, open the little side door that led from a kitchen into the small stone area, ran up the area steps and peered through the railings up and down the road in the secret hope of seeing some passer-by or a neighbour. The irregular line of houses which appeared to be all of different styles and sizes stretched into the distance on either hand of the peering little maid ; the vista on either side ended in mist and mist was also encroaching over the wide spaces of grass, through the tall withering trees and the high narrow railing, darkening down the day to a dense twilight. Jenny could see no one abroad at all, the town seemed more lonely than the country ; as far as she could discern the houses were all shut up. With a curiosity touched with awe she opened the area gate and stepped out on to the pavement. There was a queer, charming little house next door with a semicircular front and verandah balconies, very much narrower, though as high, than the mansion in which she had come to reside. This, too, was apparently empty, the white blinds drawn with a dead appearance over the tall windows ; but, no, even as Jenny looked a light suddenly appeared in the top room which was almost on a level with the top window of the neighbouring house, then was gone instantly—a spurt of red which flared into the blue-grey of the twilight, then was gone.

Jenny shivered back to the warm kitchen.

“There don’t seem nobody about,” she said ; “all the houses shut up.”

“And what would you expect at this time of year ?” said Mrs. Nangle, cheerfully ; “you and I are up in London early, my girl, you don’t find people living in this part of the town much before October.”

When the red rep curtains were drawn over the mist and the half-wall half-railing of the area, the kitchen door shut on those numerous closets and passages, life became tolerable, even cheerful, to the country girl ; she looked forward to the

future with a vague but tingling excitement. Mrs. Nangle, perfectly familiar with the mansion and knowing no such thing as nerves or whimsies, was for going upstairs to the attics and looking out her own possessions for the night, but Jenny earnestly dissuaded her.

“We’ve plenty in our bags, auntie, that’ll do for to-night, and there’s no need for you to be going up looking after your things. No need for me to undo my trunk either; it will be difficult to get that cording undone, that father made so tight, just by ourselves.”

“But I don’t want you to go, Jenny child, and I don’t see why you shouldn’t let me.”

“Oh, auntie, I don’t want to be left alone; I don’t like the place well enough.”

Mrs. Nangle laughed and good-naturedly gave in; going to the linen cupboard she took out the coarse twill sheets and began airing them in front of the fire, setting them across the kitchen Windsor chairs. She put away the provisions and Jenny had to wash up at the big sink which would be her principal place of occupation in the future, if indeed she remained as Lady Hambleton’s kitchenmaid; but Jenny did not think that she would do so. She was used to the country, a rough but an open and a cheerful life; she did not mind hard work, but she hated the dark and she had never seen a basement before. As she stood before the large, cumbersome, grey stone sink, running the water over the white plates, the yellow light of the candle falling on her, even Mrs. Nangle, practical as she was, thought in her motherly heart—“The girl’s too good for the work.” For Jenny was very pretty with the abundant prettiness of seventeen—bright auburn hair, smooth English features, English blue-grey eyes.

As Mrs. Nangle was making up the beds in the servants’ room, Jenny called across to her:

“Auntie, who lives next door?”

Mrs. Nangle pursed up her lips : " No one that you need concern yourself about, my lady don't visit there."

" Well, it's a pretty little house, ain't it? And I just wondered ; so close, too, the windows touching——"

" It's a Mr. Monkswell," conceded Mrs. Nangle, " a gentleman what lives mostly abroad."

" I like it better than this, it's smaller."

" Smaller," scoffed Mrs. Nangle, " it's hardly a house at all ; it's what the master calls a *cottage orné*, though it's so tall, if you know what that means, Jenny ; it's not a proper sort of place, anyhow, so don't you go worrying your head about it."

If conscientious Mrs. Nangle had had a woman of her own age about her, or even a married woman, she would very much have liked to have told the history of the little high house next door—a history which it was quite impossible for her to unfold to the innocent Jenny. The owner was a wealthy bachelor who, not being too great a favourite in English society, spent most of his time abroad among persons not so particular. He had many houses besides the little residence in the lane by the park, the bijou, toy-like bagatelle of a place which was always either closed up or inhabited for brief periods by ladies for whom, however exquisite and luxurious in appearance, honest Mrs. Nangle could not find hard enough names ; it was all very discreetly done, of course, there was nothing that anyone could lay hold of or complain about ; nevertheless the state of affairs was bitterly resented by the Hambletons and the Hambletons' servants.

Maids ? Yes, she could have told Jenny something about the maids ! They weren't a bit of company for honest girls ; French and Italian they were mostly, and no better than the hussies they served, and that was saying the utmost.

Jenny broke into Mrs. Nangle's indignant thoughts about the house next door.

" I saw a light," she said ; " it seemed to be the only light

there was, everything else was dark and misty, the fog was coming up fair thick."

"A light next door!" exclaimed Mrs. Nangle, "why, surely there'd be nobody there now; I had a look at it as I got out of the hackney; it seemed to me to be shut up all right."

"Perhaps it was the caretaker."

"I've never heard of one in that house," said Mrs. Nangle; "when it's shut up it's shut up, but it's no business of ours," she added, "and I dare say Mr. Monkswell or one of his friends might come back sudden-like; you mustn't take any notice of that house, Jenny, they're all eccentric—that's what the master calls them. There's plenty of company here, there's the new housemaid coming with Mrs. Withers to-morrow, then by the end of the week there'll be the other maids back, and nice good girls they are, such as I'd like to see you friends with, Jenny. Have you finished the washing-up and put everything back tidy like I showed you?"

Jenny, smiling, held up the last plate.

"Yes, I've just finished, auntie; then we can go to bed?"

"That you shall, everything is ready, and you've been yawning the last half-hour, Jenny."

Mrs. Nangle went cheerfully round the lower portion of the house, bolted and locked the doors back and front, and saw that the fastenings of the shutters were secure; she had put out the candles in the kitchen, leaving only that in the little bedroom, when she was startled by a sharp cry from Jenny and the clatter of a broken plate. Coming into the kitchen she saw that the girl had turned round with her back to the sink and the plate she had been holding had dropped at her feet, where it had smashed on the stone flooring of the passage.

"Why, Jenny, what's the matter with you?"

"Oh, auntie, I heard a step, there's someone in the house!"

"Nonsense, Jenny; now you've broken a plate and that'll spoil the set!"

"Oh, auntie, I did hear someone—a step it was, just outside

that passage!" And Jenny fled into the warmth and light of the kitchen.

"No one could have got in," said Mrs. Nangle, firmly, yet listening intently. "The keys were in the right place and Mrs. Claypole is to be relied on, though I do say she might have stayed to welcome us. Everything was shut up and proper."

"It's that lonely," breathed Jenny, "just on to that great park place; it's worse than the village, and you always said you found that lonely after London."

"You can't judge London from this," said Mrs. Nangle, sharply. "You run in and get to bed, Jenny."

But Jenny was listening with straining ears and said immediately:

"There's someone walking up and down outside, auntie, I heard 'em—a step on the stairs, someone came down and then went back again."

Mrs. Nangle had also heard a sound.

"D'you think Mrs. Claypole stayed behind," reflected Mrs. Nangle, "meaning to meet us, went to sleep upstairs in one of the rooms, and then has woke up sudden-like?"

"Then why doesn't she come in, why does she come down to the door and go back again?" asked Jenny, fearfully.

The footsteps were now as unmistakable to Mrs. Nangle as they had been from the first to Jenny.

"I was afraid of something like this!" said Jenny, "in this great awful house. Oh, I wish I'd never come. What shall we do—run out at the front, auntie, up that area, and see if we can find someone in the street?"

"Don't be a fool," said Mrs. Nangle, brusquely, "it's Mrs. Claypole if it's anybody; I'm not afraid—what is there to be afraid of? There's always a 'peeler' at the corner come to that."

"I didn't see him," said Jenny; "when I looked out there was nothing but empty houses and mist." She suddenly gripped her aunt's stout arm. "Look there, auntie, what's that?"

Mrs. Nangle looked. A line of light showed under the outer and further door that gave on to the passage and stairs.

"It will be Mrs. Claypole," said Mrs. Nangle, advancing boldly. "Never you fear, Jenny; get behind me if you're scared."

"I'm scared all right," quavered Jenny. "It's a ghost, that's what it is, or thieves or murderers."

"It may be Mrs. Withers, or one of the maids, what come earlier than was thought of."

"But we didn't hear no hackney coach, we didn't hear no one come to the door," said Jenny, shivering. "I tell you, auntie, it's thieves or murderers."

The very grossness of the exaggeration of these childish fears encouraged Mrs. Nangle. She advanced boldly and threw open the door above which the light appeared and called out in a formidable voice:

"Who's there and what do you want?"

The basement stairs, narrow and dark, ran sideways to the door that the cook threw open. On these stood a young woman, holding in her hands a small bedroom lamp. Even Jenny's fears (she was peering from behind her aunt's stout back) were allayed at the sight of a person of her own sex.

"There, you see, Jenny," said Mrs. Nangle, on a breath of relief, "it'll be the new housemaid."

She addressed the young woman:

"You gave us a fair fright. Are you the new housemaid, Dolly?"

The young woman replied:

"Yes, I'm the new housemaid, Dolly, and I suppose you're the cook?"

"Yes, I'm Mrs. Nangle and this is my niece, what's going to be kitchenmaid. When did you come?"

"Hours ago," replied the young woman. "I've been alone in the house, wandering about looking for somebody."

"But didn't you hear us arrive, and how is it you aren't

coming to-morrow with Mrs. Withers? You'd better come down into the light and warmth, you'll be fair perished up there."

"I am," said the young woman, "fair perished."

She followed Mrs. Nangle and Jenny into the kitchen. The tale she told, standing at the kitchen table, was simple, if confused. She had had an appointment to meet Mrs. Withers, the housekeeper, on, as she thought, the Monday—

Mrs. Nangle broke in :

"No, it was Tuesday, that was all arranged."

"Well, so it seems," said the new housemaid; "anyhow I made that mistake, and I came on here, and there was someone here——"

"That'd be old Mrs. Claypole."

"Yes, Mrs. Claypole—well, she let me in. She said I'd better wait for you; she was sure you'd be here. That's why she didn't wait herself."

"Then why weren't you looking out for us?" asked Mrs. Nangle, angrily. "We came afore it was dark, and noise enough we made getting that trunk down these steps."

"I suppose," said the young woman, "I must have been asleep. You see, Mrs. Claypole—isn't that the name?—showed me a little room at the top of the house; she said I'd got to sleep there and so—I—I was looking about and putting things in order and being hungry, sleepy and tired with travelling—because I've come up from Warwickshire, you know——"

"Warwickshire? I didn't know the new housemaid was coming from there. Why, wasn't Dolly Standish coming up from Oxford?"

"I don't know what you're talking about—I'm Dolly Standish, and I've come up from Warwickshire. Well, I was tired and fell asleep, that's how I missed you, I suppose."

She sat down at the table and folded her arms on the white deal.

"It's all right," said Mrs. Nangle, good-humouredly;

“ we didn't know you were here and you missed our coming ; but here we all are ; I suppose you'd like some supper ? ”

“ No, I don't want anything. It seems to me you've just cleared away and were going to bed.”

“ Why, you must have something,” said Jenny in her relief and pleasure at finding the visitor to be no other than Dolly the housemaid.

Dolly smiled : “ I don't want anything.”

Mrs. Nangle was looking at her critically. She had decided at once that this was not quite the sort of girl she would have thought either her mistress or Mrs. Withers the housekeeper would have chosen ; for both these ladies were biased in favour of honest, pious country-girls ; good creatures like her Jenny. Mrs. Nangle was rather afraid that Jenny would be too pretty to please the housekeeper, but Dolly Standish's beauty put Jenny's modest charms completely in the shade. And yet Mrs. Nangle, considering her as she sat at the kitchen table, could scarcely have said where this beauty lay. Her mouth was too wide, her cheek-bones were too high, her eyes were deep-set—yet somewhere in colour and outline, in poise and movement, was beauty. She had an abundance of bright hair drawn up under a muslin cap and wore a lilac-sprigged cotton dress much too large for her. Noticing the ill-fit of this garment Mrs. Nangle cried out :

“ Why, Dolly Standish, you're wearing one of my cotton dresses ! ”

“ One of yours, is it ? ” said the new housemaid. “ I'm sorry, I suppose I got into the wrong room upstairs.”

“ Well, even if you did, you needn't have gone opening the cupboards and taking the things out,” said Mrs. Nangle. “ Hadn't you got your own ? ”

“ My trunk hadn't got here, it was all part of the muddle, I suppose. I was looking round and I found these things in a drawer ; I thought, perhaps, they belonged to the last girl.”

“But you got into my room,” said Mrs. Nangle. “A fine business the whole thing seems to have been. Not that I mind you having the dress, but it don’t fit.”

“It’s well enough,” replied Dolly Standish. “It don’t show with an apron over it.”

“But where’s the sense in putting on a print dress at this time of night?” asked Mrs. Nangle, with some contempt. “It seems to me you fair lost your head, my girl. Why didn’t you keep on your travelling clothes?”

“Well, I’ve been here hours,” replied Dolly, “and I didn’t know but what I might be expected to do some work.”

“No work,” said Mrs. Nangle, contemptuously, “until Mrs. Withers comes and gives directions; you ought to have come with her; I don’t know what’s gone wrong.”

“Well, it’s too late to go into that now,” said Dolly.

“Where are you going to sleep?” asked Mrs. Nangle, “it’s getting fair late with all this talking.”

“I’ll sleep upstairs, if you don’t mind. There’s everything up there except sheets and pillow-cases—I was coming down for them.”

“Why didn’t you come in?” asked Mrs. Nangle.

“Well, you opened the door before I had a chance.”

“Yes, but you was walking up and down the passage—I heard you, and up and down the stairs once or twice.”

“Oh, I don’t know, I lost my way, I suppose; it seems to be nothing but passages and stairs and closets here.”

Dolly rose and steadied herself, there seemed an impatience in her manner. Mrs. Nangle primly thought that she would not “suit” but, in her honest heart, she had to admit that there was nothing against the girl.

“What’s the matter with your hand?” she asked, as she noticed that Dolly’s right hand, which she had held under her apron, was wrapped very thickly and clumsily round with a napkin.

“That’s partly what I came down for, too; I wanted to

bathe it. I hurt it trying to open one of those windows—the bolts were rusty.”

“That they weren’t,” said Mrs. Nangle, grimly; “there’s nothing ever gets rusty in this house. If you hurt yourself it’s your own clumsiness.”

“I’ll bathe it for you and tie it up,” said Jenny, hurrying for a bowl of water.

But Dolly had already gone to the sink. “I’ll do it myself, I’m used to doing things for myself. I’ve been looking all over the house for water,” she added impatiently, and it seemed indignantly. “No water anywhere except down in the basement?”

“Where do you expect to find it?” asked Mrs. Nangle.

The girl turned on the water; from the darkness of the passage they heard the gush from the faucet. Mrs. Nangle had looked out some old linen rags.

“You had better take her these, Jenny.”

As Dolly Standish heard Jenny approach she threw away the water in the bowl in which she had bathed her hand.

“My! there’s a lot of blood, it must have been a bad cut!” said Jenny. “The napkin’s soaked, too; it doesn’t look like a napkin, it’s part of a lady’s dress.”

Dolly Standish looked over her shoulder and smiled at Jenny.

The girl drew back before that smile. In the half-darkness and the uncertain obscurity of the passage there seemed to the country girl something dreadful in this new housemaid’s smile. She drew back to her aunt, silent, after timidly placing her bundle of linen rags within Dolly Standish’s reach.

Mrs. Nangle was again airing sheets and pillow-cases before the sinking fire, which still gave out a faint but grateful warmth.

The new housemaid returned from the sink, her arm swathed in bandages, which she had clumsily tied with her free hand, and refused further assistance.

A sullen, difficult piece, thought Mrs. Nangle. Aloud she said: "Come on, Jenny, let's go to bed. Dolly can go upstairs when she feels tired enough."

"I'm going now," said Dolly, pulling the sheets from the chairs by the fire.

"Well, I'll leave that candle for you. You'll be down by six o'clock, I hope."

"Oh, I'll be up early."

"Early! Six is late, but we'll allow that to-morrow."

Mrs. Nangle and Jenny went into their little room. Mrs. Nangle was soon undressed, in bed and asleep. Jenny put on her thick cotton nightgown, then her flowered chintz dressing-gown, and went on her knees by her bed and said her nightly prayer. She then crept between the sheets which were quite cold and tried to sleep, but she found this was impossible. The strangeness of the place, the sudden coming of Dolly and the personality of Dolly kept her wide awake and in an excited condition; so excited, in fact, was Jenny that she could not for very long lie still, and when she was quite sure that her aunt was asleep she sat up, struck a flint and tinder and looked round the small dim bedroom which was really like a cell compared with the small chamber she was used to under the eaves looking over the little kitchen garden. It was really a horrible place, she was quite sure she would not stay. Meanwhile she was consumed with curiosity about Dolly. She had not heard Dolly go upstairs. Why was the girl lingering? Was she, despite her bravado, really afraid as she, Jenny, would have been desperately afraid to go upstairs to those lonely dark attics, with no more protection than one small candle?

Held by breathlessness, curiosity, and a certain agitated sympathy with the other girl, little Jenny cautiously opened the door of the narrow bedroom and looked across the stone passage to the door of the kitchen; this stood ajar and there was a light within. At this sight Jenny immediately quenched

her own. Dolly, then, had not gone upstairs; she was, of course, afraid and, no doubt, lonely; why she must be much more lonely than she, Jenny, was for she had got Aunt Nangle, but Dolly Standish had no one; she must be terribly homesick and Jenny's kind little heart softened towards the stranger whom she did not like; she would go in and talk to her, though there was something rather dreadful in getting out of bed when one was supposed to be asleep and talking to anybody, and, doubtless, it was fearfully late. But Jenny was excited and, apart from her sympathy with "poor Dolly," there was a certain half-dreadful thrill in the adventure.

How strange and even delightful it would be to have a private gossip with this other girl, this stranger who was so different from herself in every way! She could ask Dolly all the things she had not liked to ask her in front of Mrs. Nangle—where she came from? Where had she been before? (for she surely was much older than Jenny). How she liked this great gloomy mansion on the edge of the park? Perhaps she knew London and could tell Jenny something about that wonderful city. So Jenny put on her little dimity gown, the bedroom slippers she had made herself and carefully quilted, and crept across the passage, peeping round the open door of the kitchen.

She knew there was something dreadful about this moment, that she was being impelled to it despite her own real and secret wish, and she recalled—she knew not why—some of the most terrifying stories of her childhood; one, in particular, where an unfortunate traveller, finding himself in a deserted house, peeps through the half-open door of a room and sees the Devil in person seated at the table. Jenny's grandmother had told her that story, oh, many times, and always had ended by saying—"It's a dangerous thing to peep through a half-open door."

Jenny was peeping through a half-open door then and saw not the Devil but Dolly Standish, the new servant-maid,

sitting at the table, her bandaged arm resting on the white deal and her face turned towards the shuttered window. Something in the stillness of her attitude and the averted line of her countenance made Jenny draw back, she had come so quickly and soundlessly that she had not disturbed Dolly and, timid yet curious, she hung back in the shadows of the passage, peering through that half-open door. Dolly slowly turned her head and at sight of her face Jenny had to put her fingers quickly to her mouth, an instinct of self-preservation made her silent though her impulse had been to cry out—why?

Dolly's face had changed. There was no colour in it at all. The eyes seemed sunk deeper into her head, her lips were drawn back a little from her teeth. Jenny had never seen a look like that on any face before. Surely, Dolly was not well, but Jenny was too frightened to call Mrs. Nangle and, staring in a deeper curiosity and a dreadful apprehension, she saw Dolly do a most curious thing. First, she took off her muslin cap—Mrs. Nangle's clear-starched cap which she had found in the drawer in the attic, then she put her fingers into her hair—which was very beautiful and abundant, held up in a strong net—and out of this hair she drew, one after the other, gold pieces—sovereigns, Jenny knew them for—and placed them on the table. The candle that Mrs. Nangle had left stood in front of the girl as one by one she pulled the golden coins from her hair and laid them on the scrubbed deal of the kitchen table. Then she counted them, ranged them in two little piles, and once more putting her fingers into that rich tangle of locks she drew out what appeared to the affrighted eyes of Jenny to be a rich diamond, she held this up to the candlelight watching the colours run in and out of the many-faceted stone, then she turned it over in the palm of her hand, and all the while Jenny watched fascinated—watched too long, for the new housemaid seemed to sense that she was being observed and suddenly turned round, fixing those beautiful sunken eyes on the passage beyond the half-open door.

"Why don't you come in?" she said contemptuously.

Jenny crept into the doorway.

"I didn't like to—somehow, to disturb you."

"Why aren't you asleep—why did you get up?" asked Dolly Standish, putting her hands over the diamond and the gold pieces.

"I was waiting to hear you go upstairs," stammered Jenny.

"And I was waiting for you to go to sleep," said Dolly.

"Why?" asked Jenny.

"Oh, I don't know; it's early yet. Is your aunt asleep?"

"Yes, she's asleep all right," said Jenny. She looked at the fire and saw that Dolly had made it up again.

"You didn't think I was going to sit without a fire, did you?" asked Dolly; "it's as cold as hell down here."

This fearful word made Jenny shiver. She wondered, too, in horror what Dolly meant by "cold as hell," she always thought of hell as the place of eternal flames. She crept to the fire and warmed herself, for she was shivering with chill after hesitating in the passage. She looked at the hoard under Dolly's outstretched hands, and said:

"That's a powerful lot of money you've got, Dolly."

"No, it isn't, there isn't twenty pounds there——"

"But twenty pounds is a lot of money."

"Well, I suppose it would be to you, but it's not so very much to me—my savings!"

"And you carry them about like that in your hair?"

"Why not? It's safe, isn't it? Where's a poor girl to keep her money?"

"But how long you must have worked to have saved twenty pounds!" wondered Jenny, her lovely eyes round and awe-struck. "Twenty pounds, Dolly Standish—why, I'm getting three pounds a year, and Mrs. Nangle's taking half of that to buy my clothes, it'll be a long time before I save twenty pounds!"

“Why, so it would the way you are living now in this hideous house. How old are you?”

“Seventeen.”

“Well, I’m a bit older than that.” She looked up sharply, tapping her cheeks as if to bring back a little colour into them. “You’re pretty,” she said, staring at Jenny across the candle-light. “You’ll get together twenty pounds all right before you’re my age.”

“What’s prettiness got to do with it?” asked Jenny.

Dolly Standish laughed out loud, then, checking herself, she said: “I’d like a glass of wine, Jenny. Do you know where the wine cellar is and the keys?”

“How should I know that?” replied Jenny, amazed and terrified.

Dolly Standish rose, stretching herself, wincing as she moved her bandaged arm.

“Where does your aunt keep the keys?” she demanded. She took down a bunch from the dresser. “I suppose these are they.”

“I suppose so, but you’d never dare touch anything, would you?”

Dolly did not answer this. She picked up the coins slowly and twisted them into her hair, swinging the keys on her little finger as she did so, then laughingly lifted the white stone.

“What’s that?” gasped Jenny.

“What do you think it is? A piece of coloured glass, of course.”

Having replaced her treasure-trove in her locks Dolly drew over them the muslin cap and, taking the keys and the candle, went into the passage, leaving Jenny shivering over the fire in the half-dark. She was terrified by Dolly, amazed by Dolly, and yet, at the same time, fascinated by Dolly. Dolly with those guineas in her hair and the beautiful stone she had called glass, but that Jenny felt quite sure was no glass with all

those colours in it! Dolly with her courage and her springing movements, taking aunt's keys and going down to see if she could find a bottle of wine!

Dolly found it, too, for she returned with it, two glasses, a corkscrew and the candle—all neatly on a tray which she put on the table.

"You didn't eat no supper," protested Jenny, "so what d'you want with that stuff now? It's fair poison it is and girls don't never drink it."

Dolly grinned.

"You'll find out something before you've been in London long," she remarked.

"What'd aunt say if she was to wake up?" Jenny was staring as Dolly drew the cork and poured out the wine. "Don't you pour none for me, I couldn't drink it."

"You'll learn in time," said Dolly, indifferently, and drank a glass with relish.

To the terrified and absorbed Jenny she seemed almost a satanic figure—her pallor, her beauty, the guineas hidden in that rich hair under the servant's muslin cap, and Mrs. Nangle's lilac print frock too large for her, drawn tightly round her slender waist with the apron strings.

"You'll never stay here," said Jenny.

"Nor you won't either," replied Dolly, flashing round on her. "Can't you see what sort of a house it is? There'll be prayers two or three times a day and church twice on Sundays! I've seen the Family Bible upstairs. . . . I suppose you'll get one evening a month off, then it'll only be to go to church!"

"I don't want no more," quavered Jenny, "I didn't ask for no more. I just want a comfortable home."

"You won't get it here."

"It fair gives you the creeps," admitted Jenny, "when it's empty, but when it's full of people——"

"There'll be work," grinned Dolly.

"Aren't you staying then?" asked Jenny.

"No, I'm not staying," said Dolly, pouring herself another glass of wine.

"You have hurt your hand bad," murmured Jenny, "I can see the blood coming through your bandages. Shan't I do it up for you again?"

She noticed, though she did not dare comment on the fact, that the heavy wrappings round Dolly's arm were edged with lace and looked, as she had noticed before, like part of a lady's dress.

Dolly sat on the table beside the candle. The wine had brought the colour to her cheeks and a lustre to her eyes. She began to talk in a low yet wild tone and Jenny understood very little of what she said, and yet was utterly absorbed by her manner of saying it.

"I was something like you when I first came to London, but you're prettier than I ever was. I had more spirit, perhaps."

She was talking differently now—almost like a lady, thought Jenny, for a great deal of her common accent had disappeared. She carried herself more boldly, too, lifting her head high and using her bandaged arm in gestures both grand and terrible.

"There are better things for a girl like you than toiling in a basement kitchen, and things in London that you'll never hear of from your aunt. Wouldn't you like to go to parties with diamonds round your neck? Wouldn't you like to have a nice little chariot to ride about in in the park, and a footman standing up behind? Wouldn't you like to go to Italy with a fine gentleman as companion?"

"Dearie me!" said poor Jenny, "I don't know what you're talking about; you frighten me, you fair do!"

"Frighten?" repeated Dolly, "frighten you? I swear I'm frightened myself, Jenny, or whatever your name is."

She sat down on a chair and locked her hands (and Jenny noticed that they did not look like hands that had done much work) under her chin.

"I wonder where I am going to," she whispered, "I wonder what will become of me."

"You're not staying here?" said Jenny, half-glad, half-sorry.

"No, no, I'm going to-night before your aunt wakes up. Where's her hood and bonnet? I'll wear those."

"No, you won't," protested Jenny, indignantly, "that'd be stealing; you've got on aunt's dress as it is. Why don't you go upstairs and put your own things on?"

"They're not suitable," said Dolly Standish. "I'll take your aunt's things. If you're so particular I can pay for them." She put her hands to her hair and, pulling out a coin, laid it on the table. "That'll pay for all your aunt's clothes, I think."

"I dare say it will, but it all seems strange."

"It's strange enough," grinned Dolly. "You can tell on me if you like, I don't care."

"Tell on you," whispered Jenny, "what's there to tell? Oh, this is a fearful house, I wish I'd never come!" She began to cry.

Dolly turned on her one of those looks which had so terrified her at the sink when she had been bathing her wounded hand.

"You start whining and wake your aunt!"

"I won't," promised terrified Jenny, "I won't—I'll be quite good and quiet. But you do frighten me, you really do."

"I wonder what you'll be like in five years' time!" said Dolly Standish, taking Mrs. Nangle's bonnet and cloak from the peg behind the door.

All these peculiar events, so outside Jenny's experience and even outside her imagination, left her dumb and baffled, terrified and staring. She could not realize that such things ever happened, neither could she possibly realize what one did in circumstances so surprising and, in an odd way, so horrible.

“ So you don't like the place and you're going ? ” she asked, foolishly.

With a smile that lifted her lip Dolly the new housemaid replied :

“ No, I don't like the place and I'm going.”

“ But where to ? It's the middle of the night—and London ! ”

“ The middle of the night,” repeated Dolly Standish, tying on Mrs. Nangle's bonnet and folding the cloak about her shoulders—“ and London ! well, it's not so strange to me as it is to you ! ”

Dolly Standish's last action was to drain the final glass of wine left in the bottle on the table. Then, with another of her pale, awful smiles to Jenny, she was gone.

Jenny heard her draw the bolts of the area door, heard her go up the area steps in the darkness and the fog ; then, was so terrified by what she had seen and so frightened of the silence in which she was left and even by the look of the wine-glasses, one stained the other clean, and the empty bottle, that she began to cry softly to herself.

The fire seemed to have suddenly fallen almost out, the candle was burning low. With an unreasoned desire to hide all traces of this dreadful interview Jenny hurried away the bottle and glasses into a cupboard, blew out the candle and crept back to her bed, shuddering and shivering, but thankful to hear the steady breathing of Mrs. Nangle.

It was not surprising when poor Jenny, exhausted and agitated, did finally fall asleep she should sleep heavily and late. But Mrs. Nangle always said afterwards that it was little short of a miracle that she herself should have so overslept herself on this particular morning. It may have been the journey, it may have been that she had been kept up late by the arrival of the new housemaid, it may have been, she said, that she had eaten of her late supper too heavily ; whatever it was the fact remained that Mrs. Nangle slept a good deal later than she had ever known herself to sleep before. She was wakened

in a strange fashion by a heavy and persistent knocking on the area door. Putting on her clothes and with a terrified glance at the clock—for the first flinging aside of the shutters had filled the kitchen with pale autumn sunlight—Mrs. Nangle hurried to the door while Jenny, only yet half-awake, sat huddled up in bed.

It was a policeman, or "peeler" as Mrs. Nangle called him, who stood at the bottom of the area steps. Fog still hung over the late autumn morning, the park was blotted out by a damp mist.

With goggling eyes and straining ears Mrs. Nangle, still fastening her apron strings, listened to the "peeler's" story.

It was murder, nothing short of that, murder at the house next door. Mr. Monkswell, found by two friends who went to have breakfast with him, murdered in his bedroom. That little top room. . . . Mrs. Nangle closed the area door, kindly and prudently she wished to keep this horror from Jenny.

"He never was no good, he's come to the end that's prepared for them like him!"

"But to think a woman done it—one what was kept there, called Sarita Gai; that wasn't her name, you may believe. There was her clothes all thrown about—bonnets and gowns. He'd been robbed of some money."

"Oh, Lord!" cried Mrs. Nangle. Then, "I don't see what it's got to do with us, young man, though it's a horrid thought that it was going on while we was here last night."

"I'm not so sure it hasn't got something to do with you," said the "peeler" in a low, mysterious voice. He pointed out a group of people waiting beyond the area railings. "We all want to have a look round. You see, mum, she must have crawled out of the window of Mr. Monkswell's house into the window of yours—you know, the top rooms nearly touch."

"My lady has always regretted it," said Mrs. Nangle, bitterly.

"She didn't care to come out into the street, you see, for

there's a constable at the corner, and she wanted a disguise ; I don't know if you've been upstairs ? ”

“ No, I haven't ; young Jenny had the terrors and I didn't go up last night.”

“ If you do, mum, I dare say you'll find some of your clothes gone. I have no doubt she took them for a disguise, and I dare say there'll be blood on the window-sill, she seems to have hurt herself climbing across, there's a dress torn up, part of which she might be using as a bandage ; she might be coming down to look for water——”

“ Look for water ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Nangle. “ O Lord, the new housemaid ! ”

“—THE WAY THE WIND BLOWS”

A MORAL TALE OF AN ENGLISH YOUNG LADY—1830

MISS JESSIE PELLEW, vexed and bored, looked out of the grandiose window on to the first cold primroses. It was a late spring and the sky heavy with snow. A wagoner with his cart and team had passed; Miss idly noticed two straws in the road and to her exasperated mind came a favourite saying of her old nurse, Sarah Vitty, “a straw shows the way the wind blows.” What a foolish proverb! Miss Pellew looked back again into the large state room where her uncle, Sir Joseph Bellis, his lawyer, and Lord Verron and his lawyer, sat at the great table scratching quills over parchment—her marriage contract, her marriage settlement.

Miss disliked all these serious grave men and detested the business they were discussing in undertones. She glanced sideways at herself in a wall glass. She saw the reflection of a neat figure in a morning gown of pink muslin with broad white chenille trimmings and, because of the unusual cold for this time of year, a little mantle of blue sarcenet. Her face was smooth, precise and very childish; she had a clear complexion with freckles like those on a thrush's egg; her eyes were rather small, her mouth rather large, she was quite charming and had often heard herself called a beauty, but that was because she was a considerable heiress.

As the scratching of quills continued she kicked her little slippers against the rungs of the high chair and made an impatient movement with her hands on the polished arms carved like snarling dragons.

Lord Verron looked up. He was a comely man of five-and-thirty or so, very formal in his manners, in plain morning dress, his beaver still on his knee ; though he was the chosen husband of the ward he was not familiar with the guardian, Sir Joseph Bellis.

Everyone had told Jessie that he was a “splendid match,” but their glances met in a stare which was, on her part at least, hostile. This quiet man who was to be her husband seemed to her to be as old as her uncle and nearly as dull. When the dullards had finished with their documents and she might get down from her high chair, Lord Verron asked “for a few words with her” ; but Miss tossed her head and pleaded another engagement, then, seeing her uncle’s frown—“a headache,” and so escaped rudely from the room, not forgetting to look back and give a little insolent giggle.

Miss Jessie ran up to her own little room and sat down on a small stool by the side of her nurse who pampered her considerably ; but this was all the pampering poor Miss got (as she often reminded herself in an access of self-pity), her uncle and aunt had “done their duty handsomely by her,” but no more. Now she pouted and shrugged, and tears of real temper burnt her clear innocent eyes.

“I don’t like him, Nurse Vitty, and I’m to marry him in May !”

The nurse, with the feminine craft of her kind, had been prepared for this and dwelt on the material advantages of the match—“a fine town house, a fine country house, horses, carriages, jewels, crowds of fine friends, to go to Court on the Queen’s birthday——”

But Jessie interrupted pettishly :

“But I might have had all that anyhow, Nurse Vitty. I’m not like some poor female who has never had a chance.”

The nurse was silent, for the little heiress had indeed always possessed the best of this world’s goods.

“It is a cold spring,” said Nurse Vitty at last with a shudder. “Dearie me! when shall we ever see the sun?”

“The primroses are out,” pouted Jessie; she smiled a little to herself, thinking of the young man yesterday when she had been riding in the lane who had plucked her a little bunch of these early flowerets and flung them into her lap. Now, if it had been he who had been sitting downstairs watching the lawyers bend their spectacles over their parchments . . . looking up shyly, she asked:

“Why does uncle dislike Esquire Brabazon Aylmer, nurse?”

“Because he hasn’t a penny-piece,” was the ready truth on the old woman’s tongue, but she checked it and began to mutter vaguely all those platitudes so disagreeable and unimpressive to the ears of youth.

“Esquire Brabazon Aylmer had his way to make, he was thought to be a gambler, he was known to be a spendthrift, he was beneath the rank of Sir Joseph Bellis, Lord Verron didn’t like him,” and so on.

Jessie listened impatiently; she knew that old people were always spiteful like that about young people, she knew instinctively that dry, prim, church-going men like Sir Joseph Bellis always hated gay, brilliant and amusing young men like Brabazon Aylmer. She was, of course, hotly on the side of youth against age. . . .

The nurse noticed the look and said anxiously:

“I don’t know what Esquire Brabazon Aylmer is doing in this neighbourhood, indeed I don’t; hanging about the lanes and fields with nothing to do. I heard that he was to get a commission and go abroad, and surely it’s the best thing for a young gentleman who has neither money nor parts.”

“He has every right to be here,” cried Miss; “he’s got a house here, ain’t he?”

“Not what you might call a house. He sold all his lands, every parcel of them, not long ago. He has only got a field or

two and that little pleasure place, what they call a *cottage orné*, I think, at Vomersby."

"Well," replied Jessie, "I suppose he has the right to come there when he likes."

The nurse did not care for the tone of her voice or her obstinate look. She said, shaking her head sadly :

"'Twill be a good thing when you are married to Lord Verron, who is an amiable, worthy, steady gentleman, if ever there was one."

The epithets which she had chosen were not such as were disposed to prepossess Jessie in favour of her prospective bridegroom.

That evening when Lady Bellis, with the best intentions in the world, lectured Miss on the importance of the step she was about to take and of all the duties incumbent on the marriage state, Miss sat in mute, grim revolt. She knew absolutely nothing of anything, little accomplishments were her sole learning and dreams found an easy entry into this open and unguarded mind.

That night she opened the lattice and looked out at the moon, as (she had read in *The Lady's Magazine*) the Elfridas, the Clorindas, of wild Gothic romances, opened their casements and "gazed out at the stormy beauty of the night."

It was cold, and she huddled deeper into her white cosy woollen wrap. There was no need to borrow images from hectic and exotic romances ; the scene was grand enough, the clouds veiled the full moon, the trees black against the gloomy purple of the sky. There was no scent of bud or flower, though this was the Ninth of April, and more snow expected.

Miss thought swooningly of Brabazon Aylmer, of his beautiful slender figure, the incomparable grace with which he wore his elegant clothes, of his dark eyes charmingly set under the low level brows, of his mouth with the arched upper lip, the way his hair sprang back into strong curls over his shapely ears. She was sure he had given her lover-like glances though they

had met so seldom, being sternly discouraged by Sir Joseph and frowned on by my lady. What did Miss know of him? Nothing. But it was very tormenting and delicious to think about him while standing there shuddering in the night air and gazing at the moon. Then the scene, which the lonely girl had so often bent over in the printed page with eager eyes and burning cheeks, took place in actuality, and she was almost too amazed to believe it true.

There, beneath her window, clear in the rays of the moon, stood Esquire Brabazon Aylmer, wrapped in a long travelling cloak. He was looking up at her and his superb face seemed more delightful than ever in this silver light. There was a balcony to the room beneath Jessie's bedchamber and even while she stared at him, to her terrified but delighted astonishment he had easily gained that and was speaking to her, using those very words of love she had always longed to hear:

“ I have had no chance, I have been on the rack ; you are alone ? I may speak ? ”

With a trembling hand Miss extinguished the taper beside her (they always did that, she remembered) and gave a whispered assent.

“ You know what you mean to me, Miss Pellew, you must ; you have read it in my glance, you have heard it in my sighs, and to-day your marriage contract was signed. These barren, dull wrongheads have sold you ! ” Sincere despair sounded in his voice.

Miss leant her head against the mullion and listened, she hoped she looked lovely in the moonlight.

He gave her beauty, her grace, her sweetness, her virtue, her unattainable exquisiteness all that extravagant praise which she had learnt in *The Lady's Magazine* were the proper tributes from a lover but which she thought, when she had looked across the parchment at Lord Verron, she would never hear.

The young man made love with arch delicacy and passion and in five minutes Miss was won. Terrified lest she should be

discovered, and giddy with her new joy, she promised to escape from the house the following evening and meet him by the decoy pond.

Content with this and renewing his protestations the expert gallant departed.

Miss had the instinctive address to conceal her ecstasy of elation, and Lady Bellis praised her submission, while Nurse Vitty told her she was "a dear, good, sweet lamb."

The night was still cold but the moon had overpowered the clouds. Miss did not know how she found the courage to wait till the house was dead asleep, and then to slip on her warm pelisse, her padded slippers and escape from the room, across the great state chamber where her marriage contract had been signed, to open the French windows without making a sound, creep across the balcony and the terrace and run to the decoy pond. There he was, an impatient lover, a gallant figure outlined against the stately sheen of the silent water! Oh! it was too good to be true!

He took her at once in his arms, too tenderly to alarm her, Miss, drooping against his bosom, tasted ecstasy. She told him eagerly that she loathed Lord Verron and had no hand in the marriage. She admitted, with a long-repressed passion vowed to some dream cavalier, that she loved him, "Oh, and no one else!"

He pressed her for an immediate elopement. Miss's courage rose high above all obstacles.

During the half-hour that she walked up and down at the side of the pond with her splendid young lover he had told her much about himself. He had been unfortunate, he said, "an orphan, like herself, with none to guide." But he had nothing to accuse himself of "save follies and those he would soon redeem." He owned a fair estate in the North, he had well-to-do relatives, "his connections were good, his reputation spotless." "With the stimulus of her love he might achieve much"; in brief, she learned that she had given her heart to an entirely

worthy as well as an entirely brilliant youth, and she agreed to meet him by the cross-roads within a stone's throw of Ruxtry House in three days' time. He would have a phaeton and pair ready, they would go at once to London and be married, then she would be his wife and all opposition useless.

He proved to be a methodical as well as a romantic young man. He had written down on a piece of paper full instructions for her and watched her put it carefully in her bosom before he gave her his farewell kiss. Miss returned to the house without being observed and, snuggling into her warm bed, lay all night awake, pinching herself to find out “if it was true.”

Miss put exactly into practice these instructions. She took a few clothes, only those necessary (“for we can buy everything in London,” he had told her), and the finest of her jewels she could get hold of without exciting comment, for he had reminded her “that little as he himself cared for wealth or worldly affairs it was as well she should take any cherished trinkets with her,” for it would be difficult to get them afterwards. Miss wished she could have packed in the small travelling case (which she was able to carry herself) her parure of emeralds, her cameos set in gold, her onyx and diamond bracelets, the pearls she had had given her on her last birthday, her mother's rubies, last set for the coronation of His late Majesty, but her uncle had charge of these, those in her possession were but trifles. A happy secret teaches clever deceit as well as a guilty conscience. Miss was dutiful and obedient; she even submitted to a state visit from Lord Verron. They sat either side of the hearth and talked about the severe weather, “how difficult the roads were becoming for the coaches and how late the mail from London had been”; Miss felt a very expert conversationalist and she wondered why a little smile seemed to lurk about the corners of my lord's fine mouth and why he gave her so constantly that straight searching look he had turned on her when their marriage-contract was signed.

When the dawn of the day of the elopement broke Miss felt

her first pangs of fear and apprehension. The weather had increased in severity ; everyone said that such cold had never been remembered at this time of the year. For two nights there had been an intense frost, and the day was far more wintry than the usual day would have been in December or January ; in the middle of the day there was a fall of snow which soon dissolved, to Miss's joy, in Ruxtry Park. Tales came in during the day that in some parts it lay a foot deep and had frozen again. Sir Joseph prosed on about “the losses among the sheep and lambs, the delay with coaches and carriers.”

The terrible sick apprehension and disappointment that a feared delay in some deeply cherished plans means afflicted Miss ; she could scarcely control herself. When at length the great moment came the snow had ceased and the moon was again shining over the frosty park.

From the little room beside that of Mrs. Vitty, who was snoring cosily, Miss crept away in her thickest pelisse, her fur tippet, her little pink bonnet of padded satin, and her case of jewels and linen in her hand. She did not fail to write a note to her guardian, for in many a tale she had read that this was the correct thing for the heroine to do before she eloped. Her fingers stiff with the cold, for the fire had fallen out in the bed-chamber, Miss penned a missive couched in the formal terms which were the only ones she knew but full of rebellion, stating clearly with whom she was leaving Ruxtry and why—her dislike of Lord Verron and her defiance of them all. She was so agitated that she could not for a moment think where to leave this note—the pincushion, surely ! But that in her nervousness she could not find, and her hands were so cold. Then she picked up her muff—how foolish not to have thought of that before—the note would do on the little bureau . . . she was out of the house and away. How easily one could escape !

The cold was intense, those were surely snow clouds riding up in a dense hard pack behind the moon as if to overtake and extinguish the icy light. The trees had a stiff look, the grass

stood rigid and frozen. This was a very different adventure from just running down to the duckpond ; it did not seem far to the cross-roads in the daytime, but it seemed a long way at night. They were gained at last with many a slip of a tired small foot, and many a palpitation of an overwrought heart, and there *he* was in his greatcoat striding up and down beneath the signpost which bore the directions of four ways.

He greeted her with all a lover's eager courtesy and took from her at once her case and comforted her about her cold journey, and warmed her hands in his. But she detected beneath his ardour a certain uneasiness and after a moment or two he confessed that “the phaeton had not come and that the roads were almost impassable ; he did not know how they were to contrive to get to town that night,” and he cursed his luck with unmistakable sincerity. Miss was completely dismayed.

“Let us wait awhile. If you have engaged a man he must arrive.”

“Fond foolish one,” said Mr. Brabazon Aylmer, “how can the fellow come if the roads are impossible for the horses ? I heard that they had stopped the coaches. I was minded to send you a letter asking you to come another time, but could not think of a messenger, you are kept so cursed close, my love.”

The night darkened down. The clouds soon overwhelmed the moon, only a fitful light remained, but Mr. Brabazon Aylmer had a dark lantern under his greatcoat and showed that to reassure Miss, who began to fall into a childish fear.

“We may be overtaken. Oh, I would sooner die ! Let us go towards London, even if we have to walk.”

“I would,” he replied, “that it were possible for you to walk, but it is several miles, and you——” his voice broke off, and she began to cry with vexation.

Miss could have walked it if it had not been for her slippers and her terror and the coming storm. Then there was a sudden rise of wind and the clouds scattered like great stallions across

the gloomy sky, seeming to rise and fall in front of the cold moon. The snow fell in stormy gusts overwhelming them as they stood beneath the signpost.

“The phaeton will not come, that’s sure,” said Brabazon Aylmer. And Miss moaned.

“I must go back, we will try another night. Come with me as far as the gates, at least.”

“No, my charmer, there is no refuge for you. What, do you think a few flakes of snow are going to prevent me in my design? No, indeed; my passion for you is far too great.”

These words a little consoled Miss even through her fright and discomfort. He helped her to walk along the frozen road. She wondered where he could be going. It was impossible for them to go to the village or to a neighbour’s house, they would both be instantly recognized by everyone and, country-bred, she knew that no bribe would make any man take a horse out on a night like this.

He was more adroit than she supposed for he soon found a way out of her predicament.

“There’s the mausoleum,” he said; “it used to be mine before I sold the ground, it will be warm and dry at least in there.”

But Miss cried out against this . . . she well knew the old brick circular mausoleum of the Aylmers. But he replied impatiently to her objections, “that the dead had not been buried there for years, and a portion of it was never aught but the chapel.”

Still Miss would not go there, and certainly she would not be left alone, she would rather go cold and hungry and walk about all night in the storm. Her voice rose hysterically above the wind and then as the inclemency of the night increased and her terror and agitation became more overwhelming she began to run through the snow, just running blindly into the large scudding flakes which she could see now by the light of Brabazon Aylmer’s lantern, now by the transient moonbeams which pierced the hurrying clouds. Out of this confusion of

seething storm and snow (it seemed to Miss a very chaos of disaster), she saw a house, a door, suddenly loom, and she recognized it as her lover's pleasure-house at Vomersby. What a relief! Miss thought, and how stupid of him not to have suggested this instead of the mausoleum!

“Quick, quick!” she cried out.

She heard her lover running behind her as hard as he was able on the frozen road, and she saw the beams of his lantern close to her.

“Have you the key? Or is there any way in which we can break in? Why did you not think of this before? I did not know we were so near.”

“Nor I,” he answered. “The place is in disorder, it is not fit for you.”

“But better than the mausoleum,” shivered Miss.

“I would not take you there,” he repeated, “I would not go there myself. It has unpleasant associations, I have been there with ill companions, I wish to have done with Vomersby.”

“But chance has brought us here,” cried Miss, shaking with cold, terror and impatience. “At least it will be shelter, and you must have food and a bed within. In the morning the storm may be over, or if need be I can be hidden here all to-morrow.”

He took a key from his pocket with which he opened the door and she passed into the passage. It was a pleasant place, as his lantern showed, and gaily furnished. Miss ran into the first room, took off her pelisse, shaking off the snow; she dashed the flakes from her long-haired muff and kicked off her soaked shoes with the unconsciousness of complete inexperienced innocence and ignorance.

He looked at her curiously then, the shutters being already closed, took pains to stuff up the chinks before he lit the candles. She crouched up on the sofy while he got food and lit a fire. He brought her a drink of apricot brandy and, looking at her lying there, half-drowsy, in the reaction from her

fright and fatigue, he muttered half to himself, "Well, this settles the affair anyway. There's no going back now."

Miss's gaiety returned, "she told him she would hide in Vomersby as long as he wished."

He sat down moodily on the other side of the fire and took his face in his hands. Miss was sorry for him, "all his plans spoilt!" She was quick to see that he felt himself humiliated in her eyes by his failure, she did her best to soothe and encourage him.

"We should have been married by now," he murmured, "I had not intended this."

Nor had she thought of it. She sat upright, flushed and then paled and felt sick at heart; for she knew enough from the tales she had read and the hints and anecdotes of her old nurse to know that she was ruined in reputation and honour if it should be discovered that she had spent the night alone at Vomersby with Esquire Brabazon Aylmer. Quite the reason for the terrible disgrace attaching to such a disaster Miss could not fathom, but instinct told her that this was an outrage on all decorum and modesty.

"You're safe with me here, my love."

Miss could not quite understand him. She began to hate the charming little room with Chinese monsters in the glass cabinets and the pastel pictures on the walls, the French carpet on the floor. She looked about and beheld a woman's work-basket with a long grey glove falling out of it. His glance followed hers, he snatched up the glove and threw it in the fire.

"I told you I had had ill companions here. Do you sleep," he added, controlling himself, "and I will sit beside you all night and guard against any surprise."

"I'll go upstairs," said Miss, faintly. "Give me a light. I'll leave you here."

He said with a dark look: "No, it is all in disorder upstairs, I would not have you in any of those chambers."

Miss, with some dignity, insisted and, seeing he did not offer

to help, herself took a candle and ascended the short stairs of the pleasure-house. She opened a door at random—a pretty room with birds on the wall-paper. The bed was not dressed but there were blankets folded on it and pillows, “ ’twould do well enough. If she must pass the night in the same house with him she would not pass it in the same room.” She looked at herself in a mirror, her face looked grey and withered in the pink silk of the Paris bonnet. “ Oh, he will never love me if I look like that,” she thought, and she remembered the toilet necessaries in her satchel. Running down to get this she surprised him in the act of opening the case, his hands already turning over seed pearl and coral with, she feared, disgust . . . —did he despise her as frivolous for bringing these pretty toys? Miss thought this prying an ungentlemanly action, but he excused himself coolly :

“ I wished to see what you have brought ; there is no great responsibility in all this, but I shall be held accountable for them. Could you get nothing of value ? Some females would have contrived to do so.”

Miss answered stupidly :

“ I brought all I had myself. I have many more—but my uncle keeps them.”

He asked sharply : “ Why did you come down for them ? ”

“ It was not for those,” said Miss, blushing, “ but for the other things in the case. Please keep the jewels and look after them to-night.”

Miss took her linen and the toilet articles and went upstairs. She was disappointed that her lover had parted from her so abruptly ; no doubt he was upset, overcome, chagrined ; but surely tenderness need not have dropped from him so suddenly ?

Everything in her room was comfortable and her door locked. Feeling secure and tired Miss snuggled down under the coverlet, pulled the pillows into position under her head and slept. The bitter dawn was in the room showing through the thick

silk curtains before he knocked at the door. Miss rose up all startled finding herself awry, both in her person and her heart, but soon put herself to rights and was out on the stairhead with her case and her pelisse, her slippers and her pink bonnet, a little thick powder on her cheeks, too, for she had been frightened at her own pallor.

Miss was still further frightened at the appearance of Mr. Brabazon Aylmer. He looked as if he had been deadly sick during the night; his handsome face was greenish, his features appeared pinched, his hands trembled.

"There's been a thaw," he said hoarsely. "This is our only chance to get away. My God! what a night." And with an extravagantly embroidered handkerchief he wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"I slept," rebuked Miss, gently, "though I suppose you would feel great anxiety, but there has been no one?" She looked round the pretty room.

"No one," he repeated, and his glance followed hers and he shuddered as if some of the thawing ice had got down his back.

Miss sighed, if he had been an ideal lover he would have got her a cup of coffee, or some comforting drink, and she asked pettishly: "Are there no provisions in the house?"

"Why, some I believe in the kitchen," he said, impatiently buttoning his greatcoat.

"Well then, I will get some. We will have a hot drink if nothing else. I am so hungry and cold, too."

"Don't go into the kitchen," he commanded; "don't stop for coffee, we'll get all on the journey. There's only one man here whom I could trust to get horses from. And that's Jeremiah Hartslib at 'The Mare and Foal'—he'll oblige me—that damned fellow and the phaeton!"

Miss wished that her lover would not swear so much. She knew now what had given Brabazon Aylmer a reputation for "wildness" among men like her uncle and Lord Verron. She

was sorry, too, about the coffee, it seemed churlish on his part. She followed him, however, dutifully, shivering and shuddering into the bleak day.

Jeremiah Hartslib, too, she had heard his name mentioned. He kept an inn, one ill-frequented, except by poachers and footpads, it was said, and the man himself she had often heard her uncle declare should be on the first excuse turned from the neighbourhood. But it was to Jeremiah Hartslib's broken-down tavern that they made their way across the frosty fields.

Miss was too occupied in gratitude for the fact that evidently she had not yet been missed, at any rate had not been pursued, to care much about other matters.

The village of Payny Wyke seemed yet asleep; they met no one and when they got to the inn there was some difficulty in arousing Mr. Hartslib, but when he was awakened Esquire Brabazon Aylmer instantly went into an inner room and had a short conversation with him, the result of which was that they were quickly accommodated with a hackney and two stout horses, and Mr. Hartslib himself drove them to London. Once they were on their way Miss found that her lover's spirits rose. He became once more the ardent wooer of that first magic interview beneath her window and of that wonderful walk by the decoy pond.

They put up, evidently through some preconceived plan with Mr. Hartslib, at a small inn in Covent Garden, called “The Rainbow.” Miss detested the look of the place, but he said gaily, what did it matter, “they would be married in half an hour or so.” And now Miss could have her coffee or whatever else she wished, and he was coaxing and kind again, and a pleasant enough meal was sent in to her, as she sat stiff and half-dazed by the fire the drawer had hastily lit in the private parlour. She asked him timidly “if he would not share her refreshment?” But he shook his head and laughed, and said he had a queasy stomach and required something stronger by this hour of the morning. When he came back in half an hour

she could see he had been drinking. He was like the gentlemen after they had come to dinner and stayed late with Sir Joseph, but he had himself well in hand.

"Well, my charmer," he cried, "you look more adorable than ever. I will give you some money and you must go out and buy what you wish. As for your jewels you must not worry about them, I have them in safe custody."

Miss had not thought of the jewels and she wondered why he mentioned them, she wondered still more at his next remark.

"Is it true, my sweet girl, that you have entire control of your own fortune when you are twenty-one and that you were twenty-one last birthday?"

"Why, I suppose it is true," said Miss, amazed. "I don't know, you must ask the lawyers." Why had he asked that? He must have taken some trouble to inform himself of her affairs.

He said in quite a reasonable fashion :

"One must inform oneself of how one stands ; it is not my intention to take a large dowry with you, for this is a marriage of love, and I intend to keep my wife myself." He kissed her hand gracefully.

But Miss still had the feeling that he knew far more about her affairs than she did herself. He now looked very handsome. He had adjusted his clothes precisely and it was difficult to recognize the man so dishevelled, so terror-stricken who had knocked on her door early that morning. It was strange that his own pleasure-house at Vomersby should have such a gloomy and depressing effect on him ! She remembered what he had said about "ill companions," and it occurred to her for the first time that perhaps there was a great deal in a man's life that a Miss like herself could not understand.

The day was grey and muddy ; he said he would hire a coach for her and take her to the shops in Regent Street. As he handed her from her private parlour they had to pass through what seemed to be a public room. There were two loungers

there with pipes and beer, leaning across the table, and as Miss passed she heard the one say to the other :

“ Look at that handsome young scoundrel with that plain little piece ; there’s a pretty game afoot there, I’ll warrant.”

Miss paused in the doorway. She remembered distinctly her own face in the mirror when her marriage contract was being signed, her own face in the mirror at Vomersby . . . and it was with very sunk spirits that she followed Mr. Brabazon Aylmer to the hackney coach. They stopped at a mantua-maker’s and he was handing her out when she saw a man and woman at the corner of the street. The woman was lurching with an unsteady step and the man was following her violently with upraised fists. As Miss stared she beheld the poor creature struck and falling on her knees in the gutter, while the man rained foul language on her. The sight to her was beyond everything incredible and terrible, she clutched her lover’s arm and exclaimed :

“ Stop him, save her ! ”

But he looked and laughed, and said :

“ No doubt the trollop deserved it ; come into the shop, my love.”

But Miss did not move. The woman had got up and thrown her shawl round her head and taken herself off sobbing, while the man stood muttering and cursing in the gutter.

“ I’ve a headache,” said Miss, “ a sudden nausea—I must go back to the inn.”

Mr. Brabazon Aylmer admirably concealed his vexation.

“ I’m afraid, my dear, you are full of whims and caprices, but it is true the weather is dismal.”

Miss agreed to everything. When they once more alighted at the Rainbow Inn she saw two straws in the gutter which had fallen from a cart taking produce to Covent Garden—“ the straws which show the way the wind blows.” She was a “ plain little thing ” and he did not care when he saw a man maltreating a woman, but seemed rather to be amused by it. She

assented to everything with adroit skilfulness. But when he had gone, gay as a feather to arrange for their marriage, she at once snatched up her case and left the inn and hastened to the town house of Lord Verron which had been pointed out to her with pride by her aunt.

Lord Verron, sitting reflectively over his paper and his morning coffee, was considerably startled when his betrothed, whom he believed safe at Ruxtry, was shown into his presence, a draggled, forlorn, sad-looking little Miss, with a damaged quilted silk bonnet, a pelisse weather-stained, and shoes bespattered with mud.

"I was stupid enough to come to try to do a morning's shopping by myself and came by the public coach, now I am frightened and tired. Perhaps you or Lady Charlotte will look after me."

"My dear child," said Lord Verron, calmly, "I'm afraid it was very uncomfortable in the public coach and foul weather for you to have adventured to London alone; I am very glad, though, you chose to come here." His words were formal but inexpressibly kind, and Miss was relieved that he did not question or reproach, comment or even so much as put her in the wrong by a critical glance.

When he had left the room to fetch his sister, the Lady Charlotte, Miss's terror (why did she feel terrified as if she had come through unmentionable horrors?), which had changed into relief, was renewed when she recollected her foolish farewell letter; how useless her story of shopping! The note would be found and everyone would know she had run away with Brabazon Aylmer. Miss turned sick when my lord returned with his sister; she would have to confide in one of them, she knew at once it would not be in the lady who must already be regarding with curiosity her soiled attire and her unlikely story. So she decided she would confide her shame, her terror and her confusion to Lord Verron.

"Oh, sir, could I see you alone for a moment?" she said,

and Lady Charlotte found a ready and gracious excuse to leave the room.

Miss stood upright in the fire-glow, twisting and untwisting her hands in her muff. Lord Verron waited for her to speak with a courteous and sympathetic aspect behind which was anxiety and, she believed, love. Miss had thought him old or plain, now she had a desire to sink at his feet and dissolve in tears, then her hand twisting nervously in her muff came upon a screw of paper. She pulled it out and to her furtive glance saw her own note. In that stupid panic confusion of leaving her room she had, after all, pushed the paper into the muff—not left it on the bureau. My lord advanced towards her thinking she was going to weep, but instead Miss cried with relief:

“After all, I have nothing to tell you,” and sat down by the fire, trembling and struggling back the tears.

“You left Payny Wyke early this morning by the first coach, bad as the weather was, my dear, because you had a whim and a desire to make some purchases for yourself, is that not it?”

Miss thought that she detected disappointment behind his manner. She replied childishly:

“Yes, that was it, and I am very sorry, sir. I will not do it again; I hope that you will not tell my uncle and aunt.”

“I can assure you, Jessie, dear, of my protection and sympathy.” Then he took her hand and told her simply (as if he knew that this was just the right moment for such an avowal, using just the right tone and look) that he had always loved Miss ever since he had seen her a little girl plucking primroses in the lane.

“And yet,” said Miss with a catch in her voice, “I am only a plain little thing.”

“Not to me,” smiled the pleasant man, “but very charming and delightful.”

Miss, looking at him and hearing his voice, was moved to do the most difficult thing of her life.

"I told you," she said, "a lie just now. I left home last night. I meant to run away with Brabazon Aylmer, but I could not because of the storm, and we spent the night at Vomersby."

He became so pale that she was frightened, still there was no harshness in his aspect and he constrained himself to speak kindly, and Miss, looking into the fire and shading her shamed face, told her tale.

"Are you angry?" she asked. "Am I entirely disgraced?"

"My poor child," he said, and folded her to his breast.

A few hours later Sir Joseph and Lady Bellis drew up at Lord Verron's town house. They had met on the road the footman my lord had sent to inform them of the arrival of Jessie now sweetly asleep in Lady Charlotte's chamber.

Both Sir Joseph and his wife seemed to my lord's surprise to make very little matter of Miss's naughty escapade. They accepted the tale on its face value, and my lord discovered that this was because they were entirely absorbed with a far more exciting happening which had occurred at Payny Wyke.

"Murder," said Sir Joseph, standing in front of the fire and rubbing his hands together, "murder, a most horrid murder, and almost next door to us."

"Where?"

"At that young scoundrel's, Brabazon Aylmer's, country house, Vomersby."

My lord could not repress an exclamation and Sir Joseph continued with a kind of unctious display when retailing a hideous, startling piece of news.

"Yes, that girl who was missing four or five weeks ago, Martha Carnaby from Sussex; they found her downstairs buried in the cellar next the kitchen."

"How? Why?"

“ Oh, it was that rogue Jeremiah Hartslib gave him away, they quarrelled over money. It was only discovered this afternoon. The young rogue was already in London, on his way to the Continent, no doubt, which partly brought the runners after him.”

My lord was thinking: “ Now I know what I could not understand, why Brabazon Aylmer left her alone last night, he must have been in a mortal terror.” And then he thought, “ No saving her reputation now—one or both will speak.”

But Sir Joseph’s next words came as an enormous relief to these hideous apprehensions. He said :

“ When Brabazon Aylmer was arrested he shot the informer—and upon my soul I can’t blame him—and then turned the weapon on himself. Both dead, sir, and the country cheated of a bit of fun at the Assizes.”

That evening Miss came down to supper very trim and neat in one of Lady Charlotte’s frilled muslins. She seemed very happy and comfortable and the name of Brabazon Aylmer was not mentioned. That was a sordid sensation they hoped to keep from the ears of the young Miss. Only before she left to go to her uncle’s town house, my lord took the occasion to draw her aside and ask :

“ One word on a matter of which I will never speak again. I can understand why you ran away with him, my dear, for he was a gay and plausible rogue ; but what made you leave him ? What put it into your head to run away from him so suddenly ? ”

Miss reflected. She was anxious to please this new-found lover. She clung to him in a touching desire to be honest ; she paused as if turning over in her mind : What had it been ? Because he wanted her to go to the mausoleum, his dislike for her to use his pleasure-house, his refusal for her to go into the kitchen, his appearance in the morning like a man who had been sick, his disdain of her shame and terror over the scene of the man striking the woman, the remark she had heard in the

tavern—(There goes a plain little thing!). And yet, trifles, all of them. Miss could not speak of all this, it was too subtle, too slight. She answered:

"Oh, I don't know, sir, I could never tell. Just straws, you know, which show the way the wind blows."

THE AVENGING OF ANN LEETE

PORTRAIT OF A LADY WITH A ROMAN SCARF—1845

THIS is a queer story, the more queer for the interpretation of passions of strong human heat that have been put upon it, and for glimpses of other motives and doings, not, it would seem, human at all.

The whole thing is seen vaguely, brokenly, a snatch here and there; one tells the tale, strangely another exclaims amaze, a third points out a scene, a fourth has a dim memory of a circumstance, a nine-days' (or less) wonder, an old print helps, the name on a mural tablet in a deserted church pinches the heart with a sense of confirmation, and so you have your story. When all is said it remains a queer tale.

It is seventy years odd ago, so dating back from this present year of 1845 you come to nearly midway in the last century, when conditions were vastly different from what they are now.

The scene is in Glasgow, and there are three points from which we start, all leading us to the heart of our tale.

The first is the portrait of a woman that hangs in the parlour of a respectable banker. He believes it to be the likeness of some connection of his wife's, dead this many a year, but he does not know much about it. Some while ago it was discovered in a lumber-room, and he keeps it for the pallid beauty of the canvas, which is much faded and rubbed.

Since, as a young man, I first had the privilege of my worthy friend's acquaintance, I have always felt a strange interest in this picture; and, in that peculiar way that the

imagination will seize on trifles, I was always fascinated by the dress of the lady. This is of dark green very fine silk, an uncommon colour to use in a portrait, and, perhaps, in a lady's dress. It is very plain, with a little scarf of a striped Roman pattern, and her hair is drawn up over a pillow in the antique mode. Her face is expressionless, yet strange, the upper lip very thin, the lower very full, the light brown eyes set under brows that slant. I cannot tell why this picture was always to me full of such a great attraction, but I used to think of it a vast deal, and often to note, secretly, that never had I chanced to meet in real life, or in any other painting, a lady in a dark green silk dress.

In the corner of the canvas is a little device, put in a diamond, as a gentlewoman might bear arms, yet with no pretensions to heraldry, just three little birds, the topmost with a flower in its beak.

It was not so long ago that I came upon the second clue that leads into the story, and that was a mural tablet in an old church near the Rutherglen Road, a church that has lately fallen into disrepute or neglect, for it was deserted and impoverished. But I was assured that a generation ago it had been a most famous place of worship, fashionable and well-frequented by the better sort.

The mural tablet was to one "Ann Leete," and there was just the date (seventy-odd years old) given with what seemed a sinister brevity.

And underneath the lettering, lightly cut on the time-stained marble, was the same device as that on the portrait of the lady in the green silk dress.

I was curious enough to make inquiries, but no one seemed to know anything of, or wished to talk about, Ann Leete.

It was all so long ago, I was told, and there was no one now in the parish of the name of Leete.

And all who had been acquainted with the family of Leete seemed to be dead or gone away. The parish register (my

curiosity went so far as an inspection of this) yielded me no more information than the mural tablet.

I spoke to my friend the banker, and he said he thought that his wife had had some cousins by the name of Leete, and that there was some tale of a scandal or great misfortune attached to them which was the reason of a sort of ban on their name so that it had never been mentioned.

When I told him I thought the portrait of the lady in the dark green silk might picture a certain Ann Leete he appeared uneasy and even desirous of having the likeness removed, which roused in me the suspicion that he knew something of the name, and that not pleasant. But it seemed to me indelicate and perhaps useless to question him.

It was a year or so after this incident that my business, which was that of silversmith and jeweller, put into my hands a third clue. One of my apprentices came to me with a rare piece of work which had been left at the shop for repair.

It was a thin medal of the purest gold, on which was set in fresh-water pearls, rubies and cairngorms the device of the three birds, the plumage being most skilfully wrought in the bright jewels and the flower held by the topmost creature accurately designed in pearls.

It was one of these pearls that was missing, and I had some difficulty in matching its soft lustre.

An elderly lady called for the ornament, the same person who had left it. I saw her myself, and ventured to admire and praise the workmanship of the medal.

"Oh," she said, "it was worked by a very famous jeweller, my great-uncle, and he has a peculiar regard for it—indeed I believe it has never before been out of his possession, but he was so greatly grieved by the loss of the pearl that he would not rest until I offered to take it to be repaired. He is, you will understand," she added with a smile, "a very old man. He must have made that jewellery—why—seventy-odd years ago."

Seventy-odd years ago—that would bring one back to the date on the tablet to Ann Leete, to the period of the portrait.

“I have seen this device before,” I remarked, “on the likeness of a lady and on the mural inscription in memory of a certain Ann Leete.” Again this name appeared to make an unpleasant impression.

My customer took her packet hastily.

“It is associated with something dreadful,” she said, quickly. “We do not speak of it—a very old story. I did not know anyone had heard of it——”

“I certainly have not,” I assured her. “I came to Glasgow not so long ago, as apprentice to this business of my uncle’s which now I own.”

“But you have seen a portrait?” she asked.

“Yes, in the house of a friend of mine.”

“This is queer. We did not know that any existed. Yet my great-uncle does speak of one—in a green silk dress.”

“In a green silk dress,” I confirmed.

The lady appeared amazed.

“But it is better to let the matter rest,” she decided. “My relative, you will realize, is very old—nearly, sir, a hundred years old, and his wits wander and he tells queer tales. It was all very strange and horrible, but one cannot tell how much my old uncle dreams.”

“I should not think to disturb him,” I replied.

But my customer hesitated.

“If you know of this portrait—perhaps he should be told; he laments after it so much, and we have always believed it an hallucination——”

She returned the packet containing the medal.

“Perhaps,” she added dubiously, “you are interested enough to take this back to my relative yourself and judge what you shall or shall not tell him?”

I eagerly accepted the offer, and the lady gave me the name and residence of the old man who, although possessed of

considerable means, had lived for the past fifty years in the greatest seclusion in that lonely part of the town beyond the Rutherglen Road and near to the Green, the once pretty and fashionable resort for youth and pleasure, but now a deserted and desolate region. Here, on the first opportunity, I took my way, and found myself well out into the country, nearly at the river, before I reached the lonely mansion of Eneas Bretton, as the ancient jeweller was called.

A ferocious dog troubled my entrance in the dark, overgrown garden where the black glossy laurels and bays strangled the few flowers, and a grim woman, in an old-fashioned mutch, or cap, at length answered my repeated peals at the rusty chain-bell.

It was not without considerable trouble that I was admitted into the presence of Mr. Bretton, and only, I think, by the display of the jewel and the refusal to give it into any hands but those of its owner.

The ancient jeweller was seated on a southern terrace that received the faint and fitful rays of the September sun.

He was wrapped in shawls that disguised his natural form, and a fur and leather cap was fastened under his chin.

I had the impression that he had been a fine man, of a vigorous and handsome appearance; even now, in the extreme of decay, he showed a certain grandeur of line and carriage, a certain majestic power in his personality. Though extremely feeble, I did not take him to be imbecile nor greatly wanting in his faculties.

He received me courteously, though obviously ill-used to strangers.

I had, he said, a claim on him as a fellow-craftsman, and he was good enough to commend the fashion in which I had repaired his medal.

This, as soon as he had unwrapped, he fastened to a fine gold chain he drew from his breast, and slipped inside his heavy clothing.

"A pretty trinket," I said, "and of an unusual design."

"I fashioned it myself," he answered, "over seventy years ago. The year before, sir, she died."

"Ann Leete?" I ventured.

The ancient man was not in the least surprised at the use of this name.

"It is a long time since I heard those words with any but my inner ear," he murmured; "to be sure, I grow very old. You'll not remember Ann Leete?" he added wistfully.

"I take it she died before I was born," I answered.

He peered at me.

"Ah, yes, you are still a young man, though your hair is grey."

I noticed now that he wore a small tartan scarf inside his coat and shawl; this fact gave me a peculiar, almost unpleasant shudder.

"I know this about Ann Leete—she had a dark green silk dress. And a Roman or tartan scarf."

He touched the wisp of bright-coloured silk across his chest.

"This is it. She had her likeness taken so—but it was lost."

"It is preserved," I answered. "And I know where it is. I might, if you desired, bring you to a sight of it."

He turned his grand old face to me with a civil inclination of his massive head.

"That would be very courteous of you, sir, and a pleasure to me. You must not think," he added with dignity, "that the lady has forsaken me or that I do not often see her. Indeed, she comes to me more frequently than before. But it would delight me to have the painting of her to console the hours of her absence."

I reflected what his relative had said about the weakness of his wits, and recalled his great age, which one was apt to forget in face of his composure and reasonableness.

He appeared now to doze and to take no further notice of my presence, so I left him.

He had a strange look of lifelessness as he slumbered there in the faintest rays of the cloudy autumn sun.

I reflected how lightly the spirit must dwell in this ancient frame, how easily it must take flight into the past, how soon into eternity.

It did not cost me much persuasion to induce my friend, the banker, to lend me the portrait of Ann Leete, particularly as the canvas had been again sent up to the attics.

"Do you know the story?" I asked him.

He replied that he had heard something; that the case had made a great stir at the time; that it was all very confused and amazing, and that he did not desire to discuss the matter.

I hired a carriage and took the canvas to the house of Eneas Bretton.

He was again on the terrace, enjoying with a sort of calm eagerness the last warmth of the failing sun.

His two servants brought in the picture and placed it on a chair at his side.

He gazed at the painted face with the greatest serenity.

"That is she," he said, "but I am glad to think that she looks happier now, sir. She still wears that dark green silk. I never see her in any other garment."

"A beautiful woman," I remarked quietly, not wishing to agitate or disturb his reflections, which were clearly detached from any considerations of time and space.

"I have always thought so," he answered gently, "but I, sir, have peculiar faculties. I saw her, and see her still as a spirit. I loved her as a spirit. Yet our bodily union was necessary for our complete happiness. And in that my darling and I were balked."

"By death?" I suggested, for I knew that the word had no terrors for him.

"By death," he agreed, "who will soon be forced to unite us again."

"But not in the body," I said.

"How, sir, do you know that?" he smiled. "We have but finite minds. I think we have but little conception of the marvellous future."

"Tell me," I urged, "how you lost Ann Leete."

His dim, heavy-lidded, many-wrinkled eyes flickered a glance over me.

"She was murdered," he said.

I could not forbear a shudder.

"That fragile girl!" I exclaimed. My blood had always run cool and thin, and I detested deeds of violence; my even mind could not grasp the idea of the murder of women save as a monstrous enormity.

I looked at the portrait, and it seemed to me that I had always known that it was the likeness of a creature doomed.

"Seventy years ago and more," continued Eneas Bretton, "since when she has wandered lonely betwixt time and eternity, waiting for me. But very soon I shall join her, and then, sir, we shall go where there is no recollection of the evil things of this earth."

By degrees he told me the story, not in any clear sequence, nor at any one time, nor without intervals of sleep and pauses of dreaming, nor without assistance from his servants and his great-niece and her husband, who were his frequent visitors.

Yet it was from his own lips and when we were alone together that I learned all that was really vital in the tale.

He required very frequent attendance; although all human passion was at the utmost ebb with him, he had, he said, a kind of regard for me in that I had brought him his lady's portrait, and he told me things of which he had never spoken to any human being before. I say human on purpose because

of his intense belief that he was, and always had been, in communication with powers not of this earth.

In these words I put together his tale.

As a young man, said Eneas Bretton, I was healthy, prosperous and happy.

My family had been goldsmiths as long as there was any record of their existence, and I was an enthusiast in this craft, grave, withal, and studious, over-fond of books and meditation. I do not know how or when I first met Ann Leete.

To me she was always there like the sun; I think I have known her all my life, but perhaps my memory fails.

Her father was a lawyer and she an only child, and though her social station was considered superior to mine, I had far more in the way of worldly goods, so there was no earthly obstacle to our union.

The powers of evil, however, fought against us; I had feared this from the first, as our happiness was the complete circle ever hateful to fiends and devils who try to break the mystic symbol.

The mistress of my soul attracted the lustful attention of a young doctor, Rob Patterson, who had a certain false charm of person, not real comeliness, but a trick of colour, of carriage and a fine taste in clothes.

His admiration was whetted by her coldness and his intense dislike of me.

We came to scenes in which he derided me as no gentleman, but a beggarly tradesman, and I scorned him as an idle voluptuary designing a woman's ruin for the crude pleasure of the gratification of fleeting passions.

For the fellow made not even any pretence of being able to support a wife, and was of that rake-helly temperament that made an open mock of matrimony.

Although he was but a medical student, he was of what they call noble birth, and his family, though decayed, possessed

considerable social power, so that his bold pursuit of Ann Leete and his insolent flaunting of me had some licence, the more so that he did not lack tact and address in his manner and conduct.

Our marriage could have stopped this persecution, or given the right to publicly resent it, but my darling would not leave her father, who was of a melancholy and querulous disposition.

It was shortly before her twenty-first birthday, for which I had made her the jewel I now wear (the device being the crest of her mother's family and one for which she had a great affection), that her father died suddenly. His last thoughts were of her, for he had this very picture painted for her birthday gift. Finding herself thus unprotected and her affairs in some confusion, she declared her intention of retiring to some distant relative in the Highlands until decorum permitted of our marriage.

And upon my opposing myself to this scheme of separation and delay she was pleased to fall out with me, declaring that I was as importunate as Dr. Patterson, and that I, as well as he, should be kept in ignorance of her retreat.

I had, however, great hopes of inducing her to change this resolution, and, it being then fair spring weather, engaged her to walk with me on the Green, beyond the city, to discuss our future.

I was an orphan like herself, and we had now no common meeting-place suitable to her reputation and my respect.

By reason of a pressure of work, to which by temperament and training I was ever attentive, I was a few moments late at the tryst on the Green, which I found, as usual, empty ; but it was a lovely afternoon of May, very still and serene, like the smile of satisfied love.

I paced about, looking for my darling.

Although she was in mourning, she had promised me to wear the dark green silk I so admired under her black cloak,

and I looked for this colour among the brighter greens of the trees and bushes.

She did not appear, and my heart was chilled with the fear that she was offended with me and therefore would not come, and an even deeper dread that she might, in vexation, have fled to her unknown retreat.

This thought was sending me hot-foot to seek her at her house, when I saw Rob Patterson coming across the close-shaven grass of the Green.

I remember that the cheerful sun seemed to me to be at this moment darkened, not by any natural clouds or mists, but as it is during an eclipse, and that the fresh trees and innocent flowers took on a ghastly and withered look.

It may appear a trivial detail, but I recall so clearly his habit, which was of a luxury beyond his means—fine grey broadcloth with a deep edging of embroidery in gold thread, little suited to his profession.

As he saw me he cocked his hat over his eyes, but took no other notice of my appearance, and I turned away, not being wishful of any encounter with this gentleman while my spirit was in a tumult.

I went at once to my darling's house, and learnt from her maid that she had left home two hours previously.

I do not wish to dwell on this part of my tale—indeed, I could not, it becomes very confused to me.

The salient facts are these—that no one saw Ann Leete in bodily form again.

And no one could account for her disappearance; yet no great comment was aroused by this, because there was no one to take much interest in her, and it was commonly believed that she had disappeared from the importunity of her lovers, the more so as Rob Patterson swore that the day of her disappearance he had had an interview with her in which she had avowed her intention of going where no one could discover her. This, in a fashion, was confirmed by what she had told

me, and I was the more inclined to believe it, as my inner senses told me that she was not dead.

Six months of bitter search, of sad uneasiness, that remain in my memory blurred to one pain, and then, one autumn evening, as I came home late and dispirited, I saw her before me in the gloaming, tripping up the street, wearing her dark green silk dress and tartan or Roman scarf.

I did not see her face as she disappeared before I could gain on her, but she held to her side one hand, and between the long fingers I saw the haft of a surgeon's knife.

I knew then that she was dead.

And I knew that Rob Patterson had killed her.

Although it was well known that my family were all ghost-seers, to speak in this case was to be laughed at and reprimanded.

I had no single shred of evidence against Dr. Patterson.

But I resolved that I would use what powers I possessed to make him disclose his crime.

And this is how it befell.

In those days, in Glasgow, it was compulsory to attend some place of worship on the Sabbath, the observation of the holy day being enforced with peculiar strictness, and none being allowed to show themselves in any public place during the hours of the church services, and to this end inspectors and overseers were employed to patrol the streets on a Sabbath and take down the names of those who might be found loitering there.

But few were the defaulters, Glasgow on a Sunday being as bare as the Arabian desert.

Rob Patterson and I both attended the church in Rutherglen Road, towards the Green and the river.

And the Sunday after I had seen the phantom of Ann Leete, I changed my usual place and seated myself behind this young man.

My intention was to so work on his spirit as to cause him

to make public confession of his crime. And I crouched there behind him with a concentration of hate and fury, forcing my will on his during the whole of the long service.

I noticed he was pale, and that he glanced several times behind him, but he did not change his place or open his lips ; but presently his head fell forward on his arms as if he was praying, and I took him to be in a kind of swoon brought on by the resistance of his spirit against mine.

I did not for this cease to pursue him. I was, indeed, as if in an exaltation, and I thought my soul had his soul by the throat, somewhere above our heads, and was shouting out : " Confess ! Confess ! "

One o'clock struck and he rose with the rest of the congregation, but in a dazed kind of fashion. It was almost side by side that we issued from the church door.

As the stream of people came into the street they were stopped by a little procession that came down the road.

All immediately recognized two of the inspectors employed to search the Sunday streets for defaulters from church attendance, followed by several citizens who appeared to have left their homes in haste and confusion.

These people carried between them a rude bundle which some compassionate hand had covered with a white linen cloth. Below this fell a swathe of dark green silk and the end of a Roman scarf.

I stepped up to the rough bier.

" You have found Ann Leete," I said.

" It is a dead woman," one answered me. " We know not her name."

I did not need to raise the cloth. The congregation was gathering round us, and amongst them was Rob Patterson.

" Tell me, who was her promised husband, how you found her," I said.

And one of the inspectors answered :

“Near here, on the Green, where the wall bounds the grass, we saw, just now, the young surgeon, Rob Patterson, lying on the sward, and put his name in our books, besides approaching him to inquire the reason of his absence from church. But he, without excuse for his offence, rose from the ground, exclaiming: ‘I am a miserable man! Look in the water!’

“With that he crossed a stile that leads to the river and disappeared, and we, going down to the water, found the dead woman, deep tangled between the willows and the weeds——”

“And,” added the other inspector gravely, “tangled in her clothes is a surgeon’s knife.”

“Which,” said the former speaker, “perhaps Dr. Patterson can explain, since I perceive he is among this congregation—he must have found some quick way round to have got here before us.”

Upon this all eyes turned on the surgeon, but more with amaze than reproach.

And he, with a confident air, said:

“It is known to all these good people that I have been in the church the whole of the morning, especially to Eneas Bretton, who sat behind me, and, I dare swear, never took his eyes from me during the whole of the service.”

“Ay, your *body* was there,” I said.

With that he laughed angrily, and mingling with the crowd passed on his way.

You may believe there was a great stir; the theory put abroad was that Ann Leete had been kept a prisoner in a solitary, ruined hut there was by the river, and then, fury or fear, slain by her jailer and cast into the river.

To me all this is black. I only know that she was murdered by Rob Patterson.

He was arrested and tried on the circuit.

He there proved, beyond all cavil, that he had been in the

church from the beginning of the service to the end of it ; his alibi was perfect. But the two inspectors never wavered in their tale of seeing him on the Green, of his self-accusation in his exclamation ; he was very well known to them, and they showed his name written in their books.

He was acquitted by the tribunal of man, but a higher power condemned him.

Shortly after he died by his own hand, which God armed and turned against him.

This mystery, as it was called, was never solved to the public satisfaction, but I know that I sent Rob Patterson's soul out of his body to betray his guilt, and to procure my darling Christian burial.

This was the tale Eneas Bretton, that ancient man, told me, on the old terrace, as he sat opposite the picture of Ann Leete.

"You must think what you will," he concluded. "They will tell you that the shock unsettled my wits, or even that I was always crazed. As they would tell you that I dream when I say that I see Ann Leete now, and babble when I talk of my happiness with her for fifty years."

He smiled faintly ; a deeper glory than that of the autumn sunshine seemed to rest on him.

"Explain it yourself, sir. What was it those inspectors saw on the Green ?"

He slightly raised himself in his chair and peered over my shoulder.

"And what is this," he asked triumphantly, in the voice of a young man, "coming towards us now ?"

I rose ; I looked over my shoulder.

Through the gloom I saw a dark green silk gown, a woman's form, a pale hand beckoning.

My impulse was to fly from the spot, but a happy sigh from my companion reproved my cowardice. I looked at the

ancient man whose whole figure appeared lapped in warm light, and as the apparition of the woman moved into this glow, which seemed too glorious for the fading sunshine, I heard his last breath flow from his body with a glad cry. I had not answered his questions ; I never can.

HELIOTROPE

A RECIPE FROM GRANDFATHER'S DAY BOOK—1860

ALTHOUGH the night was so cold Alicia had a whiff of the perfume of heliotrope as she opened the window.

Just beneath her, in the dark, under the snow was the spot that every year was planted with heliotrope, and had been ever since she was born in the little house—and before that, she believed.

But never before had she experienced this delusion of the perfume of the frail flower in winter.

She did not know what had made her open the window this stormy weather; she had risen out of bed suddenly, half dreaming, with the impression that someone was calling her, that someone was wanting, insistently, to be admitted.

But she had gone, not to the door, but to the window, and all she had admitted was this ghost of a perfume.

She pulled down the window with a snap, but the odour of heliotrope had entered her small homely bedchamber; it was unmistakably in the room, a definite presence.

Alicia crept into bed, fully awake now and thrilled with excitement.

The patch of heliotrope beneath her window was connected with the only romance that had ever coloured her quiet, pleasant, monotonous life, and this was a romance of sixty years ago that she had only heard in scraps, half as legend, half as truth, and altogether as something to be hushed up.

Alicia shivered down under the warm blankets, yet the perfume was so strong, so strong. Why, never in summer when

she had been standing over the flowers in full bloom had she felt the sweet, dusty scent so poignantly.

In the morning she would tell Mary ; but Mary would not believe ; Mary was so fond of saying things were " nonsense," and had always been for neglecting the bed of heliotrope altogether.

" Why should we have those expensive hot-house flowers every year ? " she had said often enough. " Marigolds would make a better show at half the price."

But Alicia, though by far the weaker of the two sisters, had always insisted on the heliotrope and tended it every year with meticulous care.

It was because of her grandfather that the heliotrope had first been planted there ; he had been a dandy, a foreigner with a title, a being altogether fantastic even to Alicia and to Mary quite incredible.

Seventy years ago he had come to this little house in this little English town and married the daughter of the doctor, and then gone away, and after that the story was confused and rather dreadful, like an evil dream.

For it was whispered that the marriage was no marriage at all, and the foreigner never came back, and their child Mary, the mother of Alicia and Mary, took her mother's name until her marriage, when the whole story was hushed over and forgotten.

The old doctor had left the little house to his grandchild Mary whose husband inherited his practice, so three generations of women of the one family had lived there—Alicia who married the foreigner dandy but never left her father's house, Mary her daughter who married her grandfather's assistant, and their children, also named Alicia and Mary, now for some years orphaned, who had inherited the house, a nice little income, and the bed of heliotrope.

The first heliotrope had been planted for their foreign grandfather ; he used that scent, the whisper went, and she, the first

Alicia, had worn a gown of that artificial hue, book muslin with many tiny frills, when they had first met.

Alicia the second often dwelt lovingly and secretly on this romance ; she had early sensed that it was something she must not speak about, that there was even a shade of shame or disgrace attached to it, and there were no relics of the foreigner with which to feed her imagination (though the little house held much that had belonged to Alicia the first) but this could not prevent her hoarded interest in the fragmentary story.

“Your father has a castle and estates and a title, and some day you may inherit them,” Alicia the first had whispered to her daughter, “but always keep the heliotrope growing——”

“There is some sad old story attached, poor mother would never explain,” this Mary had whispered in turn to her daughter, “but keep the heliotrope, for mother’s sake——”

And now there was the perfume of heliotrope in winter, near Christmas-time, permeating the cold dark.

Alicia counted over the sparse facts of the ancient story and tried to picture what this man was like and why he had gone away and where all the trouble was.

The perfume grew fainter, receded and appeared to die away in a gentle whisper of air that was like a human sigh.

In the morning, over the comfortable breakfast table, Alicia attacked Mary with a boldness that surprised herself.

“Mary, do you know anything at all about grandfather ? We are middle-aged women now, and I don’t think these things should be made such a mystery of——”

“Well,” replied Mary, “why should you think I know more than you do ? And what,” she added comfortably, “is the use of raking over these old tales ?—I know you and your heliotrope.” She smiled. “You’re a sentimentalist !”

Mary looked so shrewd and practical, albeit so kind and cosy, with her round face and glittering glasses and her nice grey hair waved back from her chubby cheeks, that Alicia decided not to tell her of the delusion of perfume in the night.

Besides, in the firelit room, with the snow drifting heavily against the pane, the whole thing did seem, even to Alicia, just a dream.

"I'm only curious," she answered. "It is a little strange to think one had a foreign grandfather; one may be like him for all one knows."

"I dare say you are," assented Mary placidly; and certainly Alicia, thin, dark and plain, with a very distinguished air quite unwarranted by her attainments and position, was not the ordinary English country type; "but he was a bad man, and I don't see the need of bothering about him."

"That sounds so old-fashioned, calling him 'bad,'" protested Alicia, "just because he ran away from grandmother."

"It was worse than that."

"Then you *do* know something about it!"

"A little. Father went over to see him when I was a girl—thirty years ago, perhaps."

"Why wasn't I told?"

"You were a child, Alicia, and it all came to nothing and we didn't talk about it. You know father was always a quiet sort of man; he only went to please mother."

"Do tell me—it was Belgium, wasn't it?"

"Yes—grandmother knew all about him, but of course it was all hushed up——"

"Why?"

"Well, no one knew if they were married or not."

"Were they?"

"I don't know," smiled Mary. "It doesn't matter now."

"But couldn't it be proved?"

"No, that was the trouble. You see it was all a long time ago when it was easier to muddle these things up. Grandmother went to a boarding school at Clapham and he saw her walking on the Common—he had come to London on some diplomatic mission—and when she came home he followed her—and they ran away."

Mary smiled ; she seemed to look at the whole episode from a very matter-of-fact point of view and to be only casually relating the tale to gratify her sister's curiosity.

"And presently she came back and said she was married and a Countess and I don't know what not. I think her parents didn't believe a word of it and kept it all hushed up—then the baby was born and they called grandfather to account a bit, and he admitted the marriage, but there was some difficulty, because of his people, about proclaiming it—the old excuse, of course ; anyhow, there was the baby, and I suppose they had to make the best of it, and things were patched up and he stayed here and spent money on them all, then went away again."

"You know all about it," said Alicia enviously.

"Well, I'm ten years older than you, and always more practical," replied Mary.

"Mother told me about the heliotrope."

"That was more in your line," said the elder sister. "I should never have kept that up— Well, great-grandfather died, and the old Count died, and then grandmother began to try to push her claims—this time she was repudiated altogether, and her husband, as she always called him, married a woman of his own rank——"

"Then there wasn't a marriage at all !" exclaimed Alicia.

"Perhaps the man was a bigamist," smiled Mary. "You never know, do you ? Grandmother tried to prove the marriage, of course, but the clergyman was dead, she couldn't trace the witnesses, and there was no entry in the registry. Of course, it wouldn't have been so difficult for a man with money and position to have bribed away the witnesses and tampered with the registry."

"It sounds rather fantastic," said Alicia, not because she thought so, but to please Mary.

"I suppose a lot of these sort of things used to happen," conceded Mary. "Of course I should never have believed a

word of it, but father really did go out and see the old man—he was old then, thirty years ago——”

“He’s dead now, isn’t he?”

“Oh, yes, he died soon after father’s visit; a dreadful old person he was too.”

Alicia drew her chair nearer the fire.

“I do think I should have been told,” she complained.

“Well, you see, dear, you were always the baby to us, and then when you grew up I really think we forgot all about it—and I never guessed you were interested, *except* in pleasing mother by planting the heliotrope every year——” Mary paused suddenly, and asked:

“Why did you suddenly want to know about it?”

Alicia positively coloured.

“Oh, it was just a dream I had,” she said foolishly.

“A dream of grandfather! After all these years! Well, Alicia, this *is* strange,” remarked Mary, with her rather irritating placidity, and then she was silent and reached for her knitting because the robust maid had come in to clear the breakfast things away, and Alicia had to wait; she stared down at a little hard footstool in Berlin wool cross-stitch, made by Alicia the first, two large red roses tied with blue ribbon on a black ground; it was an ugly thing and really seemed as if it would last for ever; Alicia wondered if her grandmother had made it before or after she had discovered that her lover was a faithless rogue—one would hardly have the patience for such labour after such a blow, surely!

“Father,” Mary continued, as the door finally shut, “was very impressed by the château; it was all fine and stately, he said, not what he had expected. You know how sceptical one is about these foreign Counts and Barons——”

“There really was a title?”

“Yes, Baron Londerzeel it was, and he was quite a personage. Well, father saw him, and asked him to clear up the mystery, and he would neither say no nor yes; all he would

admit was—‘the truth is known only to myself, and anyone else must find it for themselves——’”

“Whatever did he mean by that?”

“The old wretch hated his wife, the Baroness, you see, and he just held that over her head, that there may have been a former marriage which would make her disgraced and ridiculous and disinherit her son—in front of her he told father that there was a certain little box—a long olive-wood box lined with tortoiseshell—in which he had put all the truth concerning his affair with grandmamma, and this box he had hidden somewhere in the castle.”

“Why?”

“Just to keep his wife hunting for it, of course—— ‘If there is a marriage certificate it is in that box,’ he said, ‘and if Madame here finds it, she can destroy it; if anyone else finds it no doubt they will sell it to you.’ Of course, father told him what he thought of him and came home.”

“I suppose there *wasn't* such a certificate?” suggested Alicia timidly.

“Not very likely. Nor such a box. Father thought he was a little touched. Anyhow we had no money to fight the case.”

“I suppose we should be the heirs if it had been a proper marriage?”

“Of course. And wealthy people. A couple of Belgian baronesses, Alicia.”

“I should,” remarked the younger sister, “have *liked* it.”

“My dear!” Mary’s laugh was hearty. “You seem to be taking the whole thing seriously! The old man was just torturing his wife, and she, father said, was a terror, too. Fancy, he had his portrait painted holding this box with ‘*Mon secret*’ on the lid, and she was to keep it in her bedroom always, under pain of losing all he left her.”

“What happened to her?”

“Why, I don’t know. I believe she is still alive—her son and grandson died, I know, but she still lives shut up in

Château Londerzeel, I believe, about a hundred, hunting for that certificate !”

And Mary’s hearty laugh rang out again as if what she had related was really very comical.

But Alicia said nothing.

This story impressed her differently from the way it had impressed either her father or Mary, people of good sound robust common sense and no nerves or imagination, the type that miss such a great deal in life.

To Alicia the whole thing was rather awful ; she almost wished that she had not heard the tale—told by Mary, to whom it never seemed to occur that, marriage or no marriage, this old man was their own kin.

Of course, as Mary had so definitely stated, he was an old wretch and an old monster ; but then he certainly had not always been old, and perhaps not always a wretch and a monster. There certainly must have been something attractive about him or grandmamma would not have been so loyal to him, as she had been to the last.

“ Some day he will put it all right.” That was her constant saying, handed down secretly to Alicia the second.

“ Of course,” continued Mary after a pause, when she had given her whole attention to a difficult passage in her knitting, “ I think, though it was never very clearly stated to me, that grandfather made us very comfortable—there was always plenty of money after his coming, and you know we are really much better off than we should have been out of father’s savings.”

“ He bought the family off, I suppose,” said Alicia, disgusted.

“ I shouldn’t put it like that,” answered Mary. “ I should say that whatever he did it was only his duty, and of course I don’t know for certain, but I think there was a good sum of money invested for grandmamma.”

“ It is all rather queer,” sighed Alicia. “ I wish it had all been cleared up—I wouldn’t have taken money to keep quiet.”

“ We were always careful, prudent people,” smiled Mary,

“and never the kind to make a sensation when things could be arranged comfortably and quietly. We were very poor, you know, and no lawyer would have taken the case; why, it would have looked almost like blackmail!”

Alicia was silent again, oppressed by resentment; it was so stupid of Mary to have kept quiet about this so long!

Why, they had even taken two little holidays in Belgium and there had never been any suggestion that they should go and see even the outside of grandfather's castle; she had ventured to suggest this, and Mary had said that it was right off the beaten track, hardly safe travelling for two women alone.

Overcome by the remembrance of this grievance she spoke at length:

“I think we ought to have gone to Londerzeel when we were in Belgium.”

“To be thrown out by the old Baroness?” asked Mary.

Alicia gave her a queer look.

“I can't understand that you don't want to *see* the place, Mary.”

“What is the use? I've got a picture of it if you would like that.”

And Mary rose and unlocked the drawer in the tiny desk at her elbow where she kept the housekeeping accounts, and took out a little book and an old cheap lithograph.

Alicia gazed at this eagerly; it showed a castle on a rock, surrounded by trees with a winding river in the valley at the bottom, and in the distance a sunny landscape.

A flag waved above the topmost turret, and over the handsome entrance a coat of arms was indicated.

The place had a sombre and romantic look, far removed from reality.

“It was before the days of photographs,” said Mary, “but father bought this—and here he wrote down all that passed at his interview with grandfather, with the dates and everything.”

Alicia was staring at the print.

“Fancy that old woman still living there searching for that box! However old must she be?”

“I don’t know; she was very much younger than her husband, but I expect she is old enough—as for the box, of course, she has forgotten *that* long ago!”

And Mary hurried away, after a guilty glance at the clock, for she was a very busy person with her housekeeping and her charities.

But Alicia never had very much to do; she painted a little, sang a little, read a great deal, and was rather dreamy and idle.

She had never really meant to stay so long in the tiny house in the tiny town, but she lacked energy and concentration; first she had stayed because father would miss her, then because mother couldn’t be left, and now that both these excuses were in the tranquil churchyard because Mary made one so comfortable.

She read through the notes made by her father on the occasion of his visit to Londerzeel; the prosaic, conscientious man had put nothing down but dry facts and the dryer comment that he considered the old Baron “an unpleasant lunatic.”

Alicia sighed, put away the note-book and the print and went upstairs and took out of a small bookcase on the top landing one of a row of disused books; a small guide to Belgium.

She had read over, often enough, the short paragraph devoted to the historic château of Londerzeel, but now she looked at the map and compared distances, measuring off the scale with the edge of her handkerchief.

Why, Londerzeel wasn’t so far from Brussels after all! Only a little off the main line.

She played with the thought that it would be quite easy to get there.

And there was no reason at all why she shouldn’t go—except that she was afraid of Mary; that was the worst of being weak and timid, you were always doing what other people liked, not what you really wanted to.

All that day Alicia, employed in dressing dolls for the church-room festival, was absent and melancholy.

Mary, of course, with so much on her hands for Christmas, never said anything more about grandfather and certainly had quite forgotten him ; indeed, any sensible person would have agreed that there was no use in remembering him ; but Alicia simply couldn't help herself.

She felt an extraordinary and quite unwarrantable sympathy with this relative she had never seen, as if, supposing they had met, they would quite well have understood each other.

"I am sure," thought Alicia, "that he would have done something for me, that he always wanted to do something for me. I dare say I *am* like him, as I'm so different from the others."

She took the print of Londerzeel up to her room and put it away among her few treasures.

And that night again in the cold and dark she smelt the heliotrope.

Yes, wide-eyed, sitting up in bed, Alicia smelt the perfume without any possibility of a mistake.

The room was full of it ; without even the opening of the window it had surrounded her, poignant, pungent, faintly sweet with the curious dusty odour.

"Yes, what is it ?" asked Alicia, as if she addressed a ghost.

And indeed, what was it but a ghost, the ghost of a perfume ?

Alicia held herself expectant for a second, as if she really hoped for an answer, and, when the scent receded, she went to the window and opened it despite her shivering, and stared into the blank, bleak blackness.

How foolish Mary would find her behaviour ! This was even more fantastic than a dream ; Mary would begin to think, if she knew of these two incidents, that grandfather Londerzeel had really been insane and that Alicia had inherited this insanity.

Of course it was all a delusion ; Alicia applied the soporific

of this useful word to herself without knowing what it meant or considering what is delusion and what is not.

She returned to bed and lay awake and excited thinking of the Château Londerzeel as she had seen it in the lithograph.

She thought of the story of the box with the possible marriage certificate hidden somewhere in that romantic old castle, and it seemed to her unfair that she should not have been allowed to look for it also.

It was not right that the sole chance of this discovery should have been given to the old Baroness; why, supposing there *really had been* such a paper and this woman had found it, of course she would have destroyed it, and she, Mary and herself, would have been defrauded of their rights.

Alicia became restless at the thought.

Timid and irresolute as she was she longed to face the ancient châtelaine of Londerzeel and demand from her an account of her search.

"She is so old now, I think that she would be frightened and tell me."

To Alicia, tired and agitated after a bad night, came salvation in the shape of a letter which lay on the modest pile by her breakfast plate.

An invitation from Minnie Towers to "spend Christmas" with her. . . . At first Alicia was for at once refusing; but it occurred to her, with startling force, that the Towers lived near the coast; how easy to pretend to go there and really to slip over to Belgium!

Alicia, flushed with the sense of adventure, entered on the first deceit of her life.

She wrote to Minnie, declining the invitation, and she told Mary that she was accepting. The news was taken with placid good humour, for Mary liked Alicia to have what she called "a change" as often as possible, and was herself so much in request at Christmas that she would never feel lonely.

Alicia packed a small valise, drew a comfortable sum of

money out of the local bank, took a ticket for the village where Minnie Towers lived, and when she reached that station, got out and changed into another train that took her to Dover.

From there she wrote an abject letter of excuses to Mary, but not before she had her ticket for Brussels in her pocket.

To go abroad alone was in itself a thrill for Alicia Gates. All her former little trips had been carefully shepherded by Mary, and now she felt not only forlorn but rather foolish.

There were very few people on the boat, and the Belgian coast looked dun and sombre rising from the dark stillness of the winter sea; it was cold, windless and threatening snow.

When Alicia found herself in the train for Brussels, she felt extremely depressed.

And worse than depressed, silly.

Nothing is more irritating and difficult than justifying some unaccountable impulse of the dark to one's sane daylight self—especially when one has acted on such an impulse!

Alicia, reviewing her action, saw it as merely childish.

To come to Belgium, in the winter, alone, just on the chance of a peep at grandfather Londerzeel's castle!

How impossible that would be to explain; Mary would think she was quite irresponsible, and then the waste of money and the deception about Minnie Towers!

And worst of all the pleasant time missed; it was nearly Christmas, and there were all sorts of friendly, comfortable things happening at home that as a rule Alicia thoroughly enjoyed; and instead of being at home, or the guest of the Towers in their nice, wealthy establishment where everything was done with such good will and so much money, she was in this stuffy foreign train going on a really crazy errand.

Well, there was just time to get back before Christmas Day; she would buy Mary a handsome present in Brussels and go straight home.

When she reached this point in her reflections Alicia felt

easier in her mind and settled herself more comfortably in her seat.

And, as she changed her position, she was aware of someone standing in the corridor outside the open door of her compartment.

Alicia felt the little fearful thrill of the lonely inexperienced female in discovering that this was a man and that he was looking at her intently.

Then this stupid awkwardness vanished when she saw the friendly way in which the stranger regarded her; he wore an uncommon kind of light cloak thrown over his shoulder and a stiff military cap; an officer in full equipment, evidently.

"Can I assist you?" he asked in good English, and, saluting, came into the carriage.

His appearance was very attractive, and Alicia felt pleased that he had noticed her and spoken to her with such kindness and respect.

"That is very nice of you," she said, blushing a little, and on a quick nervous impulse she took him into her confidence. "I'm trying to find a little place called Londerzeel; I don't know quite how to get there. I suppose you have never heard of it?"

The young man had now seated himself opposite to Alicia; his cloak had fallen back from the silver clasps and she saw his uniform, very fantastic and ornate, with gold cords and two rows of medals; it was obvious that he came from some important function.

"Oh, I know Londerzeel quite well," he answered, "and I can tell you how to get there."

"I was going to Brussels——"

"You must not go to Brussels at all. I will show you where you change; it is quite near and you might be there late to-night——"

"I don't think that would be very convenient," explained Alicia, "as I don't know where to stay—and I've engaged a

room in Brussels in the hotel where my sister and I stayed before."

"But isn't the Baroness expecting you?" asked the officer.

"No, indeed. Whatever should make you think so? Do you know the Baroness?" asked Alicia, startled.

"Yes, very will indeed. I often visit the Château Londerzeel, and I understood that she was expecting an English lady—for some time."

"It is not I," said Alicia, "and I certainly don't wish to call on the Baroness——"

She felt a curious flutter of trepidation at getting so nearly in touch with the object of her journey, and she looked eagerly at the young man whose profile was now towards her as he gazed out into the corridor of the train.

His face was familiar, but she could not tell if she had ever actually seen it before; he had rather an effeminate appearance, his features were small and his complexion had a fine polished look, unusual in a man.

"The name of the lady the Baroness expects is Miss Alicia Gates," he said, and Alicia crouched in her seat with a sense of shock, "and this is where we get out, please."

The train had stopped, and the young man handed Alicia out on to a cold, bleak platform ill lit.

"My valise is left behind," murmured Alicia, but her companion did not seem to hear.

"I think you must make haste to the Château Londerzeel," he said, "as the Baroness cannot wait much longer."

It was snowing; Alicia felt the big soft flakes falling against her face in the darkness and she was speedily almost numbed by cold; a porter asked her for her ticket, and when she produced it told her that it was for Brussels and muttered after her when she pushed past him, which she did in a sudden nervous fright, for she had lost sight of her companion.

Just outside the station, under the light of the solitary lamp, she saw him again.

But with him was a carriage and pair ; the lamps on the front cast uncertain rays into the snow and the horses were walking up and down impatiently.

“ It is as I thought,” said the officer, opening the brougham door. “ Madame has sent for you——”

Alicia could see a coat of arms on the gleaming varnish of the panel, the same coat that she had seen on the gateway of Londerzeel in the old lithograph.

“ Please step in,” he insisted.

Alicia obeyed ; she was bewildered and eager to get out of the pelt of the snow and the bite of the winter air.

“ It begins to snow,” added the young man, “ but you will get there before the storm is impossible——”

Alicia looked out of the window ; the yellow light of the carriage candles cast a blurr round his figure, giving it a rim or glow of illumination against the darkness, like an uncertain halo.

He pulled out his handkerchief and pressed the scrap of linen to his mouth with an affected gesture.

To Alicia’s nostrils came a whiff of heliotrope.

“ Why,” she quivered, “ you use heliotrope perfume——”

And then she checked herself. It was likely enough a favourite perfume in this country, or in any country, for all she knew ; men who used perfume at all had never come the way of Alicia.

The officer saluted and slightly bowed ; Alicia saw his face for a second clearly outlined with what seemed an unnatural lucidity.

And she thought :

“ That is a wicked face—or the face of someone who could do wicked things.”

The carriage moved on briskly, and Alicia, drowsy in her corner, was casting over, in broken reasonings, in her mind how it was that the Baroness Londerzeel could possibly be expecting her. Had she for years lived in terror of a visit from her husband’s grandchild set on claiming her rights ?

That was an added misery to the dreadful life of the recluse shut up with her fanatic search for the olive-wood box, but then, how could she have known that Alicia would come to-night, been sure enough to send the carriage ?

And who was the young man who knew it all so well—this queer old story ?

The carriage stopped and the door was opened ; Alicia saw a flight of steps and an imposing doorway faintly lit by a massive lamp ; the groom had rung the iron chain bell and the door was quickly opened. Alicia shivered up the steps.

“ Are you the English lady Madame la Baronne expects ? ” asked the pale manservant.

“ I’m Alicia Gates——”

“ That is the name. Madame has expected you for years, the carriage has been sent to meet Mademoiselle every time the English train came through Londerzeel.” The man was looking at Alicia with respectful curiosity, as if amazed that the expected visitor had really come at last.

“ You really are Miss Alicia Gates ? ” he asked again, as she followed him down the long tapestried hall.

“ Yes, I am. But I never told the Baroness I was coming——”

“ It is strange,” commented the manservant. He paused outside a great door solidly carved with trophies. “ The Brussels express doesn’t stop at Londerzeel.”

“ But you say that your mistress has always expected me by this train ? ”

“ Ah, but Madame la Baronne has, for years, been—peculiar.”

He uttered the last word in a low, meaning tone, as if he meant it as a warning, and opened the big door, announcing :

“ Miss Alicia Gates, Madame la Baronne.”

Alicia entered.

The room was very splendid ; the sinking firelight glowed on painted ceiling, tapestried walls, rich screens and heavy dark

furniture, and the figure of an old woman in a green velvet hooded chair.

She was dressed in dove-coloured brocade and folds of thick yellow lace, and her frail cap of blonde glittered evilly with diamonds.

"I knew you would come to-night, Alicia," she said, "that is why I asked them to stop the express—a visitor to Londerzeel, I said, at last."

Her voice whistled from her toothless mouth, and she turned on Alicia such blank eyes so filmed by age that it seemed impossible that she could see.

"Now which Alicia is it, after all?" she added, and her voice took on a whining note. "I suppose *he* sent you here?"

Alicia supposed she referred to the young officer and found some command of herself.

"There was a young officer on the train who told me the way and helped me——"

"Ah, that was *he*—he has been here a great deal lately. Now, come close, child."

Alicia crept up to the hooded chair from which the Baroness poked her trembling head.

"You are too late, Alicia Gates. I've *found it*—it has taken me forty years, but I've found it!"

Excitement passed like a flame between them.

"The certificate!" whispered Alicia, "there was a certificate!"

"There was, and other papers proving his first marriage—the *sale bête*, but I've found them, and you've come too late except to see me burn them——"

And Alicia saw that her crooked fingers did clutch a roll of ancient papers.

"He always lied and cheated and tricked," she continued fiercely. "You never could tell when he was fooling you—but I've got them. I've got them!"

Alicia stood rigid; as if by magic, indeed, *by magic*, she was

almost in possession of the coveted treasure. She looked at the wretched old woman and thought that she herself was really Baroness Londerzeel and owner of this house and everything in it ; she controlled herself to guile.

“ Of course you must destroy the papers as you have found them, mustn't you—that was the bargain, wasn't it ? And I have come just in time to see you burn them, which I am sure will make it more pleasant for you.”

“ Of course, of course.” The old woman nodded and grimaced. “ It is some days since I found them, but I've been keeping them for your coming——”

“ How was it that you were so sure of my coming ? ” asked Alicia.

A look of cunning passed over the senile face that was not without indications of once having been graceful and noble.

“ There were his last words to me—he was continually saying them, and these were his last words—‘ Victorine, one of these days one of my English grandchildren will come here for their inheritance—watch ’—and I've been watching—ever since, watching and searching, for forty years.”

She spoke faintly, almost indifferently, and the hand that clutched the papers shook violently.

Alicia watched these papers ; a great greed possessed her, something within her that had laid dormant all her life was now dominant ; she was no longer timid, or shy, or hesitant ; she drew in her lips and her eyes glittered over the rich appointments of the handsome room.

The Baroness seemed to see or sense this glance, for she murmured :

“ Ah, there isn't a corner I haven't searched, not a stone I haven't had out—not a picture or an ornament that hasn't been moved. I've been shut up here, doing nothing else, for forty years.”

“ The whole of my life,” thought Alicia, “ and I've been conscious of it all that time, that is what has been the matter

with me. I've known that this was going on, and I've wanted to join in."

She saw, on a corner table, a pencil drawing in an ivory frame, a likeness of the young officer she had met in the train.

"Who is that?" she asked quickly, "the likeness—the only likeness in the room?"

"Oh, that is the next Londerzeel, my great-nephew," grinned the old lady. "He very much resembles my husband and he uses heliotrope perfume."

"Does he know that you have been expecting me?"

"He knows all about everything, of course. He is always round here, he is watching and waiting, too, of course—for me to die before his creditors get him."

"He isn't the heir now," said Alicia; and she knew, fearfully, that the young man would come up to the castle to-night, was probably in the castle now, watching, waiting, as all three had watched and waited so long; and she wanted to get the papers and be away quickly, before he found her; yes, even wildly away into the snow and cold.

"Where did you find the papers?" she asked, her voice flat with excitement. "You can tell me that—just to prove to me how clever you are."

The ancient Baroness unexpectedly rose, with a creeping movement, out of the hooded chair, and leaning on a stick hobbled across the room, trailing with difficulty her grotesque brocades. She passed behind a gilt screen, and Alicia followed her, desperately swift; before them was a door.

"Open it," said the Baroness.

Alicia obeyed and they stepped into a sleeping apartment, where a few lights lit in the crystal candelabra cast gleams from the lustres and showed the splendour of the beautiful room.

Above the bed was a sweeping drapery of purple satin, fluted into a gilt coronet of Empire design, and in the embrasure made by this curtain hung a portrait which appeared to Alicia

to be that of the young man whom she had met in the train, but which she knew to be that of grandfather Londerzeel.

Yes, it was very like the officer who had sat opposite to her in the swaying carriage and wore the same uniform and medals, only looked older and infinitely more wicked. This was, Alicia thought, really a dreadful face, mean, crafty, treacherous, despite the smooth effeminate good looks—and the dashing, showy equipment of such fashion-plate glossy correctness.

The picture was mutilated.

Part of the right hand and an oblong of canvas near had been cut away, revealing a dark hole.

The old woman came to the bed and stood blinking up, with her filmed, blank eyes, at this picture.

“That is where the old rogue had hidden them—in the picture itself—liar and cheat! there in the picture—the painted box with ‘*Mon secret*’ was a real box, a false back to the picture, you see, so I’ve had it over my head all these years——”

“But you found it at last,” said Alicia, trembling.

“Yes, I thought of it at last. I had the picture taken down——”

“It was cleverly done,” whispered Alicia.

“Yes. He was clever—but I’m clever too—and now I’m going to burn the certificate——”

Alicia’s hand came down strongly on the trembling wrist.

“No, you’re not—you’re going to give them to me—they are mine, you know, really mine.”

An expression of terror overspread the old woman’s face; she struggled, and Alicia’s free hand grasped her by the shoulder and shook her to and fro gently, so that they swayed together.

“Give them up—give them up——”

There was a horrible wrestle lasting a second, then the Baroness slipped to the bedstep and groaned; Alicia knew that she was dead and did not care; she drew the papers from the twitching fingers and spread them out.

Two were blank ; the third contained a recipe for making heliotrope perfume.

Someone laughed ; Alicia thought it was grandfather Londerzeel ; then she thought that it was the sound of grinding brakes. She sat up, stiff, cold, frightened, bewildered as the train drew into the murk of Brussels station.

Afterwards when she confessed to Mary that practical woman remarked :

“ Fancy going all that way to have a nightmare ! ”

Then, humouring her sister's silliness and disappointment, she added : “ But there may be something in it, of course. I've had a recipe for heliotrope perfume for years—among those old papers in the attic, and it was always supposed to come from grandfather's day-book——”

A FAMILY COMEDY

A DAGUERREOTYPE GROUP—1840

Applications regarding Amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, London, W.C. 2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York, U.S.A. This one-act comedy was first produced at The Coliseum, London, on March 17th, 1930. Also it was produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation on three occasions in 1931.

† To convey the correct atmosphere and character of this comedy, it is suggested that the Curtain goes up showing a black backcloth, with the complete characters posed as an old portrait of a stiff family group, 1840. The whole effect should be formal and severe, relieved by the colouring of the costumes. The strains of "Home, Sweet Home" played from the front as the Curtain goes up and descends slowly. The Curtain to ascend again as quickly as possible on to the Comedy proper. (See also end of Play.)

The Comedy can, of course, open without this.

MR. JOHN PORTER (a Tea Merchant).

MRS. JOHN PORTER (his Wife).

MISS EMILY PORTER (his Sister).

MR. HENRY PORTER (his Son).

MISS MATILDA PORTER (his elder Daughter).

MISS MARIA PORTER (his younger Daughter).

MISS SARAH SPEED (his Son's Fiancée).

SCENE.—Islington.

PERIOD.—1840.

SCENE.—*A Parlour in MR. PORTER'S House in Islington. Early morning. Spring. Window stage c. backing showing railings and trees beyond : a door R. and a door up L. : a round mahogany table with a wool mat and a group of wax fruit under a glass case in the middle : down L. a fireplace with mirror above and screen in front, a chair either side : above the door R. a heavy sideboard : on walls some dark oil paintings.*

(See ground plan of scene.)

(MRS. PORTER is seated at L. of the table c. turning over the pages of a large Bible with one hand and holding a handkerchief to her eyes with the other : she is a comely woman of not much more than 40, but her lace matron's cap, her dark dress, cashmere shawl, braided hair, etc., make her appear twenty years older. She has been crying violently and is still sniffing : she turns over the Book for consolation and reads between her sobs.)

MRS. PORTER. "The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, who shall know it?" True, how true! *(Wiping her eyes.)*

(MR. PORTER enters from the door R.—a big, vigorous man of 45 or so, in precise morning attire. Agitation shows beneath a manner which has been so correct for so many years as to become mechanical, and emotion tinges but does not disturb a lifelong air of undisturbed authority : he is whiskered, dominant, prosperous and God-fearing.)

MR. PORTER *(approaching R. of the table c.)*. Tears, my

dear, tears? (MRS. PORTER *sobs louder.*) I hardly expected this—I observed that Henry left the house just now—violently. (*A short pause: MRS. PORTER buries her face in her handkerchief.*) You have been harsh with him.

MRS. PORTER (*reproachfully*). You were harsh with him, last night—harsh indeed!

MR. PORTER. I exercised authority. I performed my duty. I expressed pain, surprise, displeasure.

MRS. PORTER (*the same*). And when I endeavoured to restrain you, you begged me not to meddle with matters beyond the judgment of a female!

MR. PORTER. Precisely. And you have disobeyed me, Clara. I have thought the matter over and have decided to forgive Henry—but when I look for the lad I find him driven from the house by your unwomanly reproaches.

MRS. PORTER (*aghast*). John! Unwomanly! Please listen——

MR. PORTER (*interrupting*). I refuse to listen. (*Walking up c. and down again.*) I feared this, you are always so unreasonable, Clara, last night you took his part, this morning you must open up the affair again.

MRS. PORTER. Open it up! Henry came to me——

MR. PORTER (*interrupting*). Of course, for consolation, for motherly tenderness, for feminine sympathy—he was agitated, naturally.

MRS. PORTER. Yes, by *your* reproaches, John; after all, if you may express your feelings, I suppose I may?

MR. PORTER. Certainly not. I am surprised, Clara, surprised. This is not the first time I have looked for sweetness, kindness, smiling patience in you. And failed to find it, Clara, failed to find it.

MRS. PORTER (*rising*). Please listen——

MR. PORTER (*with dignity*). No. I have refused to listen.

MRS. PORTER (*angrily*). You usually do. Indeed I cannot remember when you *have* listened to me, except when I was saying something wholly agreeable to you.

MR. PORTER. Ah! Accusing me of injustice, I suppose?

MRS. PORTER. *And* unreasonableness. Last night you were for turning Henry out of the house.

MR. PORTER (*inflamed*). Do you call that unreasonable? When a man of my principles finds his only son has been drinking, gambling, and engaging in a clandestine love affair.

MRS. PORTER (*with dignity*). I beg of you, John, *not* to use these coarse expressions before me. Henry had *only* had two glasses of port and lost fifteen shillings at dominoes.

MR. PORTER (*angrily*). And secretly betrothed himself to his tailor's daughter—that's nothing, I suppose?

MRS. PORTER. You see, you are losing your temper again about it—and yet *I* was not to say a word. Henry is *my* child, too. (*With handkerchief to her eyes.*) *I* have *my* feelings, I suppose.

MR. PORTER (*trying to control himself*). It was *my* affair. Father and son. Perhaps I went a little too far last night. I don't pretend to be perfect.

MRS. PORTER (*weeping*). How can you say that! You always have!

MR. PORTER (*still trying to control himself*). Not at all. I try to be reasonable. The boy did wrong, I—there was a regrettable scene, but he confessed. I've thought it over. I intend clemency, Clara, clemency. After all, I can recall my own youth.

MRS. PORTER (*looking up from handkerchief*). Oh, John! And I've always held you up as such an example to the children!

MR. PORTER (*exasperated*). So I am, so I am—it is quite

impossible to discuss these things with a female. That is what I complain of, Clara—your interference.

MRS. PORTER. Interference! With my own children! The Bible says— (*Majestically laying her hand on the Book.*)

MR. PORTER (*losing control and turning away*). The Bible is for Sunday—it's not real life.

MRS. PORTER (*aghast*). John! Oh!

MR. PORTER (*returning to table*). Well, not *English* life—you're continually telling me things out of the Bible to put me in the wrong, but there is a good deal there you wouldn't care for me to act on.

MRS. PORTER (*sobbing*). If you are going to blaspheme—what do you know of the Book? You always sleep in church—except for the hymns.

MR. PORTER. Exactly. A day of rest. I wish *you* slept in church, Clara, instead of listening to all you hear there and bringing it on into the week, which it was never meant for.

MRS. PORTER (*still sobbing*). Look where your inattention has brought you—if you hadn't slept through so many sermons you would not be behaving so *disgracefully* now.

MR. PORTER. You exasperate, Clara—you'll drive *me* out of the house as well as poor Henry. ("*The Turkish Patrol*" is heard on the piano from the next room.) Isn't it very early for Maria to begin her practice?

MRS. PORTER (*still half-weeping*). It is not. It is *you* who are late. Is it possible you are not going to the office?

MR. PORTER. It is. I am not. I remained at home to settle this unfortunate business with Henry—if you would have had the goodness to mind your affairs, my dear, all would have been amiably settled by now.

MRS. PORTER (*bridling*). Indeed. And how, pray? Do you mean after what you said last night, you were going to overlook Henry's conduct?

MR. PORTER (*pompously*). I do. The boy is a good boy—he took a glass or two last night merely to give himself courage to face me.

MRS. PORTER. He needed it—your display of temper——

MR. PORTER (*in his most pompous manner*). Clara, be silent. I say I had decided to tell Henry he was forgiven—even to inform him that Miss Speed—I confess I was shocked, but, on reflection——

MRS. PORTER. After what you said about clandestine love affairs!

MR. PORTER. Let us be calm. The boy told me. He confessed very candidly.

MRS. PORTER (*with tearful pride*). I always trained him to be truthful.

MR. PORTER (*sharply*). A pity you didn't train him to be temperate and prudent.

MRS. PORTER. There! You say something different every time you speak.

MR. PORTER. You don't expect me to say the same thing over and over again, Clara? You confuse me, you positively confuse me. (*With an effort.*) Speed is in a fair way of business, my own father was a clothier.

MRS. PORTER. Yes, remind me, Mr. Porter, of your obvious lack of gentility which I for twenty-five years of marriage have tried to forget.

MR. PORTER. And what do you suppose I have tried to forget? But you shan't provoke me. Sarah Speed is a modest, pleasant girl any woman might be proud of—(“*The Turkish Patrol*” *thumps more loudly.*) Need Maria continually play that piece?

MRS. PORTER. Continually, Mr. Porter, continually. She is to perform it at Miss Magnet's Academy on the fifteenth.

MR. PORTER. But I want to keep my head clear—I can't

think while that—er—music—is going on. Pray, Clara, tell the child to cease.

MRS. PORTER (*hysterically*). No, indeed. I may be an unnatural mother, I may have turned my only son out of the house, I may be unwomanly—but I will *not* interrupt Maria's education because you have no ear for harmony!

MR. PORTER. So you exult in your atrocious conduct—you did turn the boy out of the house——

MRS. PORTER (*not heeding*). As if I hadn't noticed how you leave the room when I bring out my harp—you've no soul, no sentiment.

MR. PORTER (*shouting, as "The Turkish Patrol" stumbles along again*). Are you to tell her to stop, or shall I?

(MRS. PORTER *sails to door up L. and opens it. Music louder.*)

MRS. PORTER (*with false calm*). Maria! Mar—ia!

MARIA (*off, falsetto*). Yes, Mamma!

MRS. PORTER (*with acid sweetness*). Maria, my dear, please cease your practice, it disturbs your dear papa.

MARIA (*off*). Certainly, dear Mamma!

(*The music ceases.*)

(MRS. PORTER *closes door and returns to table, c.* MR. PORTER *has made a brave effort to compose himself.*)

MR. PORTER (*pompously*). If I have been hasty I regret it, as I hope, Clara, *you* regret your hastiness with Henry. From a woman, a mother, one expects a melting tenderness, a soft sympathy, an—er—an exquisite sensibility.

MRS. PORTER (*grimly*). Qualities I trust I have never failed in, John.

MR. PORTER (*dryly*). On the contrary, your lack of them, Clara, has led to the present distressing scene.

(*The door R. opens and MISS EMILY PORTER puts in her head.*)

EMILY. Did I hear voices?

MR. PORTER (*further annoyed at her appearance*). I hope, Emily, in my house you will never hear voices. (*Moving up C.*)

(EMILY *enters*. *She is older than her brother and really as redoubtable, but her sex and the period are against her : even with these handicaps she holds her own. The cut of her features is in contradiction to the heavy decorum of her sombre attire. As she advances, MRS. PORTER, who has collapsed at L. of table again, makes an instant attempt to gain her as an ally.*)

MRS. PORTER (*sobbing, with handkerchief at eyes*). Emily, you *did* hear one voice, that of your brother—raised against me !

(EMILY *sweeps across to L. of MRS. PORTER and puts her arm round her, while she glares at MR. PORTER.*)

EMILY. John ! A recurrence of the scene of last night ! Have you no consideration for a mother's heart ?

MR. PORTER (*moving down R. again*). A mother's heart ! Don't talk nonsense—Clara has turned the boy out, abused him, reproached him, exulted in it, flown in my face, defied me.

MRS. PORTER (*rising*). Am I to endure this ?

EMILY. Certainly not—control yourself, John.

MR. PORTER (*raging*). Am I master here, or not ? Is Henry my son or not ? Am I capable of conducting my own affairs or not ?

(*Door up L. opens and MARIA, a lanky girl of 12, puts her head in. EMILY sees her.*)

EMILY (*dramatically*). John ! (*Pointing.*) The child.

(*Rebuked, MR. PORTER subsides into desperate silence.*)

MARIA. Papa, may I play "The Turkish Patrol," now ?

MR. PORTER. Certainly not.

MARIA (*coming to the top of table C. and whimpering*). But, Papa, Miss Magnet said—

MR. PORTER (*exploding*). Miss Magnet be——

MRS. PORTER (*rising hastily*). Retire, my child. Dear Papa is not very well.

MR. PORTER (*holding himself in once more*). Emily, this is between Clara and me—I will not endure any interference. I must decide about Henry, I must impress on Clara——

MRS. PORTER (*with rising hysteria*). Yes, indeed, I am to count for nothing—I, the mistress of his home and the mother of his children.

MR. PORTER (*more fiercely*). Will you allow me to speak?

EMILY (*enjoying herself*). Pray compose yourself, John—this temper is most unbecoming. (*Moving to the fireplace.*)

MR. PORTER. Emily, I have been endeavouring to compose myself for the last half-hour. Pray let us all calm ourselves. Emily, I have decided to overlook Henry's conduct—Sarah Speed is not such an ill choice.

EMILY (*turning, horrified*). After what you said last night!

MRS. PORTER (*triumphantly*). Just so. Now the girl is praised up—put before my own daughters, yes, indeed, Emily, your brother taunted me with that. (*As MR. PORTER makes an effort to break in.*) I will speak! You have abused me, John, accused me of unnatural conduct, told me my girls were a discredit to me, blasphemed the Book—— (*Tapping it.*)

MR. PORTER (*breaking in*). Lies—lies!

MRS. PORTER. You hear, Emily, you hear!

EMILY. I certainly do. (*To her brother.*) Clara had every right to reprove Henry and say what she thought of the Speed miss—entangling the poor boy.

MR. PORTER. She did not! She said she would not receive his addresses without *my* consent!

EMILY. So *Henry* says.

MR. PORTER. So I suppose the boy's a liar, too!

MRS. PORTER. You said he was last night when he tried to say his breath smelt of camomile tea!

MR. PORTER (*waving his hands*). This is paltry, positively paltry. (*Swelling with indignation as he returns to c.*) I will not be dictated to, I have been too complacent, too tender, too sensitive, with the result that I am not able to open my mouth in my own house.

EMILY. Fiddlesticks. I know what Clara has had to put up with.

MRS. PORTER (*clinging to her*). Dear Emily—

MR. PORTER (*disgusted*). Very affectionate, Mrs. Porter, very affectionate! I didn't hear so much of dear Emily when you missed the cherry brandy!

EMILY (*pushing off MRS. PORTER*). Cherry brandy?

MRS. PORTER (*weeping*). Who is being paltry now, Mr. Porter? I never accused Emily.

EMILY. I should hope not, indeed! Cherry brandy! So that was why you were measuring it off with a bit of string every night.

MR. PORTER. Precisely. Her nose was as keen for cherry brandy as mine for camomile tea.

MRS. PORTER. John!

MR. PORTER. You told me you smelt it in her bedroom, and that the *maids* were all above suspicion!

EMILY (*outraged*). I can believe it—I've long known you've spied on me.

MRS. PORTER (*responding with temper*). Well, miss, you *have* got duplicate keys, not many women would allow that.

EMILY. Why have I got duplicate keys, Mrs. Porter? Because you are such an inefficient housekeeper—for twenty-five years I've stood in the background, counteracting your incompetence and extravagance.

MRS. PORTER. For twenty-five years I've endured your

interference, rudeness and uselessness, Miss Porter ! (*Dabbing her eyes.*) I've shared my home with you, knowing you would never have one of your own—and *this* is my reward.

EMILY. You've put on me all the work you didn't want to do yourself—stop crying, do ; you're as strong as a horse, for all you spend half your time snoring on the sofy !

MRS. PORTER (*dramatically*). Mr. Porter, will you stand there and let your sister insult me ?

MR. PORTER (*who has been watching the two women with sardonic enjoyment*). I think you are quite able to take care of yourself, Mrs. Porter. Emily has always made *me* very comfortable.

EMILY (*turning on him*). Yes, that's what's the matter with you, I've spoilt you. I ought to have left you to Clara—that would have prevented you being so swelled up with vain-glory.

MR. PORTER (*majestically*). Do you forget you share my home ?

EMILY (*grimly*). Well, I suppose my two hundred a year has helped, hasn't it ?

MRS. PORTER (*shocked*). How disgusting !

MR. PORTER. What *are* we all saying to each other ?

EMILY (*with relish*). I don't quite know, but I'm sure it's something I've wanted to say for *years*.

(*MARIA puts her head in door L.*)

MARIA (*on a whining note*). Please, Papa, may I continue with "The Turkish Patrol ?"

MR. PORTER (*roaring*). No ! You may not !

MRS. PORTER (*with a shudder*). Brute !

(*MARIA PORTER enters door L. and slams it behind her. Comes down stage C. and bursts into tears, knuckling her eyes. The three adults give suppressed exclamations of intense irritation.*)

MARIA (*howling*). If I don't learn the piece I can't go to

Miss Magnet's party, and if I don't go to the party I can't wear my new tarleton with the pretty cherry sash!

MR. PORTER (*moving up to window and down again, stifling his fury*). Your daughter, Mrs. Porter, vain, disobedient, uncontrolled!

MRS. PORTER (*with false sweetness*). Dear Papa doesn't like your pretty piece, dear Maria; dear Papa (*viciously*) still doesn't feel quite well. (*Going up to MARIA and caressing her.*) My darling girl must be patient.

MR. PORTER (*with suppressed fury*). Dear Papa himself wants all the patience there is in this house. Clara, leave the child. Maria, go to your room.

MARIA (*sobbing on her mother's shoulder*). If I go—go—to—to—my room—may I practise "The Turkish Patrol" on—a—comb?

MR. PORTER (*walking about furiously*). No! No! No!

EMILY. You spoil the child, Clara—she is far too young for Miss Magnet's party—(*howls from MARIA*) and looks hideous in the tarleton—(*louder howls from MARIA*). EMILY glares at her with intense dislike—with that complexion—book muslin—with those elbows—sleeves.

MRS. PORTER (*hysterically*). Since when have you been an authority on dress, Miss Porter? Is an old maid to dictate to me how I shall dress my daughters?

(*MARIA, interested in this, stops howling to listen.*)

MARIA (*moving down between them*). Is Aunt Emily an old maid, dear Mamma?

MRS. PORTER (*turning on her*). You naughty, rude girl, how dare you interrupt?

MR. PORTER (*viciously*). Clara! Before the child!

(*MRS. PORTER pulls herself together: a forced calm descends on them. MARIA sticks her finger in her mouth and looks round from one grim face to another.*)

MARIA. If I can't play "The Turkish Patrol," may I say my little poem?

MR. PORTER (*desperately flinging himself into the chair R. of table*). Certainly, my dear, certainly. Pray let us hear your little poem.

(MARIA *puts her arms by her side and begins to gabble rapidly but distinctly.*)

MARIA.
 The tiny ant works all the day,
 The bee works all the night—
 And if I'd be as good as they,
 I must be different—quite.
 I must not yawn or laze or stare
 As naughty children do.
 Refuse to brush and comb my hair,
 And say what is not true.

MR. PORTER (*interrupting*). Who wrote that?

MRS. PORTER (*scornfully*). I should have thought you would have known John Milton when you heard him.

MARIA. Miss Magnet didn't give us John Milton. After all, dear Mamma, she wrote that herself—she said we could work it in cross-stitch, too.

MR. PORTER (*exasperated*). It's nonsense—about the bee, anyhow. Where did the woman get her natural history from? Bees don't work all night.

MRS. PORTER. Of course they do—I've seen them.

EMILY (*scornfully*). You haven't, you've never left the house after nine for years.

MR. PORTER (*grimly, ignoring the women*). Bees do *not* work all night.

MRS. PORTER (*weeping*). Then they ought to, it might make honey cheaper.

EMILY (*spitefully*). If you were more careful with your

accounts you wouldn't have to worry so over the cost of wholesome food.

MARIA (*piping up*). May I say the rest of my poem?

MRS. PORTER (*sensing opposition*). Decorum, John, decorum—before the child! (*She puts handkerchief to her eyes and sinks into arm-chair above the fireplace L.*)

MR. PORTER (*calm, but fierce*). Proceed with your poem, Maria.

MARIA (*gabbling*).

I'm very proud to think I am
A little English child.
I might have been a foreigner,
Or else a heathen wild.

But God was very good to me,
I thank His Gracious plan
Which set me in my loving home
And made papa—a Christian gentleman.

MR. PORTER (*mollified, smoothing his whiskers*). Very well, my dear, very well. I dare say Miss Magnet has observed the habits of bees more closely than I have.

EMILY (*sitting in the arm-chair below the fireplace, sotto voce*). More closely than she has observed you, at least.

MRS. PORTER. Now run away, Maria.

MARIA. There is a great deal of the poem, dear Mamma—(*exclamations of horror from all*)—but I don't know any more.

EMILY. Then run away and learn it, you lazy girl!

MARIA. Yes, dear Aunt Emily. (*Running to door up L., opening it, and then pausing and looking back.*) When I've finished learning my little poem may I practise "The Turkish Patrol?"

MRS. PORTER (*loudly*). Yes.

(*MARIA exits door L.*)

MR. PORTER (*angry*). Why is the child not at Miss Magnet's ?

MRS. PORTER. Saturday is a holiday, you seem to forget everything.

MR. PORTER (*to both of them*). You are sufficient to make a man forget everything, but I won't be provoked, I am determined not to be provoked—come here.

(EMILY and MRS. PORTER rise and approach the table, where he stands glaring.)

The trouble with females is that one must treat them as human beings—if they could be chained up, or locked up, or turned out—like—like—cats—I'm sure we should get on very well. But this attempt to use reason with creatures who haven't got any—

EMILY (*acid*). I suppose you are founding your opinion of women on Clara ?

MR. PORTER. On every female I have ever met.

MRS. PORTER (*hysterical*). Kicked out ! Kicked out ! Like—like—a cat !

MR. PORTER. I did *not* say *kicked*.

MRS. PORTER (*ignoring him*). Kicked ! Such an indelicate expression !

MR. PORTER. As far as that goes you contrived to kick out Henry.

MRS. PORTER. John ! Kicked ! How can a gentlewoman kick ?

EMILY (*looking at her skirts*). I've often wondered. But what a marvellous feeling it must be—a good kick ! Ah ! La !
(*She lifts her skirt and careering round gives a good kick at the chair L. by fire.*)

MR. PORTER (*really shocked*). Emily ! Emily !

MRS. PORTER (*in hysterics*). She has gone mad ! Oh dear ! Oh dear ! She has gone mad ! Mad !

EMILY. Not at all. I've wanted to do it for years. I

loathe that saddlebag suite—you brute! (*Kicking the chair again.*)

MRS. PORTER (*hysterically*). Your wedding gift to us, Emily!

EMILY. When I gave it to you I didn't know I was going to live with you!

MRS. PORTER (*acidly*). No, you hadn't resigned all hope of making poor James Hopkins propose!

MR. PORTER (*shouting above the tumult*). Will you be silent! I want to talk of Henry, of Henry, do you hear? (*thumping table*) Henry!

(MRS. PORTER, *who is sitting in the chair L. of table, screams in hysterics, and EMILY comes L. of her to table.*)

EMILY (*severely*). I wonder you're not ashamed to talk of Henry, you've driven him out of his home and broken his heart between you—I shouldn't wonder if he isn't at the bottom of Balls Pond by now.

MRS. PORTER (*faintly*). My salts! My salts! My heart—my palpitations. Oh, why didn't I die long ago!

EMILY. Because you took such good care to keep yourself alive. I'll not fetch your salts—there is nothing the matter with you but temper. (*Turning back to the fireplace.*)

MR. PORTER (*still shocked*). Emily! I've never heard you talk like this before!

EMILY (*grimly*). There's a sense of independence in the air. The spring, I suppose—don't you feel it, John?

MR. PORTER (*fiercely*). How dare you accuse me of feeling the spring? I tell you I want a clear understanding about Henry. I intend to give my consent to his marriage with Sarah Speed.

EMILY. Indeed. Well, when *she* comes in *I* go out.

MR. PORTER (*sarcastically*). Partly why I shall welcome her, Miss Porter. What have you against the girl?

EMILY (*folding her arms*). She is a—— (*Pause.*)

MR. PORTER. Emily!

EMILY (*defiantly*). A puss. Positively—a puss.

(*Enter, door down R., MISS MATILDA PORTER, a rather plain young woman of 22, in walking attire with a large reticule.*)

MATILDA (*slightly mincing*). Dear Mamma, Miss Bertha positively cannot match the Berlin wool, neither the cerise, the magenta, nor the salmon pink.

MR. PORTER (*sullenly*). There are a good many things in this house unmatchable, Matilda. (*Moving up to the window.*)

(*MATILDA, with a swimming motion, reaches table, opens reticule and pours out samples of bright coloured wools, then, glancing round, sees the stony attitude of EMILY and MR. PORTER and the collapse of MRS. PORTER.*)

MATILDA. Dearest Mamma! Dearest Papa! Dearest Aunt Emily!

MRS. PORTER (*faintly*). One of my attacks, dear child.

(*MATILDA, gliding to her mother and caressing her.*) Dear Papa has been horrid.

MATILDA (*turning reproachfully to her father*). Papa!

EMILY (*rapidly*). Fiddlesticks. Every one has been horrid. You'll be horrid yourself in a minute. Your mother says I'm a thief, your father says she's driven Henry to suicide, they both say I've lived on their charity, I say he's a bully and she's a fool—and Henry is to marry the Speed—puss.

MR. PORTER (*crossing down R.C., roaring*). Lies! Lies!

(*MATILDA collapses on her mother and joins her in hysterics.*)

What have I done to be so tormented?

EMILY. Married Clara.

MRS. PORTER (*with genuine surprise*). And we were all so loving!

EMILY. Nonsense. We've been bickering for a quarter of a century.

MRS. PORTER. But this is the first time we have ceased to be civil.

EMILY. Isn't it a relief?

MR. PORTER. *Not* before Matilda, please.

EMILY. It will do Matilda good. Of course she knows all about it. She heard all you said last night.

MATILDA (*masking curiosity, recovering from her hysterics*). Yes, please let me stay, I want to be a comfort to you and dear Mamma, and a loyal sister to poor misguided Henry—"Little deeds of kindness, little words of love." (*Sobbing.*)

EMILY (*turning away*). Rubbish.

MATILDA. But *you* taught it me. Oh, dear, what has happened to every one? (*Looking round at them all.*)

MR. PORTER (*pompously*). I fear it is a crisis, my dear Matilda, a crisis—one word has followed another——

MRS. PORTER (*violently interrupting*). One word followed another!

(MR. PORTER *tries to speak, but by sheer volubility she silences him.*)

No, I'll not be silent! (*Majestically rising.*) Matilda, your aunt has admitted to secret drinking, she has been smashing up the furniture—your father says I have driven Henry to suicide, and ought to be kicked—(MATILDA *screams*)—yes, *kicked* out of the house, he has been blasphemous (*banging the Bible*), used foul language about Miss Magnet——

MATILDA (*cutting in*). I met Miss Magnet, she said I was to be sure to see Maria practised "The Turkish Patrol."

MR. PORTER } (*together*). "The Turkish Patrol" won't be

MRS. PORTER } played any more in this house, Miss Porter.

MATILDA. Oh, dear, something dreadful must have happened!

EMILY (*grimly*). I always knew it was an unhappy marriage, but I never thought I'd live to see them admit it.

(*This acts as a cold douche on the others ; they all stare at EMILY, who seems to dominate them all. They become thoughtful ; MATILDA, glancing away from her aunt, surveys her parents with a sharp curiosity that makes her forget her hysterics and affectations ; a slight pause.*)

MR. PORTER (*facing a new thought*). An unhappy marriage. Good heavens. Well, I suppose so.

MRS. PORTER. We never agreed about anything. Not from the very first. It was all pretence.

MR. PORTER. I don't know that I ever undertook to do more than pretend. After all, what more *can* a man undertake ?

MRS. PORTER. Or a woman either. How hard you were when little Annie died. (*Sobbing.*)

EMILY. If little Annie had lived you would have found her just as trying as you do Matilda.

MR. PORTER (*with curiosity, to MATILDA*). Are you happy, Mattie ?

MATILDA (*sharply*). Happy ?

MR. PORTER. I'm serious.

MRS. PORTER. Why shouldn't she be happy ?

MR. PORTER (*seriously*). That's what I want to know. Family life is not easy—you suddenly find you've been doing a difficult thing for twenty-five years. Here we are, accusing each other. What about ? There's something in the air. (*Thoughtfully.*) It must be you women. I don't get this sort of thing at the office, everything goes smoothly there, year after year.

MATILDA (*shrilly*). That is it, Papa, you have *got* the office. We're rather shut up.

MR. PORTER (*puzzled*). Shut up ? This is your *home*.

MATILDA. Home isn't enough.

MR. PORTER. Not enough ? For a good woman ?

EMILY. Supposing we weren't any of us good women ?

MRS. PORTER (*sharply*). Speak for yourself, Emily.

MATILDA (*defiantly*). Papa asked if I was happy. Good? I don't know. I would like to go out more. Why *need* we live in Islington?

MR. PORTER (*amazed*). Don't you like Islington, Matilda? You were born here.

MATILDA. Perhaps that's why. No, I don't like it.

MR. PORTER. What would you like?

MATILDA (*more defiantly*). To travel. Rose Watson went to Switzerland.

MRS. PORTER. They are dreadful people. Travel!

MATILDA (*with remorse*). Oh, what dreadful things I'm saying! Papa, you should not have asked me if I was happy!

MR. PORTER (*slowly*). I suppose it is a dangerous question. Queer how I came to ask it. (*Looking round at the three women.*) How was I to know you were not happy? You've always behaved yourselves—till to-day. And so have I.

MRS. PORTER (*spitefully*). I dare say. But there are *hours* when we don't see you. *We* are always here, watching each other.

MR. PORTER. I suppose you'll tell me next that you aren't fond of one another?

EMILY. No one could be fond of Clara. I've been sorry for her. And amused.

MRS. PORTER (*bridling*). I hope there is some credit due to me for enduring Emily. All these years.

MATILDA. I believe this is the first chance I have had of being taken seriously. Or speaking seriously. It's a funny feeling.

MR. PORTER (*with dreadful curiosity*). Aren't you fond of your mother and aunt?

MATILDA (*slowly*). Of course, I must be. But I would like to get away from them.

MR. PORTER. And this is a Christian home !

EMILY. That is what is the matter with it—no one could keep up appearances as well as we have, and for so long, without suffering for it.

MATILDA (*quickly*). Suffering ! Yes, one does.

MRS. PORTER. Ungrateful girl, surrounded with every comfort—I've suffered, my heart, my nerves, the anxieties of bringing up you children, your father's tempers. And I don't like Islington, either !

(*Softly but firmly there breaks in the sound of "The Turkish Patrol."*)

MR. PORTER (*starting at the sound*). Why need Maria learn "The Turkish Patrol ?"

EMILY. For the same reason that we live in Islington, I suppose.

MATILDA. I hate my drawing lessons. Must I have them ? I would like to ask Mr. Bliss to tea—may I ?

EMILY. I would like to take my money, go away and spend it on myself. I would like to keep a parrot. And to *not* go to Margate every year. Yes, I should like everything to be quite different.

MR. PORTER (*pondering*). Why can't it be ?

MRS. PORTER. If I once began saying what *I* would like ! Why, I daren't even begin to think about it.

MR. PORTER (*still pondering*). You never began to think about anything did you, Clara ? Not to really *think*. I don't believe I have, either—it's dangerous. Look where we've got to now. (*To EMILY.*) Quite different, eh ? But we are all comfortable.

EMILY. Yes. One's body is, but one's mind always seems to be sitting on hard chairs.

MATILDA. And having nasty food, and never resting properly—yes, it's all inside one. May I have Mr. Bliss to tea ?

EMILY. If you married Mr. Bliss, you'd have another home like this, exactly.

MATILDA (*bitterly*). Don't! Don't! (*Sitting down at the table and turning over the wools mechanically.*)

MR. PORTER (*heavily*). I don't see what good all this is doing. I've allowed you women too much licence, it ought not to be possible for you to talk like this. You've made me forget all I was going to say about Henry. After all, Henry is more important than any of you.

MRS. PORTER. Henry and I——

MR. PORTER. I won't hear a word from you about Henry—you turned him out of the house, he may have run away or drowned himself for all I know. A fine mother, Mrs. Porter! (*To MATILDA.*) As for you, miss, you may not have that Bliss fellow to tea—he is only a clerk.

MRS. PORTER. Wherever did you meet him? I never heard you mention him before. For shame, miss.

MATILDA (*dully*). I met him at the church sale of work——

EMILY (*interrupting*). He is very plain. Why did you want to ask him here?

MATILDA. Because he is the only man who ever wanted to come.

MRS. PORTER (*seriously frightened*). We can't have these things said! We can't! John, I shall return to mother.

MATILDA. You quarrelled with Grannie last time we visited her.

MRS. PORTER. Be silent, miss! John, do you hear? I've been insulted, outraged, treated atrociously by you and your children. I am leaving the house. (*Putting her handkerchief to her eyes.*) Oh, my heart! I feel faint, my head!

They all look at her without offering assistance as she collapses on chair L. of the table.)

EMILY. She'll never go, or if she did she'd come back. Gran is cleverer than we are.

MATILDA. Henry is the lucky one. He has got free.

EMILY. He'll marry that Speed—puss.

MATILDA. I hate her!

MR. PORTER. Why, Mattie, why?

MATILDA (*fiercely*). She is so pretty.

MR. PORTER. Emily, stop that child playing.

EMILY (*going to door L., opening it, and calling out*). Stop that horrid noise, miss, or I'll smack you till you can't sit on the piano-stool!

(*The music ceases suddenly, EMILY shuts the door.*)

MRS. PORTER (*faintly*). Oh, what vulgarity! How degrading! And Matilda talking of prettiness and young men—you bold, brazen girl! And Sarah Speed *isn't* pretty, either.

MR. PORTER. I quite understand poor Mattie—you ought to have seen to it she had better chances—did her hair differently.

MRS. PORTER (*rising wildly*). Let me get away—help me, some one, let me get out—I'm stifling. John—oh, John! the man wants me to deck out my Matilda like a daughter of Babylon! Oh! After all these years of patience! We indeed wander in a vale of tears!

(*The two women give some perfunctory attention to MRS. PORTER, who collapses in her chair.*)

MR. PORTER (*losing his temper with a roar*). I'll be damned, blasted, roasted if I'll wander in the vale of *your* tears any more!

(*He sweeps wax flowers and wool mat off the table with a gesture of abandoned fury: MRS. PORTER'S hysterics rise louder, she beats her heels on the floor: MARIA sticks her head out of door L. and gapes, unnoticed by any.*)

(*Roaring.*) I'll stand no more of it, d'ye hear, the pack of you?

You're pampered, overfed, lazy, useless, ill-tempered, jealous !
Henry was worth the lot of you ! And then a dozen more !

(The women make some incoherent efforts to speak, but they are cowed.)

A man toils to make money to spend on—you ! *(Pointing at them.)*

(MARIA, unseen in the background, begins to giggle. Enter, door R., HENRY, a spruce, neat young man, neither as foolish as his mother nor as formidable as his father. Bright and slightly self-assured : his appearance works a miracle with the group by the table. MRS. PORTER instantly drops her hysterics, straightens her cap, and smiling, EMILY makes a grab for the wax fruit.)

EMILY *(glibly)*. An accident ! How vexatious ! Your dear Papa, Henry, tripped over the table, and I fear the lovely fruit is broken !

MATILDA *(her smooth manner returned)*. Never mind, dear Aunt Emily, I believe I shall be able to mend it quite neatly !

(MR. PORTER darts a look of amazement at this feminine duplicity, then decides to imitate it.)

MR. PORTER *(with breathless composure)*. Your mother was threatened with one of her attacks—hastening to her assistance—I tripped.

HENRY *(advancing)*. Dear Mother—you have recovered, I trust ?

(Embracing his mother, who is now perfectly controlled and even smiling. MR. PORTER can hardly restrain his amazement.)

MRS. PORTER *(coolly)*. I am perfectly recovered, dear Henry—but you have been a long time !

(MARIA enters from door L. EMILY and MATILDA are piecing together the wax fruits.)

HENRY (*brightly*). I have brought Sarah—I had some difficulty to persuade her—but she is waiting in the hall for your permission to come in.

(*All save MRS. PORTER look at him surprised : MATILDA drops the wax fruit she holds.*)

MR. PORTER. Sarah! Miss Speed here!

HENRY (*turning to him*). Oh, dear Papa, Mother said I could. She said she was sure you would soften—she was so very kind, dear Mamma.

MR. PORTER. Kind? I thought—

EMILY. Hush! John!

MR. PORTER (*faintly*). Fetch Miss Speed, Henry.

HENRY. Oh, thank you, sir.

(HENRY, *shaking his hand violently, exits by the door R.*)

MR. PORTER (*turning instantly to his wife*). Clara! You were—kind? You didn't drive Henry away?

MRS. PORTER. Of course not. But you never allowed me to say so—you kept threatening and bullying.

MR. PORTER (*to EMILY in despair*). If she'd only *told* me. The woman is a fool.

EMILY. But you knew that. Don't let Henry see anything wrong.

MR. PORTER. All over nothing! I don't know how I can pull myself together.

MATILDA. For Henry's sake—

(*Enter HENRY, door R., with MISS SPEED, very pretty and demure. The family greet her with forced but emphatic smiles : their affectations, now safely resumed again, carry them over an awkward moment. MISS SPEED glides from one to another with affectionate greetings.*)

MISS SPEED (*crossing to MRS. PORTER*). Oh, Mrs. Porter, I am overwhelmed—when dear Henry said you would receive me—(*Turning to MR. PORTER.*) And you, dear sir. I know I

am unworthy of your regard—a disappointing match for you—but I will be a good obedient wife to Henry.

MR. PORTER. Of course, of course, my dear. I'm delighted, I'm sure. Mrs. Porter is delighted, every one is delighted—in fact we were gathered here to welcome you.

HENRY (*unctuously*). How good every one is!

MATILDA (*to MISS SPEED*). We are going to be *great* friends. I've always admired you so much!

EMILY (*to MISS SPEED, who has crossed to her*). I always *hoped* you were going to say "yes" to Henry.

MISS SPEED (*taking a hand of each*). How *good* every one is!

MRS. PORTER (*looking round*). Ah, here is Maria. Come forward, child, and speak to your new sister.

(*MARIA comes forward, gaping and staring.*)

MISS SPEED (*embracing MARIA*). Oh, this is the little darling who plays so beautifully!

MR. PORTER (*patting MARIA'S head*). Yes, quite a talent, quite a talent. She is learning "The Turkish Patrol," a most interesting piece. I always insist on really *good* music.

MARIA. But, Papa, you said——

MRS. PORTER (*crossing to above table*). Hush, dear (*holding up her hand reprovngly*.) Never speak till you are spoken to.

HENRY. Mamma, I've promised Sarah you'll teach her some of your wonderful housekeeping.

MISS SPEED. Pray do, Mrs. Porter, though I shall never be able to make Henry as comfortable as you do!

MRS. PORTER (*simpering*). I do my best.

MR. PORTER (*pompously*). You couldn't come to a better school, Miss Speed. I flatter myself this is a well-run home.

HENRY. And, Papa, we've planned to take the little house next door, so that we won't have to leave Islington!

MATILDA. Won't that be wonderful! Not to leave Islington!

MISS SPEED (*who has crossed back to HENRY ; shyly*). And Papa and I have arranged to come to Margate, too, this summer.

EMILY. That will be delightful—you'll love Margate.

MRS. PORTER (*fatuously*). I'm sure we're all going to be very, very happy.

HENRY. And perhaps Aunt Emily could come and live with us—just to show Sarah the way I like things.

MR. PORTER. An excellent idea. Emily will enjoy making you comfortable, I'm sure.

(*MARIA exits quietly and sneakingly by the door up L.*)

HENRY. Dear Mamma, we met that fellow Bliss coming along ; he tried to make himself friendly, but I soon showed him his mistake.

MISS SPEED. Such a common man !

MATILDA. Odious. I am so glad you showed him he was being impertinent.

EMILY. Matilda was only saying this morning he was becoming quite pestering.

MATILDA. Dear Aunt Emily.

(*She puts her arm through that of EMILY. MR. PORTER puts his with a loving gesture round his wife. They face HENRY and MISS SPEED, who stand R.*)

MR. PORTER. All I can say, my dears, is that I hope you'll be as happy as we've been—these twenty-five years.

(*"The Turkish Patrol" is heard from the next room.*)

CURTAIN

The Curtain can ascend again on grouping as suggested at beginning, to strains of "Home, Sweet Home," or can end as above. (See Note at front.)

THE CONFESSION

A SOUVENIR OF A STAY IN SWITZERLAND—1880

THE great chemist had finished his lecture : “ an epoch-making lecture,” the newspapers would call it, in the articles that carried all over the world, and would make his name even more famous than it was to-day ; Richard Crighton, one of *the* names of all time.

While they were discussing him, all excited, all seeing in these discoveries, inventions, or as Crighton called them, “ condensations of eternal verities,” the ultimate realization of their own personal dreams of progress, goodness, ambition, or money, the man himself went away, taking only one with him, a young Frenchman, whose work closely pursued his own, had even boasted it might in time surpass it ; Crighton liked this man for his intelligence, his industry and his severe adoration ; common adulation had long since disgusted the lofty genius of Richard Crighton, but he could still savour the admiration of one quite, well, nearly, his intellectual equal, only lesser than he by the difference in years and the knowledge the years bring.

The two men sat silent, each gazing in the tall clear flames on the straight plain hearth, that burnt with the bright serenity of the fires rising from some sacrifice on an altar.

The room was of course severe, ordered with a keen economy of beauty rare to the West.

There was one picture, a *Claude Lorraine* (but Crighton called him *Gelée*), one bronze (an early Florentine David), and a bowl of flowers (branches of forced white lilac),

each with a dull grey lacquer wall background—by the fire-place—nothing but two fantastic andirons cast by *Cellini*.

Plain grey curtains shut out the London March night—for the rest, simplest of chairs and tables and a large untidy desk ; no secretaries came into this room.

A “ queer ” room, people said ; not many saw it, fewer liked it ; even the young Frenchman who sat there to-night rather resented the *Claude Lorraine*—what did a taste so fine drawn, so weary of mere beauty, so precise and overtrained, want with this fairy landscape ?

“ Of course, it is quite wonderful,” said Desalle, in his excellent English. “ The pinnacle, the pinnacle ! ”

“ For me ? ” asked Crighton quietly.

“ Naturally. You are one of—them—now. Archimedes, Galileo, Newton, Faraday—it’s—well, there is nothing like it—can be nothing like—even you—must feel that ? ”

“ I don’t know,” said the great man slowly. “ I think it seems rather flat.”

“ Flat ! ”

“ Or flavourless, like something you have sucked the taste out of——”

“ Ah, you have had always too much success——”

“ Desalle—what *do* we mean by this—success ? ”

The Frenchman smiled queerly.

“ You want to analyse—even that ? ”

“ No, no—again, a Mumbo-Jumbo word, analyse ! The thing I mean is just the thing that always escapes . . . analysis.”

“ Just ?——”

“ What Psyche missed in the dark, what Pandora shut the lid on—the side of the apple Adam *didn't* bite—the few grains of ‘ unknown matter ’ at the bottom of your crucible ! ”

“ Not much unknown to you, Professor, at the bottom of your crucible—but I see what you mean, of course, you can

teach the universe how to spin, but you cannot control your own heart-beats."

Crighton smiled ; he leant forward in the spare-looking, but supremely comfortable chair ; the subdued glow of the electric bulbs concealed somewhere in the cornice, showed his heavy, yet fallen figure, the bearded face, fine, yet physically a ruin, his precise, expressionless evening clothes, the dead black, the glazed white, the heavily veined, pale hands.

"Right, as usual, Desalle," he said: his tired voice was almost sad. "Heart, or conscience, that is what I meant, I suppose."

The alert Frenchman caught at a word in this sentence that seemed to him peculiarly grotesque.

"Conscience ! That cannot concern you, Professor. The most generous of men, the most just and kind——"

Crighton checked him with a lift of the tired hand.

"You always admired me, Desalle ; well, well." The faded, strained eyes flashed a second behind the spectacles. "Who paid for your training, Desalle ?"

So direct was this suddenly personal question that the younger man almost flushed.

"My people, sir."

"Ah . . . they were, are, well to do ?"

"Wealthy, you might say, Professor. Where are you leading me ?"

"Nowhere. My mind rambles. Tired, Desalle. Wealthy ! They spent a lot of money on you ?"

"I'm afraid . . . a great deal, sir."

"Expensive training ! Expensive experiments ! Travel ! Leisure ! Books ! Yes, a great deal—a great deal of money."

Crighton spoke thoughtfully, gazing into the fire, springing straightly up, as from a poured libation.

"You do not earn much money now, Desalle ?"

"Not a great deal, sir."

"You will. As I have done. A great deal of money. You are not forty yet? And well on the road."

"Thank you, sir. But I never much wanted money——"

"Money!" repeated the old man. "You speak with an emphasis of contempt——"

"Not contempt——"

"You do, you do—because you have always had it, and were able to forget it, eh?"

"That—perhaps."

"Now, supposing you [had] [been] poor, conscious of your powers, knowing what you needed to cultivate them—with no one to help you, only capable of earning a small wage by hard distasteful work . . . well, you would have found yourself thinking a great deal about money, Desalle."

The Frenchman's lean face showed concentrated and keen in expression.

"Yes," he admitted.

"And what would you, so young, so ambitious, so sure of yourself, so desperate, have done to obtain that money?" demanded the great man.

"Almost anything, I suppose, sir."

"*Almost* anything! We come to the bottom of the crucible, Desalle, the small residue in our tubes of 'unknown material,' *almost* anything!"

"Well, one would not care for a career founded on fraud, or wrong, or lies, or any kind of thieving or trickery——"

"Are you sure?" asked Crighton quickly. "Or are you just repeating the usual thing?"

"The usual thing?"

"What we are expected to say to these questions. I mean—the answers dictated by tradition, convention!"

"I do not know, sir," replied Desalle slowly. "I have never been tried. One takes so much for granted——"

"Wealthy people do," came the rather harsh interruption.

“—and I have always, I think, believed—in tradition,” finished the Frenchman with a touch of stiffness.

“ But you’ve never been tempted ? ”

“ Tempted, Professor ? ”

Crighton smiled at the intonation.

“ Oh, not crudely. We can most of us keep our hands out of each other’s pockets—but—well, there are degrees—it is like a man priding himself on his disdain for a flashy street-walker—*she* does not tempt you, of course, but there may be a woman somewhere who could make you do something you would rather not.”

The Frenchman very slightly shrugged.

“ Of course. Nevertheless I should hope to withstand your ‘ one in a million ’ woman as successfully as the poor prostitute.”

“ Oh, Desalle, Desalle ! ” sighed Crighton. “ Listen to what I am going to tell you. I want to tell someone. It is at the bottom of everything with me.”

“ The usual thing, again ? ”

“ You mean—Love ? How curious the word sounds. Cheapened till we are ashamed to use it, eh ? Made common as dirt, vulgar as town mud ! Romance ! Love ! ”

His glance just flickered, in a pause of silence, to the *Claude Lorraine*, cunningly lit by hidden lamps to show the golden distance, the gleaming river, the ethereal clouds.

“ Exquisite,” said Desalle, respectfully. “ This room has made me discontented with every picture gallery and museum in Europe.”

“ That is not what you meant to say,” smiled Crighton.

“ Yes, Professor. Not what I thought, perhaps.”

“ And that ? ”

“ I always thought that picture out of place,” conceded the Frenchman.

“ Yes. A fairy-tale slipped into a treatise on Molecules ! Never mind. I want to show you something.”

Desalle made no further attempt to change the subject ; he had wanted to talk "shop," but he knew when it was useless to induce Crighton to do this, and there was something too reverential in his attitude towards the older man to permit him to endeavour to lead the conversation.

Besides he was becoming interested.

With a slow, rather awkward movement Crighton turned in his chair, and opened a drawer in the little slender table that stood beside him, which held the untouched decanters and unopened cabinet of cigars.

From this drawer, with clumsy hands that slightly trembled (Desalle reminded himself that the great man was old, old) he drew out a small box.

Desalle knew it at once for one of those cheap affairs of unstained wood, crudely carved and sold to "tourists" in every Swiss town.

It was locked ; Crighton actually had the tiny key on his watch-chain and fumbled with it slowly.

Desalle was interested.

"It does not look fifty years old—nearly?" smiled the great man. "They make them just the same now. But they were more uncommon then. And more expensive. This cost . . . ten francs, a lot of money to me then . . . a lot of money to a very poor young man."

The last words impressed the Frenchman with a quick sense of queerness, but, being subtle, he did not say—"You were poor, then?" but :

"You bought it, Professor?"

"Nearly fifty years ago. At —, 'a little village at the foot of the Alps'—you remember *Julie*?"

Desalle smiled.

"Yes. But I should not have thought you would, Professor."

"It was a favourite book with me, then. I think I took it for 'light literature'! Well, well."

He had unlocked the box now.

Inside—a ring, a letter, a flat and withered flower.

“Very much the usual thing,” smiled Crighton.

Desalle took out his cigarette-case ; the love-story of Richard Crighton ! How poignant . . . and how utterly trivial . . . an old man dwelling on a half-century old romance . . . rather dreadful.

To Desalle it was almost like a first horrible touch of senility . . . as if Crighton had begun to talk of his first breeches or the attack of measles he had had at six . . . almost.

“I am not going to be garrulous,” smiled the great man with a humorous look at the other’s cigarette.

“Garrulous !” repeated Desalle. “The word is an affront——”

He was sincere, yet nothing had been in his mind save what this word expressed.

Crighton looked at his treasures and lifted them out, one by one.

First, the ring, that just circled the top of his little finger ; “cheap” as the box from which it came, made when “artificial” stones were so crudely done, glass coloured red and white that gave out not one flicker of light, but stared dull and blank from the thick setting.

Second, the flower ; eidel-weiss (*of course*, thought Desalle) looking like heavy flannel, dried and flat, dirty white, dingy green, a touch of withered gold.

Third, the letter, a buff envelope, the stamp with the young Queen’s head, the thin postmark—the address in a careful hand to :

RICHARD CRIGHTON, ESQUIRE,
88, BLOMFIELD STREET,
MARY-LE-BONE.

No letters after the name . . . and what an address . . . fifty years ago. . . .

"I just want you to see this picture," said the great man, putting the three objects back into the box which he held open on his lounging knee. "A young man, myself, very poor, very friendless, very ambitious, at the end of all his resources, forced to give up all his dreams—which were—well, not so wild—and take a job, they would say now, at—a soap factory, shall we call it, a small salary, continuous work, no time, no money, no heart *for what he wants to do*, what he thinks, God helping him, *he ought to do*—"

"He was right, sir—"

"Wait, Desalle. I see him in this little village—he had got away to think it out, Switzerland was a bit of an adventure in those days, almost like Rousseau saw it—it was his last assertion of liberty. He was really at the end of things . . . and going back to the . . . soap factory."

"Was there no way, sir?"

"None. He had tried everything. It was all so much more difficult then. People were very comfortable. And blind. They did not really want—scientists. Discovery seemed, well, a little blasphemous. You weren't—encouraged. No one was looking out for you. They—they honestly thought—you could do better in, in the soap factory."

Desalle pressed out his cigarette and sat still.

"I see this young fellow, myself, a likely young fellow, I suppose . . . and, my God, how much in earnest! . . . coming across those fields at the foot of the Alps, and a girl with him, a funny little dark girl—not—no, I do not think you would call her pretty—she was not anything else either, not distinguished, nor clever, nor wealthy—just a little English governess in one of the better families of the place. She wore this ring. She had not, even, I think, very good taste. I have forgotten the dress. I remember the hat—with plaid ribbons. She was carrying this box—she had admired it so much that the young man had asked her to keep it—he had only bought it

himself because he was sorry for the peasant who made it. And sold so few."

The quiet voice, weary with the long lecture, dropped a second.

Desalle glanced, almost furtively, at the *Claude Lorraine*.

"So I see them," continued the great man. "Young, side by side. And soon—another picture. The girl—dying. Some quick infection—some carelessness—and the funny little dark girl is dying. In the deal-boarded, white-curtained Swiss bedroom. Her—employers—are kind. She has asked for the young man, and he is allowed to sit beside her. It is too early for flowers, but he brings the little spray of eidel-weiss, not knowing why, and she tries to kiss it. She will not let him leave her. And when she is delirious, which is often, she says, 'Richard, Richard——' The doctor is sorry. They are all sorry. They did not know that she had—a romance—they call it. They thought her plain, not interesting. Everyone is sympathetic—kind—sorry. They telegraphed to England, which still seemed rather a wonderful thing to do—and the only relative comes—an aunt, very affectionate, very tremulous, rather—fine—no, not the word—noble, I think something noble, about this agitated, plain, elderly woman."

Crighton was silent a second, he had the indrawn look of one who sees pictures of his own making that blot out actuality.

"Almost as soon as the aunt arrives, the girl dies—this box, this flower on her pillow, the young man so close—that his face was the last thing she saw. Well! It is over . . . there is the funeral, the comments—the aunt goes back to England in her black crêpe dress—and presently the young man goes too—back to the soap factory——"

"Wretched," murmured Desalle. "Wretched."

"Wretched! Poor devil! Now—another picture—it is just a few days before he takes up his new post, and he is in his common little room, dark, rather dirty and uncomfortable, I

think, though he did not notice that then—and he means to burn his books, and never dream of them again—the books that could only whet his appetite—there is the fire in a heavy grate and the books ready. When—the post. A letter. This letter——”

Desalle felt a curious pang ; he wished the old man would stop.

“——from the aunt of the funny little dark girl—by the same post a parcel, with the eidel-weiss, the box, the cheap ring she had always worn——This is the letter—she had written to the Swiss Hotel for my address——Listen.”

Slowly he drew a single sheet of paper out of the buff envelope and read aloud :

“ DEAR MR. CRIGHTON,

“ Mary had no time to tell me of you, and afterwards I saw you did not feel you could speak of it. But I understood. How much she loved you ! I send you her ring—your betrothal ring I guess it to be, the mountain flower, and the box she treasured so. Also, what will surprise you very much, a cheque for a thousand pounds. Mary’s little fortune that I had charge of—it was for her dowry, or, if she never married, to set her up in a little school. Now, it seems so naturally yours that I can hardly think you need telling so. I heard you were not rich and wished to study—medicine, was it ? Mary can help you perhaps with this money, as she will, I know, by the memory of her love—she would have been your wife, remember.”

Crighton folded the letter away without a word of comment.

“ A pathetic idyll, sir,” remarked Desalle gently.

“ I took the money,” said Crighton, closing the box. “ I never went to the soap factory. I meant to pay it back, but the woman died soon after. That money was the foundation of everything for me.”

“ Rather beautiful, sir—I do not see what there should be to question in it—*she* would have been so pleased——”

As Desalle spoke he recalled that the great man had never married.

“ How pleased and proud she would have been,” he added warmly.

“ Do you think so ? ” asked Crighton slowly, falling sunken into the chair and replacing the box carefully on the little table.

“ I wonder. Did she care for me—or was it the delirium. The usual thing ? ”

“ I do not follow you, sir.”

“ I took the money,” said Crighton again, not heeding him. “ There was your delicate temptation ! I took it. Lie, fraud, cheat—well, what do you say now, Desalle ? Those are my foundations—the ambitious grab, the swift unscrupulous seizing of advantage, the absence of honour, of rectitude ! The usual thing ! ”

“ I have not got it clear, sir.”

“ No. I’ll tell you. I do not know if that girl loved me—but I did not love her——”

“ Ah ! ” Desalle looked again at the *Claude Lorraine*.

“ I was not betrothed to her—I did not know her name—I met her on the fields three days before she died . . . for the first time she spoke to me casually—about the way. I offered her the box to put some winter cones in, her hands were so full—that was all. She must have known my name, for she sent for me when she was ill. And everyone thought we were lovers. It did not seem possible to undeceive them. Or worth while. The girl was dead. And I accepted her money.”

Desalle dropped his glance from the golden picture.

The flames had died down on the hearth now, peaceful as an offering accepted, a sacrifice completed.

Crighton put the Swiss box back into the drawer of the table.

"Think it over," he said in a very tired voice. "Think it over. . . . I haven't told you . . . there was a lock of her hair put in by the aunt . . . with the other things . . . I could not keep that—I destroyed it—perhaps remorse."

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MARWOOD'S GHOST STORY

A PUZZLE-PIECE—1890

HE went into the country to write a ghost story ; he had written about most things but never about ghosts ; he was a keen, practical, clever man and he could not admit that there was anything, in the writing way, that he could not do ; since other people had achieved ghost stories, he meant to achieve one—a good ghost story.

He did not despise any of the usual effects, loneliness, snow, even Christmas Eve ; he thought that if he went into the country for the winter and experienced all these sensations for himself he might be helped in the writing of his story.

Of course there were a great many trashy, flimsy, silly ghost stories written, but that did not prevent someone writing a really fine ghost story, a tale that would grip and chill and pester the imagination of the unfortunate reader.

Marwood had never been very successful as far as money goes though the critics, those one or two or three or four that can really be called critics, always encouraged him ; still he had sufficient means to be able to, sometimes, do what he liked ; he was able now, for instance, to give up the winter to writing this ghost story ; able, with the assistance of Janet, his wife, who came willingly into the country because the doctors, three very clever doctors, had said that Marwood was overworking, that he wanted quiet, a rest and change.

Doctors say that kind of thing very often, and sometimes rich, or lazy, or solitary folk are able to take advantage of the advice.

The cottage was very lonely, but not inconvenient ; it was solid, compact, and could be made warm. Marwood paid so little rent for it that Janet felt she could be slightly lavish in comforts ; Marwood had his big soft chair, his clear lamp, his roomy shelves, his thick curtains, his bright fires and his books.

The room soon began to overflow with books ; Marwood began to collect ghost stories ; he had never read a ghost story before, being a rational, sceptical man ; his sharp, acrid studies of modern life had had as little to do with ghosts as with fairies.

"It is a queer thing," said Janet, "that you should want to write about ghosts—it is so silly, really, and so overdone."

"I know ; that's the interest, to see if you can put some new vigour into such old stuff—one ought to be able to do—it is just a question of applying your intelligence."

Janet said :

"The best ghost stories have been written by those who believe in ghosts."

Marwood didn't think so ; he didn't really think that anyone believed in ghosts.

"Well," argued Janet, "I don't see how you can hope to scare anyone, if no one believes——"

"Oh," said Marwood impatiently, "the fools who read ghost stories—it's a special audience, of course."

It was November and he had not begun to write ; he just sat in his comfortable room and read the other fellows' failures.

He didn't think much of any of them, not even Defoe, or Roe, or Walter Scott.

"Stuff to frighten children," he said. "There must be a good ghost story somewhere, and I'm going to write it——"

Janet didn't care as long as he was quiet, resting ; she was absorbed in making him comfortable ; a plain woman who had never been enticed by pleasure, she did not miss the seductions of town, but sometimes she found the place rather lonely.

It was in a field, off a by-lane, and when the tradespeople

(three times a week) and the postman, had "called" there was no one else all day but perhaps a farm-hand trudging through the mud.

It had been a wet summer; when the Marwoods first came the trees were still green, a dank and sodden green, and for a month the low swollen clouds hung over the bistre-coloured uplands and the rain slashed, for many hours each day, into fields already like a sponge full of water. Then, in November, came the frost, and everything was dry and blackish against a sky the colour of iron.

Marwood continued to buy ghost stories; he searched old catalogues for anything remotely bearing on the subject; piles of books came from the library.

"I'm not trying to get ideas," he explained to Janet. "I'm just seeing what the other fellows have said, so I can leave all that alone and start fresh—it's amazing. The credulity, the childish nonsense!"

"You'll get swamped in all that rubbish," replied Janet, who was a very practical woman. "I should stop if I were you and begin to write—after all, we can't stay here for ever."

"Of course not. I've got my plot, you know; it won't take me long to write it—I ought to have it ready soon after Christmas; that was part of my plan, you know, to spend Christmas here——"

"You won't know if it is Christmas or not here, no one comes near us, they think we are mad, or heathen."

"Still it *will* be Christmas Eve and I shall get the atmosphere——"

"I don't see why ghosts should come out on Christmas Eve, never could; there's no logic in it——"

"Of course there isn't," said Marwood, irritated. "It is all an absurd invention. Haven't I told you that is what I want to do, take the stupid nonsense as it stands and make something out of it that's going to touch people up a bit?"

Janet thought that he was becoming rather bad-tempered and

rude ; she didn't believe much in his ghost story, she wished that he would get it over and done with and back to his usual work ; with the cold the loneliness increased and Janet would have been quite glad to have returned to town.

When she ventured to make some remark to this effect, he returned a queer reply.

Janet said :

" If we stay away much longer you'll get out of touch with things."

And Marwood answered :

" I'm just getting *into* touch with things ! "

He looked vexed at her surprise and added sullenly :

" It depends what you mean by *things*."

The first day of real snow Janet remarked that it might be a good occasion to commence the book.

Marwood said, yes, it was a good occasion, and he would go upstairs and write.

During their quiet meal that evening he seemed thoughtful, his lean, yellowish face was, Janet believed, paler than usual.

" Isn't it remarkable," he asked suddenly, " where they get it all from ? "

" All what ? " Janet was stupid at an emergency.

" All those things—ghosts, griffins, cockatrices, hobgoblins, vampires—if they never existed, how did people come to think of them ? "

" Ignorance, of course." Janet was alert now. " They saw something that they didn't understand and they made up a tale——"

" But why ? And how ? *Where did they get the stuff for the tale ?* "

" Imagination, obviously."

" But what is imagination, Janet ? "

Janet became impatient.

" I should think that you are reading too much of that trash."

"I only want to know where they got it from," he persisted obstinately. "Some of those tales are so queer——"

"Inventions, fancies."

"I know," replied Marwood, exasperated, "but where did they get them from?"

"Well, there's drink, and drugs." Janet tried to humour him.

"That only starts it off—do you think the vision is in the glass? It's in your brain and the drink sets it free."

"What's madness, then?" asked Janet finally. "What's raving lunacy?"

Marwood sat up in some excitement.

"Now don't you ask me that—don't you ask me what madness is——"

"You needn't be personal over the stupid argument. I wish you'd finish your book so that we could get away from here——"

"You don't like the place?"

"I don't say that. But we've been here long enough. It's rather lonely."

"Yes, it's rather lonely."

They both glanced round the room, the one large low living room, as if to confirm this impression of loneliness.

"Fancy sitting up in bed at night and feeling the Devil pulling the mattress from under you, or hearing an empty box opening and shutting, or something with eight feet shuffling round the house——"

"Robert," said Janet, "you couldn't frighten a child with those things, nowadays."

"Couldn't you? Couldn't you?"

"Of course not."

"What would you say if I told you I saw a gigantic negress, very lean, with a huge red turban, prying round the house and staring in at my window?"

"I should say that it was a poor joke."

"So it is," responded Marwood grimly, "a very poor joke."

"Silly."

"Silly," agreed Marwood.

They sat in silence a little while.

It was real silence in the cottage, heavy palpable silence.

That night Marwood stayed up late, writing or reading, Janet did not know which ; she heard him talking to himself—a bad habit that had lately increased upon him, a habit to be discouraged.

They awoke to snow so thick that the dawn could scarcely penetrate the heavy chilled clouds ; the fields were pure against a dirty sky.

A few days off Christmas Eve now.

"I hope you got on all right last night," said Janet.

"Splendidly."

"Really begun the ghost story ?"

"Really begun."

"Well, I shall be glad when you've finished and we can get away."

"That's the trouble," said Marwood. "It isn't so easy to get away, in fact it's extraordinarily difficult."

"What do you mean, quite ?"

"Oh, I can't keep explaining what I mean," he replied testily.

She left him alone.

Queer how the snow added to the loneliness ; they seemed absolutely cut off from humanity ; if it hadn't been for that glimpse of the tradespeople and the postman Janet would have felt herself completely isolated ; she wanted to go to the village, just to see people, but it was a long way and there was the snow, and her husband didn't seem to care to be left alone.

"Someone might come to the door and interrupt me——"

"Not likely."

"You never know. The Vicar perhaps. And I really can't be interrupted."

Janet stayed in.

That evening they sat alone round the fire ; the snow had ceased, there was a wind and a frost ; they had been to the door several times to look at the stars and to listen to the church bells, practising for Christmas Day, that could just be heard in the absolute stillness.

" Funny," said Marwood, " if something really came along——"

" What do you mean, Robert ? "

" Ghosts, or devils——"

She laughed thinly : they evaded each other's look.

" Mind you," Marwood added earnestly, " if any were to come, I couldn't bear it ; I've been thinking it over—and I really couldn't."

Janet smiled at his joke.

" You aren't afraid ? " she asked feebly.

" How can you be afraid of what you don't believe in ? I never believed in them, did I ? "

Still they didn't look at each other ; Marwood lowered his voice and continued :

" What I am afraid of is *Fear*."

" Afraid of being afraid ? " she suggested.

" That's it—if you were afraid now, if you looked afraid—if I saw *Fear*—anywhere," he answered confidentially.

" This is foolish," said Janet stoutly. " We are really shut up too much alone."

Marwood looked sullen ; he remarked that he had a bad headache ; temper, translated Janet, who was beginning to be nettled herself—and it was lonely.

Lonely.

They locked and barred and bolted it all up, they put out all the lights but one candle, and went up to bed.

Janet could not get to sleep ; she thought it was because the silence was oppressive.

But Marwood was asleep, and dreaming, she thought, by his mutterings and tossings.

Janet felt uneasy ; what a lot of queer things her husband had said lately ! He wasn't really a bit like his usual level-headed self ; she would be glad when they got away from this place and all these ghost books.

Then Janet heard a faint noise.

Outside the house.

A shuffling, scraping, peculiar sort of noise. What had Marwood said about *SOME* thing with eight feet ?

Janet struck a match and lit the candle by the bedside ; in the spurt of yellow light she saw her husband's face staring up from the pillow.

" It's nothing," she said quickly. " Some stray dog."

" Oh, you *do* hear it, then ? "

" Of course—a stray dog, I say."

Marwood sat up and they listened.

The noise seemed to encompass the house ; it was as if they were being surrounded, beleaguered in the cottage.

" A dog," said Marwood.

Then the shuffling was broken by a hoarse, quickly suppressed laugh.

Janet gripped her husband's shoulder ; they stared at each other, shivering.

" If it *is*," whispered Marwood. " I can't bear it."

" Nonsense. It *ISN'T*."

They peered forward across the murk of the room ; the window space now showed faintly luminous, a square of reddish light ; at the sight of this doubtless infernal illumination Janet winced.

" You're afraid," gibbered Marwood. " I can see that—you're afraid."

" No—I'm going down to find out——"

He clung to her.

" No, you're not——"

A sudden clash, wail and howl tore the tension.

Marwood shrieked.

" I knew they couldn't have invented it all, I knew they'd got the stuff somewhere ! It's true ! It's true ! "

" What's true ? " mumbled Janet.

" Devils, ghosts—there outside—legions of 'em."

The howl took form and substance ; it became :

" Hark, the Herald Angels sing——"

With triangle and trombone accompaniment.

" The Waits," sighed Janet, trembling.

Marwood never wrote his ghost story ; he composed instead an essay on " Fear," but he would not care to have it published.

You see, he never believed they *were* the Waits.

“ ILLUSION D’HYACINTHE BLANCHE ”

A PARISIAN IDYLL—1890

IT has been said of love that one of its greatest charms is that it is a panacea against boredom, that most insidious enemy of idle human nature.

And it was mainly to escape a quite definite boredom that Harry Considine persuaded himself that he was in love with anything so elusive, so quite impossibly difficult, so obviously spoilt and *outré* as Thérèse Fabre.

He was not attracted by the fact that it was the fashion to be in love with her, but indeed vexed that he had not made a more exclusive choice, nor was he greatly impressed by the force of her genius ; his acknowledgment of her as one of the greatest of actresses was a little cold.

It was the woman herself with her extraordinary exotic delicacy, her air of secret magnificence, her serene and weary loveliness—who attracted his too-sensitive judgment, his over-fastidious taste.

Considine was a diplomat who had seen too much and known too much for the measure of his youth not to overflow with experience not often sweet.

He was clever and pleasant and comely in quite the right sort of way and was assured of success in due course, for there was no flaw in his relations, his means and his prospects.

But as his qualities were not of the driving, brilliant or pushing order (he was too aristocratic and sane for anything of that kind) the waiting period of humdrum duties was naturally long, and as he moved comfortably from capital to

capital in elegant but subordinate employ, he was more often and more ferociously attacked by the demon boredom.

And so, finding his stately steps stayed in Paris for some considerable time, he encouraged himself to fall in love with Thérèse Fabre.

He toyed with this cool passion.

She had her own theatre and produced strange and extravagant dramas that showed off her curious personality. To each of them Considine went several times, studying the actress with an almost cruel scrutiny, rediscovering her peculiar traits under this and that disguise.

Her costumes were as remarkable as the ease with which she wore them.

She appeared sometimes in the most severe classic drapery, sometimes in a baroque gown of hoops and panniers with yard-long feathers on her head, sometimes in the stiff golden and coral robes of a Chinese queen with her face painted to the likeness of an Oriental mask, and sometimes in a wisp of a dress of to-day, her features not “ made up ” and looking pallid and weary in the glow of the foot-lights.

The *décor* of her plays was always beautiful. Considine had seen her moving through dim enchanted forests, sleeping on high brocaded beds, pacing rose-laden terraces, reclining in great lacquer chairs under satin palanquins so that she was woven into the stuff of dreams and fairy-tales, associated with vague, unreal dim lights, with heavy perfumes and languorous music.

It was with a sense almost of pain that he went to his first interview with Thérèse Fabre. He had woven so many illusions round this enchanting figure that he had a sensitive dread of dispelling the magic of the theatre, of looking behind the mask, of seeing the natural stature of the woman without the buskins.

Yet his desire to behold her in her natural life, to talk to her, was imperative.

He was now very definitely in love.

She received him in a dressing-room furnished in a dull gold colour and filled with the fumes of Eastern pastilles smoking in a little brazier.

The play was over, and she reclined, wearily, on a low scarlet divan, turned so that she could see herself in a queer oval mirror that hung opposite.

She was wrapped in what seemed a straight length of wine-coloured silk, and her maid removed, carefully and slowly, the elaborate braids of pearls from her warm, dark, curling hair.

She gave the young Englishman one glance for his grace and distinction and another for the homage in his eyes.

It still never failed to please even her satiated vanity to see that she did not disappoint as a woman the expectations she had raised as an actress.

Again and again had she seen that questioning look of almost frightened anticipation give place to the relief of rapturous admiration. She was a Basque, triumphantly young and healthy, the years of her conquering success coming after a girlhood of hardship and simplicity that had left her strong and robust under the artificial languors of her present life.

She gave Considine her hand; she spoke to him of her play; braid by braid the pearls slipped on to her smooth shoulders, over her breast, on to her lap from there, her silk-spread knees. She gathered them up and put them in an ivory box lined with blue velvet.

"You send me too many flowers," she smiled. "They stifle me. Or, rather, you do not send them to me, but to Hélène, Zaire, Margaret, Melusine, the parts I play——"

"Always to you," he answered. "Directly and only to you."

She shook her head.

"No," she said sadly. "Only to the illusion I create."

"You create no illusion."

“Fie, do you say that I am a bad actress, then?”

“I say you are the thing you profess to be—it is not any illusion.”

She looked at him, half mocking.

“You thought so, till to-night.”

“No, no,” he protested.

“Confess that you were almost afraid to come here.”

“Why should I be? I knew that you were young and beautiful——”

“But you thought,” she insisted, “that I might destroy your dreams—I saw that in your eyes.”

She suffered him to argue with her on this topic.

While she accepted his worship with a languid interest, she strove to prove to him that she was for him but an illusion, a mere figment of dreams and fancies, a symbol of beauty, of Magic.

“And this beauty, this Magic is,” she said, “all in the mind of the beholder. It is you who create the creature you admire.”

It was sufficient to listen to her low mournful voice and to watch the perfect woman in the perfect setting.

Only one thing jarred on Considine.

Seated on a stool, just under the gold-shaded electric light on the dressing-table, was a girl mending lace.

She was very plain, and, more than plain, commonplace and ordinary.

A cheap string of glass beads was round her neck. She wore an old-fashioned blouse and skirt, the first check, the second drab, and the street mud was on her laced boots.

On the carpet beside her was a fustian-looking hat, with a gaudy dyed quill in it, and her drab coat.

Considine found himself obliged to look at a creature so incongruous and displeasing; he understood that she was a professional lace-mender, entrusted with the mending of lace too valuable to leave the owner’s possession, but he could not understand why Thérèse Fabre tolerated her in her presence,

nor how she could endure in these austere lovely surroundings this blot of ordinary ugliness.

When he took his leave Thérèse Fabre gave him her hand again.

"If you send me any more flowers let them be white hyacinths," she said. "I am weary of all other kinds."

These frail and stately blooms, the resurrection of beauty in mid-winter, well expressed the personality of the actress.

She also had this pallid honey flushed whiteness warmed with the faintest tones of amber and gold, this immaculate fragrance, this still dignity conveyed by the pure clusters of the rich flower.

Considine searched the great opulent florists' shops for white hyacinths.

When slush and snow disfigured the roaring, hungry, cold streets, and bitter winds blew the beggars into the doorways of frozen buildings, the dressing-room of Thérèse Fabre was always full of white hyacinths.

She ceased to use the exotic perfumes that effaced the delicate odours of the flower, and her person was always enveloped in this chill scent of the spring.

Considine progressed in friendship, not in love. She admitted him into many recesses of her subtle, too-clever mind, but she kept closed to him her heart.

If indeed she ever could, or would, open this to any. . . .

Considine thought that, in this also, she was like the white hyacinth, that hot-house loveliness that perishes with the first natural warmth of spring.

He continued to be irritated by the presence of the lace-mender; not always, but often, her dull ugliness of dress and figure and face would be obtruded on him; the maid he could accept as part of the necessary furniture of the dressing-room, but this girl thrust forward memories of hideous things.

He was sure that she would go home on a packed, filthy tram, jostled with dirty, tired people; he could imagine the

gaunt, arid house she lived in, somewhere in those desolate regions, “the fortifications”; he could visualize her coarse food, her whole sordid surroundings.

One day he found her sitting beneath a big silver bowl of the white hyacinths.

The sight enraged his nerves.

When she had gone, he asked :

“Why do you have that poor girl here? Doesn’t it bother you to see her?”

“The lace-maker?” asked the actress indifferently. “Oh, she is very ugly and no doubt imbecile, but she mends excellently—lace and stockings, and even veils and chiffons.”

“She looks very clumsy for such delicate work,” returned Considine resentfully.

“You dislike her? I assure you she is to be pitied. You have no idea how roughly she lives, how little she earns.”

“I have,” he said. “That is why I do not care to see her. She reminds me of all that I want to forget.”

“The next time that you come when she is here,” said Thérèse Fabre gravely, “we will put up a screen round her and tell her that it is to prevent her being disturbed by our chatter.”

“But she will be able to hear us just the same,” objected Considine.

“And do you think that she is able to understand?” smiled the actress.

He did not think it likely that she would be able to understand anything but her fine stitching; yet he was irked by the sight of the bright lacquer screen (a deep coral red and a notable background for white hyacinths) that he knew concealed the bent, shabby, dull figure of the seamstress.

After one of his visits, very suddenly he was dismissed from the dressing-room and any contemplation either of the lace-mender, or the spiral gold dragons on the shining crimson lacquer that hid her plainness, for Thérèse Fabre told him, in

one indifferent breath, that she was leaving the stage and taking a husband.

This person was a strange cosmopolitan of wealth approaching the tales of fable, of vague but Eastern nationality, of polished manners, and a vast understanding of women.

The actress gave no reason for her choice which withdrew the radiance of her kindness from so many of her adorers.

She said that she was tired and that this man could take her to the kind of lotus land she loved. She was married in January and left Paris for one of the islands in the Ægean Sea.

Considine almost filled the church with white hyacinths; the bride allowed him to do this, but her bridal flowers were queer Chinese lilies with flaming, spotted throats.

Considine used his not inconsiderable influence to hasten his removal to Rome.

As far as he was concerned the delicate play had been serious enough, the sting was deeper and the wound sharper than either his pride or his affections cared to acknowledge.

This successful and pleasing young man felt wretchedly lonely; he swiftly earned the reputation in the quick Italian society of being morose.

And then her love letters began to arrive.

There very definitely opened out to him, if not a new earth, at least, what is perhaps more important, a new heaven.

She wrote all the things he had hoped to hear her say; she disclosed all the passion and tenderness he had scarcely dared think that she possessed; she soared to the heights of those peaks of emotion to which before she had only raised her glance.

She told him that she loved him and she showed him what love can be, in mystery, in power and eternal strength.

"You will think me faithless," she wrote, "but my love is a treasure that will not bear the light of day—like fairy gold. I could not risk that you should tire of me as a wife, or hold me cheaply as a mistress. Love me the most difficult way,

with the love of pain and parting, of eternal separation, of spiritual communion.

“ Did I not tell you that I was only an illusion ? Preserve me as an illusion, and I will perfume your life as the white hyacinth perfumes the lonely woods in spring.”

The coming of the letter was, to Considine, like the rising of the sun out of the sea, flooding all the world with light.

To many men such an oblique and mysterious love affair would have been an offence, an affectation, a puerile pretence of the shallow wits of vanity to masquerade as passion.

But Considine’s peculiar temperament was suited by this indirect and subtle affair, a certain fastidious weariness of everyday events, a certain half-cynical melancholy of disposition, even a certain laziness of mind were well served by the method chosen by Thérèse Fabre.

He answered ; taking not long enough time to keep her waiting and too long for his reply to be a mere ejaculation of surprise or emotion.

She wrote again.

And before the Italian summer had played the blue-gold skies to the bleached violet azure of winter, Considine’s whole life was set to the secret melody of these letters.

They always came in slim, smooth envelopes, written on smooth, plain paper with no distinguishing mark beyond the perfume of white hyacinth. Wherever Thérèse Fabre might be, the letters were invariably sent from Paris, and it was to the address written at the top that Considine always sent his replies, addressing them, as she requested, to an assumed name.

An old servant, of priceless discretion, was, she explained, the intermediary.

Considine had at first thought these precautions childish, yet they were only what was to be expected on the part of a French-woman and an actress, and the method had conveniences ; while he watched her movements in the society “ gazettes,” he always posted his letters to “ Mdlle Jane Mailly, 2 rue

Eglantine, Paris (VII *arronde.*)," and gradually did so mechanically, without criticism of the method.

Thérèse proved herself more than a great lover; her letters showed wisdom and the imagination of a poet.

She painted the ineffable luxury of her surroundings in quick, warm words; the pink lotus and the papyrus growing out of the glassy water at the foot of the tall Egyptian columns, the orange groves in Sicily, the vivid fruit, first jade, then flame, amid wax-white flowers and leaves nearly black, edging the desolation of the gaunt scorched country, the forgotten beauty of the Black Sea, darkly reflecting the luxuriant coast, the strange wild splendours of Montserrat, full of mystic remembrances, the sad glooms of ancient Moorish palaces beyond Granada, the haunted quiet of deserted monasteries on the luxuriant banks of the Rhine.

So, as she moved from place to place, she wrote of her impressions, and always ended her vivid sentences with one that seemed like a quick cry:

"It is all illusion, illusion! Only my love for you is real."

He recalled how she had always insisted on that word, and now she had beguiled him into sharing her view.

"Illusion is the only true happiness," she wrote. "How can so gross a thing as reality yield genuine delight?"

"Confess that the whiff of white hyacinth that comes to you with this letter gives you more joy than the rich odours of the rose that you hold in your hand, and could, if you wished, tear to pieces.

"I am unattainable, yet infinitely possessed. I shall never grow old, or stale, or commonplace—you will never weary of me.

"It is impossible for me to bore you, yet I am always with you—in the light, in the trees and flowers when the festival lamps are lit among them, in the stars behind the cold clouds, in the misty visions that come to you when you wake in the night."

It was a year after her first letter came that he met her—almost with a sense of shock—even of faint dismay.

Unexpectedly he found himself in Athens, believing her to be in Tunis; the date of her last letter was Tunis.

And then, at a cosmopolitan gathering to which he had gone with a lively apprehension of boredom, he saw her across the room.

And recognized her with a pang that was as if she had subtly been translated into a stranger, so different was the woman he beheld with his outer senses to the woman of the letters he loved with his inner senses. Illusion! Illusion!

She greeted him with a composure that was almost too perfect; his vanity was irritated. He looked at the fair still hand that had so often traced the words, “I love you, I love you,” coupled with his name, and thought how ironical it was that he must not touch it, save in the lightest of greeting.

Not only was she absolutely at her ease, she even contrived an effect of vagueness; as if she had almost forgotten him and was trying to recall him as she spoke.

This piqued him, and when the shifting groups left them for a moment almost alone, he showed it in a faint hostility.

“The only happiness is illusion,” he quoted her own words. “How far you carry your cult.”

“My cult?” she queried lazily.

“Your mystery, if you will,” he returned.

“I do not think that I have ever been mysterious with you,” she replied.

This spurred Considine to still further directness.

“You do not use white hyacinth perfume to-night,” he said.

A wrinkle of bewilderment troubled her smooth brows.

“Ah, yes, you are the man who used to send me white hyacinths,” she reflected. “I remember—those chill spring flowers—have not you, like myself, found the perfume rather sickly by now?”

He thought that she was pushing her perversity too far.

"I am glad, however, that you still use it on your letters," he said.

"Letters?" She echoed the word as if he had affronted her. "But I consider perfumed stationery so vulgar."

She turned away as if she did not wish to further speak to him, and he looked after her tall silver figure with resentment.

The mask was too firmly fastened for his liking; she might, by a smile, a hand-clasp, a glance, have varied it for a second; surely he had deserved as much as that.

She was too discreet; even Considine, man of the world and diplomat, disliked a woman over-prudent in her love affairs.

The next morning he received another passionate letter, posted in Paris, forwarded from Rome; before he replied to it he resolved to see Thérèse again.

Enquiries at the house of the mutual acquaintance where they had met before revealed that she had left Athens.

"I think she has gone yachting with her husband," said the lady. "No one really sees much of her since her marriage."

Considine could scarcely conceal his chagrin.

"Thérèse is so successful, isn't she?" continued his hostess with a spice of malice. "She always does the right thing."

"As far as effect is concerned?" asked Considine sourly.

The lady laughed.

"Well, anyhow, she has had the supreme good taste to fall in love with her husband."

Considine did not like the sound of that; Thérèse was evidently too perfect an illusionist.

But he could not resist her letters; she had drawn him into an enchantment from which he could in no wise escape.

He wrote to her, reproaching her with her behaviour at their meeting, and she replied with a sweet cloud of mystical excuses.

A month later he was again in Paris; there was now no object in his avoidance of this city, but it depressed him. The season was once more winter, a chill leaden period when the

streets looked squalid and filthy, the ancient buildings iron hard and iron cold. Considine had the fancy to discover the rue Eglantine.

A vague and languid fancy at first, but startled into activity by the fact that no one knew of such a street.

Thereupon he took uncommon trouble to trace it, and discovered it to be in an outlying and very poor district.

He had not thought that any former servant of Thérèse would be living in poverty, and curiosity urged him to find the place where he had addressed so many love letters, *the* love letters of his life.

It was a pitiful pilgrimage ; the fastidious young man shuddered at the ugly windings of the gaunt streets, the high grim buildings, the greasy roads and metallic tram lines, the cheap shops and drab crowds.

The rue Eglantine was a slum ; the number he looked for was a sad tenement house ; what ironic caprice had induced Thérèse to use this sordid corner for their beautiful correspondence ? What former servant of hers could have been left in this indigence ?

A trickling rain was falling, a north wind whistling ; everything looked mud colour in the twilight.

Considine thought of her letters, of the blue sea, where she now was, of white hyacinths. What poor old hag was the depository of her secret—their secret ?

He asked the frowsy portress if she knew the name of Mlle Jane Mailly ?

The woman jerked a thumb up the sombre stairs, and with a glare of suspicion, said :

“ Third *étage*, first door.”

So Jane Mailly was the name of the go-between—perhaps she even opened his letters . . . it was a curious, a repulsive thought. . . .

He toiled up the cold, enclosed stairs, lit only by a thin jet of gas on each floor.

"Illusion!" he said to himself. "Illusion! What illusion could carry anyone away from this?"

He knocked at the first door of the third *étage*; he searched in his pocket-book for money; he would be more generous than Thérèse had been to this miserable "confidante" of her queer choice.

There was a gentle shuffling on the other side of the door. It was opened by the lace-mender.

She wore the same skirt, the same blouse, but now spectacles further disfigured her strained eyes. As she stared at him in dumb fright, one horrible glimpse showed him the wretched room behind her; the table with a pile of mending and a packet of thin, smooth, expensive note-paper, a rickety shelf where stood some cracked crockery, a few thumbed guide books; he could read the names on the back, staring at him with brutal mockery: "Sicily," "Algiers," "Spain," "Egypt."

As Jane Mailly shrank back and back before him and the agony of his amaze, she knocked against the loaded table.

A bottle of cheap perfume rolled off and spilled between them on the dusty drugget. An unbearable odour filled the man's nostrils; stupidly he picked the bottle up; stupidly he noted that it had cost ten francs (a long time to earn that, Jane Mailly, mending lace) and was labelled "Illusion d'hyacinthe blanche."

A TRAVELLER'S TRUE TALE

THE EDUCATION OF A MAN OF QUALITY—1800

AS the horse struggled round the uphill bend of the snowy road, the wheel of the coach twisted over the broken linch-pin and the heavy vehicle tipped to the ground; the three occupants climbed out and consulted with the coachman and postillion; they were yet in sight of a wintry sea; a chill wind was blowing sharply over the bare, rising fields, the moon shining cold, clear in a silvery void of sky over the North Foreland; the travellers hunched themselves into their coats, thrust their hands in their pockets and walked up and down the road where the first snowdrifts had been hardened by a light frost; they comprised a young gentleman who was important enough to travel with an *incognito*—Mr. John Falconer, his body-servant, and tutor. This latter, Dr. Sopher, grumbled:

“Sir, this might have been foreseen—a crazy hired carriage! How much more reasonable to have spent the night in Marygate!”

“The fellows here,” replied the young man, “say it is only a matter of half an hour to fetch a wheelwright.”

“’Tis likely. But who, sir, will relish even a brief delay in this forlorn spot, encompassed by the night, the winter, after thirteen hours in that murderous Dutch packet?”

Mr. Falconer replied with dry irony:

“Sir, we have travelled two years round Europe and this is our first adventure—nay, our first discomfort.”

“’Tis to be hoped, sir,” snapped the indignant clergyman, “that the world has become sufficiently civilized for gentlemen

to travel without fear of one or the other—and this, sir, is a mere vulgar mishap, due entirely to your unaccountable desire to make a push for London.”

Dr. Sopher, with this, jerked up his coat collar, pulled down his hat flaps, passed a rug round his body and seated himself on the roadside with grim resignation, to await the resumption of the tedious journey.

“Indeed, I blame myself, sir,” admitted Mr. John Falconer, who was possessed of sensibility and delicacy, and who perceived that the tutor, who had suffered severely during the passage from Helvoetsluys, really appeared ill; “and I will endeavour to discover some shelter; there is surely a house or cottage in the neighbourhood.”

He made enquiries of the coachman (the postillion having departed to fetch the wheelwright) and learnt that in a hollow of the Downs, not half a mile away, was a mansion belonging to a Sir William Taverner who, if not there himself, would have servants in charge; Mr. Falconer examined the wheel, he perceived that it would take some time to mend, that indeed further progress that night might be impossible, and, telling his servant to do what was possible for Dr. Sopher, he set over across the hill-side fields in the direction the coachman had indicated.

His rank was sufficient to admit him into palaces and he had no hesitation in demanding the hospitality of a country gentleman of Kent, and stepped out briskly across the wide, solitary, moonlit downs.

He reflected, smiling, on his own recent remark—two years travelling in Europe and this their first accident . . . the dull, slow years, the young man had visited Electoral and Royal Courts, heard the Opera at Venice, examined the ruins at Rome, seen a royal wedding at Vienna, pried into the rich confusion of costly churches, the damp glooms of catacombs, the varied splendours of picture galleries and cabinets of curiosities, been caressed by the most polished society, smiled on with

gracious partiality by delicious ladies and found it all very tedious.

And not one adventure had broken the monotony of well-arranged, well-introduced progress, no episode had occurred which had aroused his passions, his wonder or his desires.

He had seen, heard, learned nothing that would make him forget, for one disloyal moment, Henrietta Pentelow.

As he breasted the bare shoulder of the downs he paused, oblivious of the stinging cold, forgetful of his errand, and took from the pocket of his travelling-coat a small gold snuff-box enamelled with a tiny picture of *amorini*, rosy, tender as flower petals; he opened this and gazed with delight at the contents, a male sapphire of Indian blue.

The moonlight struck this magnificent gem with cold azure fire, from every cunningly-cut facet flashed a long sparkle of beamy light; the blue of the rare stone was more than a colour, it was an emotion.

For Henrietta Pentelow.

A year ago he had sent her another such jewel, which he had bought from an impoverished collector in Torino . . . her letter of loving thanks lay with her other letters, all too few, on his heart; he had found the second sapphire at Prague among the merchandise of an old, secret Jew; these gorgeous jewels were to hang in her ears, to cast blue shadows on her perfect neck, to gleam beneath the silken lustre of her hooped curls and her bridal wreath.

The young man returned the snuff-box, the gem safe within, to his pocket and, musing sweetly, continued on his way; he was soon out of sight of the road, the coach, his companions, the sea; alone on the wintry downs beneath the November moon. Falconer was at last free to marry Henrietta Pentelow; six weeks ago he had been of age; his famous title, his great wealth, his huge estates, were his to deal with as he would; he could lay all at the feet of Henrietta Pentelow . . . the sweet, still, tranquil maiden. . . . This young man was of such im-

portance that his guardians had forbidden his marriage with his love because she was the daughter of a private gentleman, and he had had to endure these weary two years with Dr. Sopher—but that was over ; to-morrow he would be in London where Henrietta Pentelow was waiting for her love, her fortune to be put into her hand, like a rose for her heart.

A gather of wind that rushed by his ears and sent his coat flapping reminded him of his immediate business ; he had, absorbed in enchanting reveries, wandered without regard to the instructions of the Marygate coachman ; glancing about him he perceived that he had climbed to a considerable height and stood (as it seemed) directly under the moon, with, beneath, a gently-sloping hollow in which, clearly showing in this pale light, was a small house set in the interlaced thickness of the black boughs of a close grove of nearly leafless trees, and approached by a bridle-path.

If he had been in Italy or Germany Falconer would have considered this scene very romantic and affording some prospects of adventure, but as he stood in an English field, a few miles from the busy town of Marygate, he merely reflected that the house was very retired, and inconveniently situated. Indeed, having traversed Europe without encountering any of those odd or peculiar incidents, people or scenes that he had often read of in the books labelled *Travellers' True Tales*, he had ceased to expect anything extraordinary, either in nature or humanity.

But, as he descended the hill, the danger of footpads did occur to him ; he was resolute and sensible, and he looked to the pistol at his belt and put his gloved hand on his stout travelling-sword . . . it was not likely ruffians would lie at catch in a place so remote, yet there lingered a menace in this complete solitude.

A few moments' brisk walking brought him to the little wood, which reminded him (he being newly instructed in the classics) of that passage in *Lucan* that speaks of the dark groves that

shelter cruel priests whose sacrifices to unknown powers smear the black tree trunks with smoking, human blood, or of those sombre forests in the Vosges that were so dense and gloomy that the Roman legions quailed as they proceeded . . . these similes were too grandiose for the occasion since this was but a group of English oaks in a hollow of English hills.

An unpretentious iron gate hung open on the gradual ascent of the path to the trim mansion ; the moonlight showed the grey façade with the windows discouragingly shuttered ; the silence was only disturbed by the intermittent passage of the wind through the almost bare trees and a shower of dank leaves tumbling to the frost-hard ground.

Falconer hesitated.

His errand appeared futile ; he considered it might be wiser to return to the road and wait the accommodation of the coach, for Sir William Taverner was obviously not in residence, and, should the mansion be inhabited at all there seemed not much prospect of obtaining here any but a bleak hospitality ; Falconer, fastidious, elegant, luxurious, did not relish the thought of a night in this small disused-seeming house ; rather the hired coach that brought him every moment nearer to Henrietta Pentelow. . . .

He disliked, however, an unfinished errand and was, moreover, impelled by a vague curiosity.

So, he approached the house.

The trees formed a semicircle before the closed door with the classic porch, the blank windows ; there was no indication of life.

But on the lowest of the three shallow steps lay a dark object which the moonlight outlined in black shadow.

Falconer observed that this was a man's gauntlet ; he picked it up and could have vowed that it came from his own glover in St. James's Street ; it certainly did not belong to a servant.

Encouraged by this discovery Falconer walked round the house with the glove in his hand ; at the back of the mansion

a low terrace and a small plot of grass divided the house from the encompassing wood, all in the heavy shadow cast by the building which reached the thin dark interwoven shadows flung from the sighing boughs of the thick close oak trees.

Four windows gave on to this terrace ; the last of them was unshuttered and disclosed a feeble illumination ; Falconer advanced briskly and struck on the window-frame ; the room was concealed by curtains between which the faint glimmer of light was revealed.

Falconer's knock was answered by a woman's low cry of alarm, so doleful and penetrating that Falconer felt himself impelled to push open the unlatched window and enter the room.

The scene which he beheld was not extraordinary ; the room appeared to have been furnished by an ordinary upholsterer ; hangings, furniture, were commonplace. The wall facing the window was filled by folding doors, slightly ajar ; a modest fire glowed on the ash-strewn hearth ; on a small side-table was a tea equipage and cakes, wine bottles and sweetmeats ; on a chair were coats, hats and walking canes. The lady who had cried out had disappeared—through the folding-doors, no doubt. Falconer gazed at the only occupant of the room ; a gentleman who reclined on a sophy by the fire and returned the scrutiny with a keen, inquisitive, mocking glance.

"The Devil must have sent you here," remarked this personage.

"Sir, I trust not," replied Falconer, who was not used to liberties and disliked ribaldry. "Are you Sir William Taverner ?"

"Sir, I am not."

"Is this that gentleman's house ?"

"It is not."

"Then I have mistook my way."

"You have indeed. Taverner's place is in the other direction. Did I not say that the Devil had guided you ?"

"For your convenience?" asked Falconer, haughtily, resenting the other's easy, jeering, cold tone.

"Precisely. Though, no doubt, you came here for your own."

"To ask an ordinary courtesy. A trivial accident has overtaken me."

"I," replied the lolling gentleman, with an added depth of sarcastic scorn, "have been overtaken by an accident that is not trivial."

Falconer approached him; he was in shadow, for the one lamp was concealed (oddly) behind the tea urn on the table beyond the sophy, and his person was partially hidden by a light dimity wrapper, such as Falconer knew as hairdressers' or barbers' bibs, which had evidently been flung hastily over his shoulders; apart from this unusual garment the man on the sophy made a figure familiar to Falconer, that of a fine gentleman, handsome, fashionably attired; even the uncertain light could not disguise his uncommon pallor, this and the barber's wrap were all that was remarkable, in Falconer's eyes, about the stranger who added, with an unpleasant sneer:

"You are very young, are you not?"

Young enough to blush at this; Falconer was almost stung into declaring his rank which was such as would bring this insolent lounging fellow to his feet, but disdained that expedient and drily explained his errand and his need; with his hat in his hand he stood erect, indifferent, disliking the moment, too proud to notice the other's sharp appraisal of his person and appointments, both of which were extremely good to contemplate; Falconer was as comely as he was elegant and had that cold proud air that gracefully disguises the warm romantic passions of the young English aristocrat.

"I cannot assist you," remarked the stranger.

Falconer bowed stiffly; he then noticed the glove he carried with his hat.

"I found this on your step," he said, very severe at the other's rebuff, and was taking his leave when the lolling gentleman added :

"Ah, yes. Place it beside me. You, I was about to say, can assist me."

"I regret my time is hardly at my own disposal."

"Oblige me," said the stranger, "and move the lamp from behind the urn."

As Falconer hesitated, the other added :

"As a favour."

Falconer went behind the sophy and brought the lamp forward so that the coarse yellow light fell over the face now upturned towards him ; a face of considerable beauty set in an expression of resolution and self-mocking, but a face colourless indeed, with a faint distortion about the wide nostrils and deep-cut lips that were of a hue Falconer's brief experience had not seen on a human countenance before . . . the ringlets on the low forehead were dank with sweat, and there was a sinister darkness beneath the handsome grey eyes.

"You are ill," murmured Falconer, bending down.

The other, gazing up, smiled.

"I have been murdered."

Falconer set down the lamp and snatched off the hair-dresser's wrap with great expedition ; he saw then the reason for this hasty concealment ; the gentleman's cravat, shirt and waistcoat were open, and he was holding to his breast with both hands a sponge and several napkins ; the blood had already penetrated these and soaked on to his pale cloth coat and breeches.

"That glove," he said, "belongs to my murderer."

"How can I help you ?" asked Falconer, pale himself, but calm as became his breeding. "You are not alone ? I heard a lady's voice ? Has a surgeon been sent for ?"

"You heard a lady," replied the wounded man. "She and I are alone in this house. And have been so alone since early

afternoon. It is impossible to send for assistance. Odd one lives so long, eh ? ”

He sighed ; Falconer observed that he was making severe efforts to speak ; his voice was faint, uneven.

“ I must be succinct. And mysterious. I'll not know your name or you mine—I am in a confounded predicament,” he shifted the napkins at his breast, fought down a spasm of faintness and added with casual contempt, “ Damn the women.”

“ I dare swear the women you are involved with are damned already,” remarked Falconer, stern in his young virtue and his steady fixed love.

“ A wise, sober remark, boy,” mocked the other, “ but I, as you said just now, have little time at my disposal. I am dying fast. I believe only my will has kept me alive so long. I was resolved ”—he struggled with his breath—“ to find some expedient—then—the Devil—sent you.”

He moved his bloodstained hand towards the glasses on the table beside him ; Falconer found a flask of *aqua vitæ*, poured some out and offered it to those grey lips.

“ A drop only . . . I must keep my wits clear. A few words will explain . . . an ordinary situation, eh ? A certain lady's husband pursued us here, set on me before I could draw . . . escaped.”

“ Leaving his wife in so horrible a plight ? ” asked Falconer, revolted at these ugly-tempered scenes thus evoked.

“ He could not find her . . . one has one's places of concealment. . . . I observed him coming . . . besides, she was not his wife.”

“ No ? ”

“ No—but, of course, I could not explain this without revealing the lady's identity. . . . Confound these intrigues ! . . . to what airy figures have I sacrificed my ease and life.”

Falconer perceived the coil, he did not perceive how he could unravel it, though his generosity was stirred by the thought of

the trapped woman's agony . . . she must be exposed to all the practices of scorn and ignominy.

"In brief," smiled the dying man, "my mistress has been alone in this house with me for—a cycle of torment—she loves me, but also her reputation; she knows her dishonour would involve others—the poor fond fool has a husband, children——"

"She could have escaped?"

"She was simple enough to endeavour to preserve me—and now it is late, eh? We came here on foot, leaving a carriage on the high road to Marygate; she meant to have returned hours ago, she was, in fact, leaving when that blundering rustical fellow arrived . . . now the worst mischief has befallen us."

He leant back exhausted; the blood oozed unheeded through his slack fingers; a faintness was on his spirits.

"It seems, on your own confession," said Falconer, sternly, "that you have seduced married women to confusion and shame, and I take you for one of those rake-hell fellows whose barbarous and brutish ends arouse not compassion but disgust."

"I'm past your moralities," the other smiled, wryly. "I ask you this—as one gentleman to another—will you, when I am dead—she'll not leave me sooner—take this lady away?"

"Yes."

"I thank you—this will pass for the work of thieves. I'll not be found for days as this house is credited not to be used—we came from London to-day—by different roads, eh?"

"Where am I to take the lady?" Falconer abhorred this duty.

The dying man had now a sharp difficulty with his speech, yet forced himself to put his design into execution.

"There's a house near Canterbury—where they give a great entertainment—she'll tell you—they expect her—take her there."

"But how?" asked Falconer, quite unused to intrigue and in a tumult of alarm and disgust. "And what tale shall I tell?"

The other grinned ; his eyes gazed hollowly through his fallen hair, he pressed his fingers on the bandages beneath his disordered attire ; he faced his inexorable foe.

“ Cannot you think that out ? No—well, I must—tact, discretion, eh ? You’ll learn in time.”

Falconer stood disdainful ; with a deep inner joy he thought of Henrietta Pentelow who moved in such a different world from this world that had been so brutally revealed to him—Henrietta, in her muslin and swansdown, who would be, even at this moment, safe in her tender home, among her young sisters, rapturously awaiting his return. . . . To give himself courage and fortitude (for he disliked all of this, felt sickened, outraged, struck) he put his hand in his pocket and caressed the enamelled snuff-box that contained the Indian sapphire, while he listened to the wounded man’s instructions. And, as he listened, Falconer could not resist an admiration for one he had already decided was a very worthless fellow, the victim of his vile passions, the cause of ruin to frail women. For, with infinite bravery, his companion strove against pain and death, with clear composure and scornful self-control he conceived and expounded his plans ; and there was, even in this moment of his overthrow and agony, a grace, a gaiety, a charm in his air, that accorded well with the beauty of that person avenging jealousy had so harshly destroyed ; no defection lowered the insolence with which he held off a fate like to have broken all patience.

For the first time Falconer learnt more of life than was contained in the books selected for him by Dr. Sopher, in the civil conversation of modish society—in the girlish adoration of Henrietta Pentelow—learnt something of the expedients of illicit passion and the reckless ingenuity of a practised rake.

For a year these two had been secret lovers, though he, at least, had not been faithful to the dishonouring hidden vows ; through his contrivance both had been asked to a marriage

entertainment at the mansion of an acquaintance ; her husband was abroad, and she had travelled with servants—women, a cousin—"all the panoply of virtue," in sedate safety as far as five miles or so from Canterbury, then, a feigned attack by his hired ruffians—cut traces, disarmed grooms, a hubbub, and the lover neatly to the rescue—a skilfully organized confusion, panic—the lady snatched up—he would escort her to their common destination—nay, servants as well, for decorum, then the valets outridden—his swift light carriage ready at a lonely bend—the country cut across—his desolate pleasure-house reached—the light carriage ordered again for two hours later (it waited in vain, eh? and not long, Jewel had his orders—"Whenever I am late, slip away"), with the most moderate luck they should have reached their destination unquestioned as to honour—Oh, an alarming experience, the wrong turn, a lame horse, a rest at an inn, the public stage,—“Eh, you see, as easy as that?”

“All this for one stolen meeting?” asked Falconer, amazed, disgusted.

“You understand nothing,” the dying man assured him, and fainted.

Falconer rubbed his drawn lips and damp temples with *aqua vitæ*, and endeavoured to staunch the flowing blood; he was horrified by the aspect of death, the loneliness of the scene, the tragedy of the circumstances, but resolved to act as a man of breeding; he wondered at the woman—how could she leave so long her dying lover? . . . these fierce, yet coward, passions were new to him.

As the gentleman sighed back to a feeble consciousness, Falconer voiced this question.

“She is in the next room, where I ordered her when we heard your knock,” was the whispered answer. “I make them obey me. She is not to come until I summon her.”

“She thinks of her reputation,” suggested Falconer, sadly.

“What else has she to think of? I suppose, you—can hardly

guess—what they become—poor, slight, silly wantons, when they lose their reputations.”

Falconer had guessed but never realized.

“ You will not ask who she is—she will wear her riding-mask—a married woman, remember, well-born—older than you—with children—brothers, a sister—all shamed, blighted, if this is discovered.”

He struggled up on his elbow and, with a firm effort, gasped out instructions.

“ You will say—you met her—on the road. I left her—hours before—for some other assignation, perhaps ; leave that—she was separated from her servants—thrown—nothing to connect her with me—eh, you’ve some wits, patch that up—I’ve known a worse tale serve when a woman is suspected. And she has never been blown upon.”

He coughed into his handkerchief.

“ I’ve nearly finished—call her—her mask——”

Falconer knocked on the inner door which still stood ajar. She must have overheard everything.

“ Madame, you are to come out. And wear your mask and riding-hood. I am a stranger who does not pretend to your acquaintance, but I desire to help you.”

The young man was proud of these sentences which he delivered in a steady voice, though awed by the situation, he eagerly desired to conduct himself in a manly and generous spirit.

The lady entered immediately ; she must have been waiting behind the doors ; she was sedulously disguised, a deep riding-hood, *calèche*, as they were named that year, stiffened with whalebone, was pulled over her face which was further concealed by one of those vizards ladies used to protect their complexions from the rigours of the climate.

A breath of horror seemed to enter with her, invisible disasters to lurk in the darkness of the room where she had waited ; Falconer saw her eyes flashing through the mask holes

in the depths of her hood ; she took no heed of the man on the sophy.

“ How whimsical that your grace should come here.”

“ You know me ? ” Falconer had never considered this possible complication.

“ I met your grace at Court. My name would shock you.”

“ Hush,” murmured Falconer, “ I’ll not know it, madame, and do you forget mine. . . . I travel *incognito* as John Falconer.”

“ You do well,” replied the lady, “ to overcast your quality since you are so high a prize in so many markets.”

The youth was deeply outraged by these words, which struck in so ghastly a manner into this scene.

“ You heard what Charles named me ? ” added the lady—“ light, wanton, foolish . . . such are my titles after obsequious affection and obedience.”

“ He is dying,” said Falconer, “ and the conduct of this affair falls on me.”

The woman moved to the sophy and bent above her lover who appeared to be dozing ; he had slipped sideways into the cushions.

“ I have watched him die—for hours,” she said. “ Charles, is it time to say farewell ? ”

She bent lower.

“ He is dead. Charles is dead. Vast passions, high designs and rich beauties die with Charles.”

Falconer was horrified as fascinated by her steadfast heartlessness.

“ He died, madame, with incredible constancy and valour . . . does not something smite you that he might have been preserved had you fetched help ? ”

“ I could not do that without blasting myself.”

“ But, madame, at the very height and felicity of love how could you consider so base a detail ? ”

The woman said, as the dead man had said :

"You understand nothing."

Falconer offered to adjust the collapsed figure decently on the sophy, but she stayed him, quietly.

"Leave him so that it seems an unperceived crime."

She raked out the fire, a dark shrouded figure with the monstrous hood; she turned down the lamp; they stood in a darkness flecked with only a mournful gleam of light from the fading embers.

"You are fortunate in not suffering most intensely," remarked Falconer, sternly.

"My suffering may find expression hereafter. I end a servitude. All Charles told you of me was lies."

"Yet lies for your service since he was past any ends of his own." Falconer was earnest to be gone from this dreadful house; he felt unsteady and uncertain in his resolves, at once awed by, and hostile to, the shrouded woman.

"Come, madame, let us put in practice the expedients of your friend. . . . I am to take you to your destination with a blown-up tale——"

She crept to his side.

"I know your Henrietta Pentelow."

"Forbear that name, madame, for pity."

"Do you then value in women nothing but their ignorance?"

With this ambiguous remark she glided on to the terrace. Falconer followed her, less uneasy when he was beneath the sky, though the dark bough moaning in the moonlight, the drift of drab leaves, the encompassing embrace of the winter-dead forest could not brighten his dampened spirit.

"Your grace has been notably faithful—you have resisted two years and many temptations, and returned to marry this little creature whom many do not consider seductive."

"Madame, if you continue on this theme, I may acquit myself of my obligation to you."

They followed the short way through the wood; an unseen

screech owl greeted them from the tangle of branches, Falconer was startled ; the lady laughed.

"Suppose," she said, "your Henrietta had learned something while you were away—something of what you have learnt to-night?"

"I can have no such gross imagination."

"Your grace is romantical. But, be at rest—your Henrietta is unchanged, docile, sweet—a doll baby, a smiling moppet—she will make a pretty little Duchess."

They were clear of the whispering wood, of the creaking, open iron gate, and out upon the moonlit downs ; Falconer did not look back at the house that contained the murdered man ; he wished to be staunch to his promise ; but, temperate and orderly himself, was in a confusion before these thoughtless, prodigal people, at once gay and tragic, and this amazing mesh of circumstance into which he had strayed . . . he thought of the broken coach, of Dr. Sopher, of the high road, as the incidents of another world . . . of London and Henrietta Pentelow waiting for him, as of another world yet ; this was his first adventure, his first experience of the horrible, the marvellous, the fantastic ; nor did the commonplace surrounding of down and sky mitigate his amazement, for this had changed into a dreadful bleakness ; the moon appeared to languish in a blank sky, the hill-side was covered with grass withered to the root.

They hastened ; he had forgotten the way, but she could find it ; they hastened, further and further from the scene of her tragic mischance.

"All Charles told you was false—will you hear another story ? One fiction goes as neatly as another. He was my husband and in a moment of jealousy I slew him——"

She spoke wildly now and he judged her to be wavering, trembling to tears.

"Hush, I will not learn of your story, nor of you—that confession is counterfeit—I am to save you, if I can."

They gained the road which was not so far as his imagination had conceived it ; the coach was ready, his servant anxiously looking out for him ; Dr. Sopher, on a disgust at the long delay, had pettishly returned to the comfort of the harbour inn, trudging with dudgeon to his bed ; easier then for Falconer, explanations to servants need not be more than brief, nor any question of the unmasking of the lady arise ; they took their seats in the coach which started on the London road, swinging, to Falconer, through the dingy, insipid depression of a nightmare.

They sat opposite each other ; she, one with the darkness of the interior ; he hoped that he would never have a closer knowledge of her than he now possessed. Sometimes she leaned forward to view the passing grey monotony of the landscape and to enquire of the way, and then he saw, in a fascination, the quick movement of her eyes through the mask holes.

Once she discovered a red smear on her small bare hand, and wiped it off carefully, diligently, with a crumpled handkerchief ; once she bent towards the window on some impatience and he saw a shaft of blue light at her bosom ; a jewel had swung free from her cloak and dangled in the moon-mist that fitfully penetrated the coach.

A blue jewel that seemed a body of azure flame bursting out of the colourless gloom ; the companion to the sapphire Falconer had lovingly concealed in his pocket.

“ You had that from Henrietta Pentelow ! ” he exclaimed, on a cry.

Her swift hand hid the gem, eclipsed the fire.

“ You know it ? Your gift ? It has too bold and rich a lustre for a young maid's wearing. ”

“ Why did she give it to you ? ” asked Falconer, passionately.

“ Ask her. ”

“ There could be no reason—no possible reason why she should part with my gift—so valuable, so rare. ”

“There might be many reasons, your grace is so young, so inexperienced, you trust women too utterly—you left your Henrietta for two years, remember, and Charles was most accomplished.”

“But, how do these names come together?”

“If we were rivals for the favours of Charles, she might have given me this as a bribe for silence, eh? Supposing I discovered her with Charles—and she so anxious to secure your grace, the finest match in England?”

Nothing could have sounded uglier in the ears of the sensitive, honourable youth than this; in the harshest tones he had ever used to a woman he commanded her silence; he was aware that never would he know the truth of her story, at once trivial and horrible, nor how she came by his Henrietta's jewel; but, as if she read this sad conviction of his, she said:

“Some day you will know everything.”

Then, retired into her hood, she began to sigh and weep, but not without a desperate attempt at control; Falconer listened to her soft and broken lamentation, her ejaculations of distress that contained the name of her lover, her whisperings of reproach as if she threatened herself for her cowardice.

They reached the house to which she had directed the coachman—a formal, cheerful mansion in pleasant parkland; the lady appeared to recover, if not her spirits, her courage, and ordered the coach to halt at the gates—she would go in alone—she would make her own tale; as she said this, there rang foolishly in Falconer's mind—*Travellers' True Tales*—he could have related one himself now.

She was thrusting a cold object into his hand.

“It is right I should return this.”

As he gazed at the sapphire and the snapped chain, she was running towards the house; lights flashed from the lower windows, the handsome door admitted her immediately; Falconer continued a detestable journey, after asking the postillion:

"What is the name of this house?"

"Merrion Court, sir."

Arrived in London, confused from disordered slumbers in the carriage, Falconer stirred himself to shake off infamous dreams; a midday visit to a prim house in Queen Street gave him the news that Miss Pentelow was out of town, her family on their estate; uneasy but resolute he waited on his uncle and late guardian, Colonel Douglas; this gentleman's greeting reminded him that he was returned sooner than was expected.

He had forgotten that; it accounted for his Henrietta's absence; yes, by pushing on impatiently from stage to stage he had arrived in London a week before his time.

"Did you have any adventures, John?"

"None, sir, till I reached Marygate—and there the hired coach met with an accident and I lost Dr. Sopher."

Both the gentlemen laughed; there was a different quality in their merriment; Falconer laughed too long, too loudly.

"Henrietta Pentelow is out of town," he remarked, still laughing.

"She is often out of town. She has become Maid of Honour to the Princess—she told you?"

"No."

"Well, I have respected our agreement not to mention her name while you were abroad—you'll find her changed. She's much admired—her dresses, her exploits are daring. I leave you to judge you have rivals. It is thought that Lord Charles Scroop would have married her out of hand had he not possessed a wife——"

"Who?" asked the young man, steadily, fingering the two sapphires in his pocket.

"Charles Scroop—he was in Brussels when you left—a notable scoundrel."

His Grace was surprised at his own calm . . . but two years is a long time for youth.

"Where is Miss Pentelow?—But you'll not know."

“ I watch her movements, in your interests, John—she has gone—with a wild crowd—to Merrion Court, in Kent.”

In a week's time *The Mercury*, with perfect truth, could announce :

“ *His Grace the Duke of H—, lately returned from his Travels, has become so Enamoured of Naples, that he has decided to purchase a Villa there, and spend the Season in that agreeable Climate. The rarest Curiosities that His Grace brought Home consist of two Indian Sapphires which he has presented to the Lady of his Uncle, Colonel D—.*”

KECKSIES

A PATCH OF MARSH WEEDS—1800

TWO young esquires were riding from Canterbury, jolly and drunk; they shouted and trolled and rolled in their saddles as they followed the winding road across the downs.

A dim sky was overhead and shut in the wide expanse of open country that one side stretched to the sea and the other to the Kentish Weald.

The primroses grew in thick posies in the ditches, the hedges were full of fresh hawthorn green, and the new grey leaves of eglantine and honeysuckle, the long boughs of ash with the hard black buds, and the wand-like shoots of sallow willow hung with catkins and the smaller red tassels of the nut and birch; little the two young men heeded of any of these things, for they were in their own country that was thrice familiar; but Nick Bateup blinked across to the distant purple hills, and cursed the gathering rain.

“Ten miles more of the open,” he muttered, “and a great storm blackening upon us.”

Young Crediton, who was more full of wine, laughed drowsily.

“We’ll lie at a cottage on the way, Nick—think you I’ve never a tenant who’ll let me share board and bed?”

He maundered into singing:

“There’s a light in the old mill,
Where the witch weaves her charms,
But dark is the chamber
Where you sleep in my arms.

Now came you by magic,
By trick or by spell,
I have you and hold you,
And love you right well !”

The clouds overtook them like an advancing army; the wayside green looked livid under the purplish threat of the heavens, and the birds were all still and silent.

“Split me if I’ll be soaked,” muttered young Bateup. “Knock up one of these boors of thine, Ned—but damn me if I see as much as hut or barn !”

“We come to Banells farm soon, or have we passed it ?” answered the other confusedly. “What’s the pother ? A bold bird as thou art, and scared of a drop of rain ?”

“My lungs are not as lusty as thine,” replied Bateup, who was indeed of a delicate build and more carefully dressed in great coat and muffler.

“But thy throat is as wide !” laughed Crediton, “and God help you, you are muffled like an old woman—and as drunk as a shorn parrot.”

“Tra la la, my sweeting,
Tra la la, my May,
If now I miss the meeting
I’ll come some other day.”

His companion took no notice of this nonsense, but with as much keenness as his muddled faculties would allow, was looking out for some shelter, for he retained sufficient perception to enable him to mark the violence of the approaching storm and the loneliness of the vast stretch of country where the only human habitations appeared to be some few poor cottages, far distant in the fields.

He lost his good humour, and as the first drops of stinging cold rain began to fall, he cursed freely, using the terms common to the pot-houses, where he had intoxicated himself on the way from Canterbury.

Urging their tired horses they came on to the top of the little hill they ascended. Immediately before them was the silver ashen skeleton of a blasted oak, polished like worn bone, standing over a small pool of stagnant water (for there had been little rain and much east wind), where a few shivering ewes crouched together from the oncoming storm.

Just beyond this, rising out of the bare field, was a humble cottage of black timber and white plaster with a deep thatched roof.

For the rest, the crest of the hill was covered by a hazel copse and then dipped lonely again to the clouded lower levels that now began to slope into the marsh.

"This will shelter us, Nick," cried Crediton.

"'Tis a foul place and the boors have a foul reputation," objected the lord of the manor. "There are those who swear to seeing the Devil's own phiz leer from Goody Boyle's windows—but anything to please thee and thy weak chest."

They staggered from their horses, knocked open the rotting gate, and leading the beasts across the hard dry grazing field, knocked with their whips at the small door of the cottage.

The grey sheep under the grey tree looked at them and bleated faintly; the rain began to fall, like straight yet broken darts out of the sombre clouds.

The door was opened by a woman very neatly dressed, with large scrubbed hands, who looked at them with fear and displeasure; for if her reputation was bad, theirs was no better. The lord of the manor was a known roysterer and wild liver, and spent his idleness in rakish expeditions with Sir Nicholas Bateup from Bodiam, who was easily squandering a fine property.

Neither was believed to be free of bloodshed, and as for honour, they were as stripped of that as the blasted tree by the lonely pool was stripped of leaves.

Besides, they were both now, as usual, drunk.

"We want shelter, Goody Boyle," cried Crediton, pushing

his way in as he threw her his reins. "Get the horses into the barn."

The woman could not deny the man who could make her homeless in a second; she shouted hoarsely an inarticulate name, and a loutish boy came and took the horses, while the two young men stumbled into the cottage which they filled and dwarfed with their splendour.

Edward Crediton had been a fine young man, and though he was marred with insolence and excess, he still made a magnificent appearance, with his full, blunt features, his warm colouring, the fair hair rolled and curled, and all his bravery of blue broadcloth, buckskin breeches, foreign lace, top boots, French sword and gold rings and watch-chains.

Sir Nicholas Bateup was darker and more effeminate, having a cast of weakness in his constitution that betrayed itself in his face; but his dress was splendid to the point of foppishness and his manners even more arrogant and imposing.

Of the two he had the more evil repute; he was unwed and therefore there was no check upon his mischief, whereas Crediton had a young wife whom he loved after his fashion, who checked some of his doings, softened others, and stayed very faithful to him and adored him still, after five years of a wretched marriage, as is the manner of some women.

The rain came down with slashing severity; the little cottage panes were blotted with water.

Goody Boyle put logs on the fire and urged them with the bellows.

It was a gaunt white room with nothing in it but a few wooden stools, a table and an eel-catcher's prong.

On the table were two large fair wax candles.

"What are these for, Goody?" asked Crediton.

"For the dead, sir."

"You've dead in the house?" cried Sir Nicholas, who was leaning by the fireplace and warming his hands. "What do you want with dead men in the house, you trollop?"

“ It is no dead of mine, my lord,” answered the woman with evil civility, “ but one who took shelter here and died.”

“ A curst witch ! ” roared Crediton. “ You hear that, Nick ! Came here—died—and now you’ll put spells on us, you ugly slut——”

“ No spells of mine,” answered the woman quietly, rubbing her large clean hands together. “ He had been long ailing and died here of an ague.”

“ And who sent the ague ? ” asked Crediton with drunken gravity. “ And who sent him here ? ”

“ Perhaps the same hand that sent us,” laughed Sir Nicholas. “ Where is your corpse, Goody ? ”

“ In the next room—I have but two.”

“ And those too many—you need but a bundle of faggots and a tuft of tow to light it—an arrant witch, a confest witch,” muttered Crediton. He staggered up from the stool. “ Where is your corpse ? I’ve a mind to see if he looks as if he died a natural death.”

“ Will you not ask first who it is ? ” asked the woman, unlatching the inner door.

“ Why should I care ? ”

“ Who is it ? ” asked Sir Nicholas, who had the clearer wits, drunk or sane.

“ Robert Horne,” said Goody Boyle.

Ned Crediton looked at her with the eyes of a sober man.

“ Robert Horne,” said Sir Nicholas. “ So he is dead at last—your wife will be glad of that, Ned.”

Crediton gave a sullen laugh.

“ I’d broken him—she wasn’t afraid any longer of a lost wretch, cast out to die of ague on the marsh.”

But Sir Nicholas had heard differently ; he had been told, even by Ned himself, how Anne Crediton shivered before the terror of Robert Horne’s pursuit, and would wake up in the dark, crying out for fear of him, like a lost child ; for he had wooed her before her marriage, and persisted in loving her

afterwards with mad boldness and insolent confidence, so that justice had been set on him and he had been banished to the marsh, a ruined man.

“Well, sirs,” said Goody Boyle, in her thin voice that had the pinched accent of other parts, “my lady can sleep o’ nights now—for Robert Horne will never disturb her again.”

“Do you think he ever troubled us?” asked Crediton, with a coarse oath. “I flung him out like an adder that had writhed across the threshold——”

“A wonder he did not put a murrain on thee, Ned. He had fearful ways and a deep knowledge of unholy things.”

“A warlock. God help us,” added the woman.

“The Devil’s proved an ill master then,” laughed Crediton. “He could not help Robert Horne into Anne’s favour—nor prevent him lying in a cold couch in the flower of his age.”

“The Devil,” smiled Sir Nicholas, “was over-busy, Ned, helping *you* to the lady’s favour and a warm bed. You were the dearer disciple.”

“Oh, good lords, will you talk less wildly with a lost man’s corpse in the house, and his soul riding the storm without?” begged Goody Boyle; and she latched again the inner door.

Murk filled the cottage now; waves of shadow flowed over the landscape without the rain-blotted window, and drowned the valley. In the bitter field, the melancholy ewes huddled beneath the blasted oak beside the bare pool, the stagnant surface of which was now broken by the quick raindrops; a low thunder grumbled from the horizon and all the young greenery looked livid in the ghastly light of heaven.

“I’ll see him,” said Ned Crediton, swaggering. “I’ll look at this gay gallant in his last smock!—so that I can swear to Anne he has taken his amorous smile to the earthworms—surely.”

“Look as you like,” answered Sir Nicholas, “glut your eyes with looking——”

“But you’ll remember, sirs, that he was a queer man and

died queerly, and there was no parson or priest to take the edge off his going, or challenge the fiends who stood at his head and feet."

"Saw *you* the fiends?" asked Ned curiously.

"Question not what I saw," muttered the woman. "You'll have your own familiars, Esquire Crediton."

She unlatched the inner door again and Ned passed in, bowing low on the threshold.

"Good day, Robert Horne," he jeered. "We parted in anger, but my debts are paid now and I greet you well."

The dead man lay on a pallet bed with a coarse white sheet over him that showed his shape but roughly; the window was by his head and looked blankly on to the rain-bitten fields and dismal sky; the light was cold and colourless on the white sheet and the miserable room.

Sir Nicholas lounged in the doorway; he feared no death but his own, and that he set so far away it was but a dim dread.

"Look and see if it is Robert Horne," he urged, "or if the beldame lies."

And Crediton turned down the sheet.

"'Tis Robert Horne," he said.

The dead man had his chin uptilted, his features sharp and horrible in the setting of the spilled fair hair on the coarse pillow. Ned Crediton triumphed over him, making lewd jests of love and death, and sneering at this great gallant, who had been crazed by love and driven by desire and who now lay impotent.

And Sir Nicholas in the doorway listened and laughed and had his own wicked jeers to add; for both of them had hated Robert Horne as a man who had defied them.

But Goody Boyle stole away with her fingers in her ears.

When these two were weary of their insults they returned the flap of the sheet over the dead face and returned to the outer room.

And Ned asked for drink, declaring that Goody Boyle was a known smuggler and had cellars of rare stuff.

So the lout brought up glasses of cognac and a bottle of French wine, and these two drank grossly, sitting over the fire ; and Goody Boyle made excuse for the drink, by saying that Robert Horne had given her two gold pieces before he died (not thin pared coins but thick and heavy) for his funeral, and the entertainment of those who should come to his burying.

“What mourners could he hope for ?” laughed Ned Crediton. “The crow and the beetle and the death-watch spider !”

But Goody Boyle told him that Robert Horne had made friends while he had lived an outcast on the marshes ; they were, no doubt, queer and even monstrous people, but they were coming to-night to sit with Robert Horne before he was put in the ground.

“And who, Goody, have warned this Devil’s congregation of the death of Robert Horne ?” asked Sir Nicholas.

She answered him—that Robert Horne was not ill an hour or a day, but for a long space struggled with fits of the marsh fever, and in between these bouts of the ague, he went abroad like a well man, and his friends would come up and see him, and the messenger who came up to enquire after him was Tora, the Egyptian girl who walked with her bosom full of violets.

The storm was in full fury now, muttering low and sullen round the cottage with great power of beating rain.

“Robert Horne was slow in dying,” said Sir Nicholas. “Of what did he speak in those days ?”

“Of a woman, good sir.”

“Of my wife !” cried Ned.

Goody Boyle shook her head with a look of stupidity.

“I know nothing of that. Though for certain he called her Anne, sweet Anne, and swore he would possess her yet—in so many words and very roundly.”

“But he died baulked,” said Ned, swaying on his stool, “and he’ll rot outside holy ground.”

“They’ll lay him in Deadman’s field, which is full of old bones none can plough and no sheep will graze,” answered

the woman, "and I must set out to see lame Jonas who promised to have the grave ready—but maybe the rain has hindered him."

She looked at them shrewdly as she added :

"That is, gentles, if you care to remain alone with the body of Robert Horne."

"I think of him as a dead dog," replied Ned Crediton.

And when the woman had gone, he, being loosened with the French brandy, suggested a gross jest.

"Why should Robert Horne have all this honour, even from rogues and Egyptians? Let us fool them—throwing his corpse out into the byre, and I will lie under the sheet and presently sit up and fright them all, with the thought it is the Devil!"

Sir Nicholas warmly cheered this proposal, and they lurched into the inner chamber, which was dark enough now by reason of a great northern cloud that blocked the light from the window.

They pulled the sheet off Robert Horne and found him wrapped in another that was furled up under his chin, and so they carried him to the back door and peered through the storm for some secret place where they might throw him.

And Ned Crediton saw a dark bed of rank hemlock, and cried :

"Cast him into the kecksies," that being the rustic name for the weed.

So they flung the dead man into the hemlocks, which were scarce high enough to cover him, and to hide the whiteness of the sheet, broke off boughs from the hazel copse and put over him, and went back laughing to the cottage, and there kept a watch out from the front window, and when they saw Goody Boyle toiling along through the rain, Ned took off his hat and coat and sword and folded them away under the bed, then Sir Nicholas wrapped him in the under sheet, so that he was shrouded to the chin, and he lay on the pillow, and drew the other sheet over him.

"If thou sleepest do not snore," said Sir Nicholas, and went back to the fire and lit his long clay full of Virginian tobacco.

When Goody Boyle entered with her wet shawl over her head, she had two ragged creatures behind her who stared malevolently at the fine gentleman with his bright clothes and dark curls, lolling by the fire and watching the smoke rings rise from his pipe.

"Esquire Crediton has ridden for home," he said, "but I am not minded to risk the ague."

And he sipped more brandy and laughed at them, and they, muttering, for they knew his fame, went into the death chamber and crouched round the couch where Sir Nicholas had just laid Ned Crediton under the sheet.

And presently others came up, Egyptians, eel-catchers and the like, outcasts and vagrants who crept in to watch by the corpse.

Sir Nicholas presently rolled after them to see the horror and shriekings for grace there would be when the dead man threw aside his shroud and sat up.

But the vigil went on till the night closed in and the two wax candles were lit, and still Ned Crediton gave no sign, nor did he snore or heave beneath the sheet, and Sir Nicholas became impatient, for the rain was over and he was weary of the foul air and the grotesque company.

"The fool," he thought (for he kept his wits well even in his cups), "has gone into a drunken sleep and forgot the joke."

So he pushed his way to the bed and turned down the sheet, whispering:

"This jest will grow stale with keeping."

But the words withered on his lips for he looked into the face of a dead man. At the cry he gave they all came babbling about him and he told them of the trick that had been put upon them.

"But there's Devil's work here," he added. "For here is the body back again—or else Ned Crediton dead and frozen

into a likeness of the other——” and he flung the sheet end quickly over the pinched face and fair hair.

“And what did ye do with Robert Horne, outrageous dare fiend that ye be?” demanded an old vagrant; and the young lord passed the ill words and answered with whitened lips:

“We cast him into yon bed of kecksies.”

And they all beat out into the night, the lout with a lantern.

And there was nothing at all in the bed of kecksies . . . and Ned Crediton's horse was gone from the stable.

“He was drunk,” said Sir Nicholas, “and forgot his part—and fled that moment I was in the outer room.”

“And in that minute did he carry Robert Horne in alone and wrap him up so neatly?” queried Goody Boyle.

“We'll go in,” said another hag, “and strip the body and see which man it be——”

But Sir Nicholas was in the saddle.

“Let be,” he cried wildly, “there's been gruesome work enough for to-night—it's Robert Horne you have there—let be—I'll back to Crediton Manor——”

And he rode his horse out of the field, then more quickly down the darkling road, for the fumes of the brandy were out of his brain and he saw clearly and dreaded many things.

At the cross-roads when the ghastly moon had suddenly struck free of the retreating clouds he saw Ned Crediton ahead of him riding sharply, and he called out:

“Eh, Ned, what have you made of this jest? This way it is but a mangled folly.”

“What matter now for jest or earnest?” answered the other. “I ride home at last.”

Sir Nicholas kept pace with him; he was hatless and wore a shabby cloak that was twisted about him with the wind of his riding.

“Why did not you take your own garments?” asked Sir Nicholas. “Belike that rag you've snatched up belonged to Robert Horne——”

“ If Crediton could steal his shroud he can steal his cloak,” replied the other, and his companion said no more, thinking him wrought into a frenzy with the brandy and the evil nature of the joke.

The moon shone clear and cold with a faint stain like old blood in the halo, and the trees, bending in a seaward wind, cast the recent rain that loaded them heavily to the ground, as the two rode into the gates of Crediton Manor.

The hour was later than even Sir Nicholas knew (time had been blurred for him since the coming of the storm) and there was no light save a dim lamp in an upper window.

The first rider dropped out of the saddle, not waiting for the mounting-block, and rang the iron bell till it clattered through the house like a madman’s fury.

“ Why, Ned, why this panic home-coming ? ” asked Sir Nicholas ; but the other answered him not, but rang again.

There were footsteps within and the rattle of chains, and a voice asked from the side-window :

“ Who goes there ? ”

And he who dragged at the bell screamed :

“ I ! The Master ! ”

The door was opened and an old servant stood there, pale in his bed-gown.

Ned Crediton passed him and stood by the newel post, like a man spent, yet alert.

“ Send someone for the horses,” said Nick Bateup, “ for your master is crazy drunk—I tell you, Mathews, he has seen Robert Horne dead to-night——”

The other laughed ; the long rays of the lamplight showed him pale, haggard, distorted with tumbled fair hair and a torn shirt under the mantle, and at his waist a ragged bunch of hemlock thrust into his sash.

“ A posy of kecksies for Anne,” he said ; and the sleepy servants, now up, began to come into the hall, and looked at him with dismay.

“ I’ll lie here to-night,” said Sir Nicholas, “ bring me lights into the parlour. I’ve no mind to sleep.”

He took off his hat and fingered his sword and glanced uneasily at the figure by the newel post with the posy of kecksies.

Another figure appeared at the head of the stairs, Anne Crediton holding her candle, wearing a grey lute-string robe and a lace cap with long ribbons that hung on to her bosom ; she peered over the baluster and some of the hot wax from her taper fell on to the oak treads.

“ I’ve a beau pot for you, Anne,” said her lord looking up and holding out the hemlocks. “ I’ve long been dispossessed, Anne, but I’ve come home at last.”

She drew back without a word and her light flickered away across the landing ; the man went up after her and they heard a door shut.

In the parlour the embers had been blown to flames and fresh logs put on and Sir Nicholas warmed his cold hands and told old Mathews (in a sober manner for him) the story of the jest they had striven to put on Goody Boyle and the queer, monstrous people from the marsh, and the monstrous ending of it, and the strangeness of Ned Crediton ; it was not his usual humour to discourse with servants or to discuss his vagrant debaucheries with any, but to-night he seemed to need company and endeavoured to retain the old man, who was not reluctant to stay though usually he hated to see the dark face and bright clothes of Nick Bateup before the hearth of Crediton Manor.

And as these two talked, disconnectedly, as if they would fill the gap of any silence that might fall in the quiet house, there came the wail of a woman, desperate, yet sunken.

“ It is Mistress Crediton,” said Mathews with a downcast look.

“ He ill treats her ? ”

“ God help us, he will use buckles and straps to her, Sir Nicholas.”

A quivering shriek came brokenly down the stairs and seemed to form the word "mercy."

Sir Nicholas was an evil man who died unrepentant ; but he was not of a temper to relish raw cruelty or crude brutalities to women ; he would break their souls but never their bodies.

So he went to the door and listened, and old Mathews had never liked him so well as now when he saw the look on the thin dark face.

For the third time she shrieked and they marvelled that any human being could hold their breath so long ; yet it was muffled as if someone held a hand over her mouth.

The sweat stood on the old man's forehead.

"I've never before known her complain, sir," he whispered. "She is a very dog to her lord and takes her whip mutely——"

"I know, I know—she adores his hand when it caresses or when it strikes—but to-night—if I know anything of a woman's accents, that is a note of abhorrence——"

He ran up the stairs, the old man panting after him with the snatched-up lantern.

"Which is her chamber ?"

"Here, Sir Nicholas."

The young man struck on the heavy oak panels with the hilt of his sword.

"Madam, Madam Crediton, why are you so ill at ease ?"

She moaned from within.

"Open to me, I'll call some of your women—come out——"

Their blood curdled to hear her wails.

"Damn you to Hell," cried Sir Nicholas in a fury. "Come out, Ned Crediton, or I'll have the door down and run you through."

The answer was a little break of maniac laughter.

"She has run mad or he," cried Mathews, backing from the room. "And surely there is another clamour at the door——"

Again the bell clanged and there were voices and tumult at the door ; Mathews went and opened and Sir Nicholas, looking

down the stairs, saw in the moonlight a dirty farm cart, a sweating horse and some of the patched and rusty crew who had been keeping vigil in Goody Boyle's cottage.

"We've brought Esquire Crediton home," said one; and the others lifted a body from the cart and carried it through the murky moonlight.

Sir Nicholas came down stairs, for old Mathews could do nothing but cry for mercy.

"It was Edward Crediton," repeated the eel-catcher, shuffling into the hall, "clothed all but his coat and hat and that was under the bed—there be his watches and chains, his seals and the papers in his pockets—and for his visage now there is no mistaking it."

They had laid the body on the table where it had so often sat and ate and drunk and cursed; Sir Nicholas gazed, holding up the lantern.

Edward Crediton—never any doubt of that now, though his face was distorted as by the anguish of a sudden and ugly death.

"We never found Robert Horne," muttered one of the mourners, trailing his foul muddy rags nearer the fire, and thrusting his crooked hands to the blaze.

And Mathews fell on his knees and tried to pray but could think of no words.

"Who is upstairs?" demanded Sir Nicholas in a terrible voice. "Who is with that wretched woman?"

And he stared at the body of her husband.

Mathews, who had loved her as a little child, began gibbering and moaning.

"Did he not say he'd have her? And did not yon fool change places with him? Oh God, oh God, and has he not come to take his place——"

"But Robert Horne was *dead*. I saw him dead," stammered Sir Nicholas and set the lantern down, for his hand shook so the flame waved in gusts.

"Eh," shrieked old Mathews, grovelling on his hands and

knees in his bed-gown. " Might not the Devil have lent him his body back for his own pitchy purposes ? "

They looked at him a little, seeing he was suddenly crazed ; then Sir Nicholas ran up the stairs with the others at his heels and thundered with his sword, and kicked and shouted outside Anne Crediton's chamber door.

All the foul, muddy, earthy crew cowered on the stairs and chattered together and in the parlour before the embers old Mathews crouched, huddled and whimpered.

The bedroom door opened and Robert Horne came out and stood and smiled at them and the young man in his fury fell back and his sword rattled from his hand to the floor.

Robert Horne was a white death, nude to the waist and from there swathed in grave clothes ; under the tattered dark cloak he had ridden in, was his shroud knotted round his neck ; his naked chest gleamed with ghastly dewes and under the waxen polish of his sunken face the decayed blood showed in discoloured patches ; he went down the stairs and they hid their faces while his foul whiteness passed.

Sir Nicholas stumbled into the bed-chamber. The moonlight showed Anne Crediton tumbled on the bed, dead, and staring with the posy of kecksies on her bare breast, her mouth hung open and her hands clutching at the curtains.

The mourners rode back and picked up Robert Horne's body whence it had returned from the kecksie patch and buried it in unholy ground with great respect, as that of one to whom the Devil had given his great desire.

RAW MATERIAL

STRANGE HAPPENINGS AT PECKHAM RYE—1900

LINLEY was fond of collecting what he called "raw material," and, as a fairly successful barrister, he had good opportunity for doing so. He despised novelists and romancists, yet one day he hoped to become one of these gentry himself, hence his collection of the raw material . . . however, after some years he became disgusted and overwhelmed by the amount of "stuff"—as he termed it—which he had gathered together, scenes, episodes, characters, dialogues, descriptions and decorations for all or any possible type of tale; he remained, he declared, surprised at the poverty of invention of the professional story-tellers who gave so little for the public's money in the way of good, strong, rousing drama, such as he, Robert Linley, had come across, well, more times than he cared to count. . . .

"There isn't anything," he declared, with some vehemence, "of which I haven't had experience."

"Ghosts?" I asked, and he smiled contemptuously.

"Yes, of course, I've had any amount of experience with ghosts, with people who've seen 'em, and people who think they've seen 'em, and with the ghosts themselves. . . ."

"Well," I asked, "have you come across a real Christmas ghost story—what we used to call the old-fashioned kind? They're getting a bit threadbare now, you know; they've been told over and over again, year after year; have you got a novelty in that direction?"

Linley, after a moment's sharp pause, said that he had.

“There’s some raw material for you,” he cried, waxing enthusiastic—“the story of the Catchpoles and Aunt Ursula Beane; there’s some raw material—why, there’s everything in it—comedy, tragedy, drama, satire, farce——”

“Hold on!” I cried, “and just tell us as briefly as possible what your ‘raw material’ consists of. I’m out for a Christmas ghost story, you know, and I shall be disappointed if you don’t give us something of that kind.”

Linley made himself extremely comfortable and, with a lawyer’s relish of the right phrase and the correct turn of sentence, gave us the history of Aunt Ursula Beane, with the usual proviso, of course, that the names and places had been altered. Before he began his narration Linley insisted on the novelty of the story, and before he had finished we all of us (those select few who were privileged to hear him hold forth) agreed that it was very novel indeed.

The case of Aunt Ursula Beane, as he called her, had come under his notice in a professional way, and in the following manner—uncommonplace enough from a lawyer’s point of view, although the subsequent case was one which the papers endeavoured to work up into what is described by that overworked word “sensational.” As far as the lawyers and the public were concerned it began with an inquest on Mrs. Ursula Beane. In Linley’s carefully selected phrases the case was this :

Mrs. Ursula Beane had died suddenly at the age of seventy-five. The doctor who had been intermittently attending her—she was an extremely robust and healthy old woman—had not been altogether satisfied with her symptoms. He had refused a death certificate, there had been an autopsy, and it was discovered that Mrs. Ursula Beane had died from arsenical poisoning. The fact established, an enquiry followed, eliciting the following circumstances. Mrs. Ursula Beane had lived for forty years in a small house at Peckham Rye which had belonged to her father and his father before him. The house had

been built in the days when Peckham Rye—well, was not quite like it is now. She resided with a nephew and a niece—James and Louisa Catchpole. Neither of them had ever married, neither of them had ever left Peckham for more than a few weeks at a time, and the most minute investigation did not discover that either of them had had the least adventure or out-of-the-way event in their lives. They enjoyed a small annuity from a father who had been a worthy and fairly prosperous tradesman. James was, at the time of the inquest, a man of over sixty, and had been for many years a clerk—"confidential clerk" as he emphasized it—in a large firm of tea merchants. He received a sufficient, if not a substantial salary, and was within a year or two of a pension. His sister, Miss Louisa Catchpole, was younger—fifty or so; she also had a substantial, if not a brilliant, position as a journalist on one of those few surviving monthlies which rather shun publicity and cater for the secluded and the virtuous. She wrote occasional short stories in which the hero was always a clergyman, and the heroine "*sans peur et sans reproche*." She also wrote little weekly *causeries*—as I believe they are called—"Meditations in a Garden," they were headed, and adorned with a little cut of an invalid in a basket-chair gazing at a robin. In these same *causeries* Miss Louisa Catchpole affected month after month, year after year, with unfaltering fortitude, a vein of Christian cheerfulness, and encouraged her readers with such maxims as "Character is stronger than Destiny," "A man is only as strong as his faith in himself," and chirpings about the recurring miracle of spring, together with quotations from the more minor poets—you know the type of thing.

It is irrelevant to our story to go into why Aunt Ursula Beane lived with those two; they seemed to be the only surviving members of their very unimportant family, and they had lived together in the house at Peckham Rye for forty years, ever since Louisa was quite a small child and had gone there to live with Aunt Ursula who, on her husband's death, had retired to this

paternal abode. Nobody could think of them as apart one from the other. During those forty years James had gone to and fro his work, Louisa had written her articles and stories, and at first had been looked after by, and afterwards had looked after, Aunt Ursula Beane. Their joint earnings kept the tiny establishment going; they were considerably helped by the fact that there was no rent to pay, and they lived in modest comfort, almost with, what James would have called, "every luxury." Besides giving them the house to live in, Mrs. Beane paid them at first thirty shillings, then, as the cost of living went up, two pounds a week for what she called "her keep." What, you will say, could have been more deadly commonplace than this? But there was just one touch of mystery and romance. Aunt Ursula Beane was reputed to be of vast wealth and a miser—this was one of those family traditions that swell and grow on human credulity from one generation to another. The late Mr. Beane was spoken of with vague awe as a very wealthy man, and it appeared that the Catchpoles believed that he had left her a considerable fortune, which she, a true miser, had concealed all those years, but which they might reasonably hope to inherit on her death, as a reward for all their faithful kindness. Investigation proved that what had seemed rather a fantastic delusion had some startling foundation. Mrs. Ursula Beane employed a lawyer, and his evidence was that her late husband, who had been a tobacconist, had left her a tidy sum of money when he had died forty years ago, amounting to fifteen thousand pounds, which had been safely invested and not touched till about five years before. What Mrs. Beane lived on came from another source—a tiny capital, left by her father, that brought her in about a hundred and fifty pounds a year; therefore, this main sum had been, as I have said, untouched and had accrued during those thirty-five years—and also through lucky speculation—into a handsome sum of nearly fifty thousand pounds. The lawyer agreed that the old lady was a miser, nothing would induce her to draw out any of this

money, to mention its existence to a soul, or to make a will as to its final disposal. The lawyer, of course, was pledged to secrecy. He knew that the Catchpoles guessed at the existence of the hoard, he also knew that they were not *sure* about it and that they had no idea as to its magnitude. Five years before her death the old lady had drawn out all her capital—forty-eight thousand pounds—every penny of it, without any explanation whatever to the lawyer, and had taken it away in a black bag, going off in a taxicab from the lawyer's offices in Lincoln's Inn. It might have been the Nibelung hoard flung into the Rhine for all the mystery there was attached to it, for nobody saw or heard of it again. Both the Catchpoles swore that they had no knowledge whatever of the old woman realizing her capital; she had certainly not banked it anywhere, she must have taken that very large sum of money in notes and, I believe, a few bonds, to that small house at Peckham Rye, and in some way disposed of it. A most exhaustive search revealed not so much as a five-pound note. In the bank was just the last quarterly instalment of her annuity—barely enough, as Louisa Catchpole remarked with some passion, "to pay the doctor and the funeral expenses."

There you have the situation. This old woman dead in what was almost poverty, the disappearance of this large sum of money she had realized five years previously, and the fact that she had died from arsenical poisoning. To explain this there were the usual symptoms, or excuses, whatever you like to call them; she had been having medicine with arsenic in it and she might have taken an overdose; there had been arsenic in the house in the shape of powders for an overgrown and aged dog, and in the shape of packets of weed-killer; James had always taken an industrious interest in the patch of garden that sloped to the Common. The old lady might have committed suicide, she might have taken some of the stuff in mistake, or the Catchpoles might have been murderers. The only possible reason for suspecting foul play would have been that the Catch-

poles knew of her hoard and wished to get hold of it. But this it was impossible to prove. I was briefed to watch the case for the Catchpoles. There was, of course, a certain sensation and excitement over the fact of the large sum of money, the only, what you might call, startling and brilliant fact about the whole commonplace, drab and rather depressing story. I myself thought it rather absurd that any question of suspicion should attach to the Catchpoles; after forty years of placid uninspired devotion to Aunt Ursula Beane, why should they suddenly decide to put her out of the way, when, in the nature of things, she could not have had more than a few years to live? Their demeanour, too, impressed me very favourably; there was none of the flaunting vanity, posing, or vehement talk of the real criminal; they seemed slightly bewildered, not very much disturbed, and to trust wholly in their undeniable innocence; they almost found the whole thing grotesque, and I could understand their point of view. The verdict, however, was rather surprising; it was confidently expected that it would be "Death from Misadventure," but instead of that the verdict was "Death from Arsenical Poisoning not self-administered." This is really about as near as we can get in England to the Scottish verdict "Not Proven," and I was rather indignant, for it seemed to me to attach a great deal of wholly unmerited suspicion to the two Catchpoles. Still, of course, they were quite free, and no direct blame was laid on them. In fact, the coroner had remarked on their devoted care of an old lady who must have been, from the various facts proved by the doctors, "very trying and difficult," as the saying goes. They conducted themselves very well after the inquest; still with that slightly bewildered patient air of resignation. It seemed to me that they did not realize the ghastly position in which they had stood, and, as I knew when I heard the verdict, the very narrow escape they had had from being arrested on a charge of murder. They paid all the expenses connected with the inquest at once and without any trouble. They had, as James explained with

a certain mild pride, "savings." . . . I was interested in them ; they were so meek and drab, so ordinary and repressed ; there was something kindly and amiable about them, and they were very attached to each other. I questioned them about this mysterious hoard, the existence of which would have been difficult to believe but for the evidence of the lawyer. They did not seem very concerned ; they had always known that Aunt Ursula Beane had money and, said Louisa, without passion, they had always guessed that she had tried to do them out of it—she had been an extraordinarily malicious old woman, they complained, and it was quite likely that the money was buried somewhere, or had been destroyed ; she was capable of feeding the fire with it, of sticking it in a hole in the ground, of throwing it into the water in a bag weighed down with stones, in fact of doing anything in the world with it except putting it to some profitable use. She was undoubtedly not right in her head.

"She ought to have been certified years ago," I declared.

James Catchpole shook his head ; "She was never bad enough for that," he announced, with resignation.

They had really been slaving and "bearing" things for forty years for that money, and they took the loss of it, I thought, with extreme gallantry.

They returned to the little house in Peckham which came to them as next-of-kin. The little annuity, which was all that Aunt Ursula had left of her worldly goods, after she had disposed of her main fortune, perished with her ; James and Louisa would have to live on his clerkship and her journalism.

At this point Linley stopped to ask me if we did not perceive a real strong drama in what he had told us—"A whole novel, in fact," he added, triumphantly.

"Well," I replied, "one might make it into a whole novel by inserting incidents, and imagining this and that and the other. As you have given it, it seems a dreary stretch of nothingness

with a rather damp squib at the end ; after all, there was no murder, and I suppose the old woman took an overdose of medicine by mistake. Where," I asked, " does the Christmas ghost story come in ? "

" I will tell you if you will have just a little more patience. Well, I have said that I was interested in the Catchpoles, I even went to see them once or twice ; they seemed to me to be what used to be called ' human documents '—the very fact that they had such blank faces made me want to study them. I knew there must be some repression somewhere, some desire, some hope, something beside what there appeared on the surface—this blank negation. They did not betray themselves. Louisa said she missed the old lady, and that she was having quite a handsome headstone put on her grave in the vast London cemetery where she had been laid to rest. James spoke of the old lady with a certain reverence, as if the fact of her being dead had made a saint of Aunt Ursula Beane.

I continually asked them if they had had any news of the money ; they shook their heads with a compassionate smile at my hopefulness. They were convinced that during those five years Aunt Ursula Beane had completely destroyed the forty-eight thousand pounds—easily destroyed, after all, for most of it had been in hundred—and thousand—pound notes. Of course the garden had been dug over, and every brick and plank in the house disturbed with no result."

" And if she never left the house and garden ? " I said.

" They told me she had ; she was a robust old woman, as I said before, and she used to take long walks, and every year during those five years she went away for a fortnight—sometimes with Louisa, sometimes with James, sometimes to the seaside and sometimes to lodgings in a farmhouse, and on all these different occasions she had had plenty of opportunity of getting rid of her money. Of course these five several lodgings had been searched and the country round about them, but always with no result.

'You see, sir,' said James, with his meek and placid smile, his pale faded eyes gleaming at me behind his glasses, 'she was far too cunning for all of us.'

One winter evening about a year after the inquest, when the mood took me to go and visit these two curious specimens, I found them with a planchette, their eyes goggling at the sprawling writing that appeared on the piece of paper beneath. James informed me without excitement that they had 'taken up' spiritualism, and Miss Louisa chirped in that they were getting 'the most wonderful results.'

Aunt Ursula Beane had 'come through,' as they put it, almost at once, and was now in constant communication with them.

'Well, I hope she can tell you what she did with the money?'

They answered me quite seriously that that was what they were trying to find out, but that the old lady was just as tricky and malicious on the other side, as they termed it, as she had been on this, luring them on with false scents and wayward suggestions. At the same time they declared, placidly, but with intense conviction, that they believed, sooner or later, she would disclose to them her secret.

I soon began to lose interest in them after this. When people of the type of the Catchpoles get mixed up with this spiritualist business, they cease to be—well, almost cease to be 'human documents.' I thought I'd leave 'em to it, when I received a rather urgent invitation from Miss Louisa Catchpole begging me to be present at a 'demonstration' at which Aunt Ursula Beane would undoubtedly appear in person. I went to the little house in Peckham, where the furniture, the wall-paper, even the atmosphere did not appear to have been changed for those monotonous forty years—forty-one now to be exact. There was a medium present, and no one else save myself and the brother and sister. We sat round the table. The medium who beamed with a rather fussy kindness went off with

surprising celerity into a trance and soon, what the Catchpoles called 'the demonstration' took place.

At first I was cynical, secondly I was disgusted, and thirdly, I was rather disturbed, finding myself first among farce, low charlatanry and chicanery, then suddenly in the presence of something which I could not understand. The demonstration began by groans and squeaks issuing from the lips of the medium, greetings to Louisa and James—presumably in the voice of the defunct Aunt Ursula Beane—various jovial references to a bottle containing poison, and a few other crude remarks of that nature, and then several knocks from different parts of the room—rappings loud and quick, and then beating time, as if to a piece of music, and then a sudden clatter on the table in the middle of us as if the old lady were dancing there with heavy boots on. James and Louisa sat side by side, their hands clasped, listening to all this without a shade of expression on their blank faded faces. The hideous little room was the last resort of the antimacassar, and presently these began to fly about, scraps of the horrible white crocheted tatting gliding through the air in a way which would have been funny if it hadn't been rather dreadful. Of course I knew that many mediums have these powers, and there is nothing much in them—I mean it can all be explained in a perfectly practical and satisfactory fashion. At the same time I did not greatly care about the exposition, and I begged the Catchpoles to bring it to an end, particularly as the old lady had nothing definite to say. James whispered that the medium must not be disturbed while she was in trance. Aunt Ursula Beane then began to sing a hymn, but with a very unpleasant inflection, worse than any outspoken mockery; while the hymn was being sung I gained the impression far more vividly than I had ever received before that Aunt Ursula Beane had been a rather terrible person. When she had finished the hymn she began in an old half-broken voice to softly curse them all in a language that was not at all agreeable to listen to, coming as it did in those querulous,

ancient feminine tones. This was rather too much for me, and I shook the medium violently. She came out of her trance. Louisa and James did not seem in the least affected, drank tea, and ate biscuits, and discussed in banal terms the doings of those on 'the other side.'

I received no more invitations from the Catchpoles and did not go near them for a considerable time. In fact, I think I had rather forgotten about them, as I had had a good many other interesting cases, and a good many other interesting specimens had come my way. I had heard a vast number of stories as good as the story of Aunt Ursula Beane, but it did happen one day that I had to pass through Peckham, and could not resist the passing impulse of curiosity that urged me to go and look at the house on the Common. It was 'To Let', or 'To be Sold,' according to two or three estate agents' blatant boards on the front railing. I called next door, and was received with the inevitable suspicion with which the stranger is usually regarded in small places. I did, however, discover what I had set out to discover; namely, that the Catchpoles had left the neighbourhood about six months ago, and no one knew where they were. I took the trouble to go to one of the estate agents whose address was given on the board, to make further enquiries. The house was to be let or sold, it did not seem to have been considered a great prize, and it certainly had not gone off very fast, though it was cheap enough; the neighbourhood, even the estate agent admitted, 'was not what it had been.' Then, of course, one couldn't deny that the Ursula Beane case and the fact that the old lady had died there, and of poison, had given a slightly sinister air to the modest stucco building. As to the Catchpoles the estate agent did not know where they had gone—all he had was the address of a bank; nor was it any of my business, so I decided to dismiss the whole thing from my mind.

Good raw material, no doubt, but none of it worked up sufficiently to be of much interest."

Linley glanced round at us all triumphantly as he said this. "But it was all rounded off as neatly as any novelist could do it; let me tell you," he added, with unctiousness.

Five years afterwards I ran over to Venice for Christmas—I don't know why, except just the perverse desire to see the wrong place at the wrong time, instead of for ever the right place at the right time. I liked Venice in the winter fogs, with a thin coat of ice on the canals, and if you can get a snow-storm, well, so much the better. St. Marco, to me, looks preferable with the snowflakes in front of the blue and the bronze instead of that eternal sunshine. . . . Well, there I was in Venice, and I'm not going to bore you with any more local colour or picturesque detail. I was in Venice, very well satisfied with myself, very comfortable, and alone. I was tolerably familiar with the city, and I always stayed at the same hotel. One of the first things I noticed was that a large and very pretentious palace near by had recently been handsomely and expensively "done up"; I soon elicited the fact that the place, which I had always envied, had been bought by the usual rich American who had spent a great deal of money in restoring and furnishing it, but who did not very often live there, he only came and went after the fashion of all Americans, and was supposed to travel considerably in great luxury. Once or twice I saw this American going past in a gondola, wrapped in a foreign, rather theatrical-looking cloak, lounging with a sort of ostentation of ease on the cushions. He was an elderly man with a full grey beard and wore, even now in the winter, blue sun-glasses. On two separate occasions when I was sitting on the hotel balcony in the mild winter sunlight and he was rowing past underneath I had the impression that he was looking at me sharply and keenly behind those coloured spectacles, and also the impression, which was likely enough to be correct, that I had seen him before. I meet, of course, a great many people, but even with a memory that I rather pride myself on, cannot

immediately place everyone. The hotel at which I was staying—and this was one of the reasons that I always selected it—did not have any of those ghastly organized gaieties at Christmas ; we were left to ourselves in a poetic gloom best suited to the season and the city. I was seated by myself enjoying a delicious kind of mournful repose, piquantly in contrast with my usual life, when I received a message, and a very odd one : the gentleman, Signor Hayden, the American from next door, would very much like to see me. He had observed me on the balcony, knew my name and my profession, and requested the honour of my company. Attracted by anything queer or the least out of the way I at once accepted, and in ten minutes or so found myself in the newly-restored palace which I had so often admired and envied. The place was furnished with a good deal of taste, but rather, I suspected, the orthodox taste of the professional decorator. Mr. Hayden was not immediately visible, but, I understood, in bed, ill ; I expressed my willingness to go to his bedside and was shortly conducted there. The room was very handsome, the servants very well trained, and I was impressed by the fact that this rich American must be very rich indeed. One knows, of course, what these out-of-the-way little caprices of newly restored palaces in Venice cost. The owner of this up-to-date luxury was in bed, propped up with pillows and shaded by old-fashioned mauve velvet curtains. He still wore the coloured glasses, and I concluded either that he was blind or had some defect in his sight. He appeared to see me perfectly well, however, and beckoned to me to approach his bedside. As I did so he removed his glasses ; there was an electric standard lamp on an antique table by the bedside, and the light of it was turned full on to the sick man's face, which I immediately recognized. I was looking down into the faded, mild, light blue eyes of James Catchpole.

“Very odd that you should be here,” he smiled at me, “very odd indeed. You've always been interested in us and

I thought perhaps you'd like to hear the end of the story, that is, if any story ever does end ; there's a pause in ours, at this point, anyway."

I expressed due surprise and gratification at seeing him ; in truth, I was considerably amazed. I was startled, too, to see how ill he was. He asked me to help him up in bed. He declared, without emotion, that he knew himself to be dying.

"Where's Miss Louisa ?" I asked—"where is your sister ?"

"She died last year," he answered, placidly ; "she had a thoroughly good time for four years, and I suppose it killed her ; at her age, you know ; but, of course, it was worth it, she always said so."

The inevitable conclusion had jumped to my mind.

"You found Miss Ursula Beane's hoard ?" I suggested.

James Catchpole, passing his hand over the full grey beard which had so changed his face, replied simply, "We never lost it—we had it all the time."

"You mean *you* ?" I asked, dubiously, and he nodded and replied :

"Exactly !"

"That you—— ?" I suggested, and this time he nodded and said :

"Precisely !"

"Louisa persuaded her to realize her capital," he continued, with childish calm ; "she was a proper miser, and she rather fretted not having the actual stuff in her hands. It wasn't difficult to make her get it—she liked a real hoard, a thing you can put under the hearthstone or in the mattress, you know. We thought we should get hold of it easier that way when she came to die ; you never knew with anyone like that what she might do in the way of a will, she was keen on lost cats and Christians. We thought she would enjoy herself playing with it, and then we'd get it if we were patient enough."

He blinked up at me and added with the faintest of ironic smiles—"We'd been patient for forty years ; don't you

suppose we spent some part of that time planning what we would do with the money? We were both 'engaged' to start with, but her young man and my young woman couldn't wait all those years. . . . We read a good deal, we made lists of things we wanted, and places we wanted to go to. . . . We had quite a little library of guide-books, you may have seen them on the bookshelf—one of them was a guide to Venice. Louisa, writing her piffling articles, and I at my piffling job, to and fro—well, you don't suppose we didn't have our ideas?"

"I see," I said, doubtfully, "and then when there was that little misfortune about the arsenic, I suppose you didn't care to mention the hoard?"

"It wouldn't have been altogether wise, sir, would it?" smiled James Catchpole, simply; "it would have thrown a lot of suspicion on us, and we'd been very careful; there wasn't any proof—not a shred; we had to wait until the case had blown over a bit, and then we—well, we did the best we could with the time that was left us. We lived at the rate of ten thousand a year; we had the best of everything. . . . Of course it was the pace—don't you call it?—that killed; we were neither of us young, and we knew we couldn't stand it long, so we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly—believe me, sir, *thoroughly*."

He paused and added, reflectively, "But it's a good thing we made a move when we did; we shouldn't have been able to get about at seventy; *she*—she might have gone on to a hundred and ten."

"Do you mean that you——?" I suggested, quietly.

"It was the easiest thing in the world," he smiled, "to drop a couple of those dog-powders into her milk. . . ."

I'd always been intensely interested in murderers. I tried to question James Catchpole as to his motives, his sensations, his possible remorse; he appeared to have had none of any of these. . . .

"You didn't regret it afterwards, you haven't felt the furies behind you, or anything of that sort?"

He replied, as far as his feeble strength would permit:

"I have enjoyed myself thoroughly. I wish we hadn't waited so long."

I was puzzled: they had always seemed such very nice people.

"I am dying now," said James Catchpole, "and it's about time, for I've spent all the money. The doctor said my next heart attack would be fatal, and I've done my best to bring one on. I couldn't go back to lack of money."

"Who are you going to leave all this to?" I asked, with professional interest. I glanced round the handsome room.

He smiled at me with what I thought was compassion:

"I haven't been so silly as all that," he replied; "everything that I possess won't half pay my debts. I have had full value, I can assure you. After all, I had a right to, hadn't I? I'd waited long enough."

"What about the planchette and the 'demonstrations'?" I asked. "I suppose all that was a fake to throw us off the scent?"

"Not at all," he declared, in what seemed to be hurt surprise, "that was perfectly genuine. We made up our minds to get in touch with Aunt Ursula Beane to find out what she thought about it all."

"And what did she think?" I asked, startled.

"She said we were a couple of fools not to have done it sooner."

"Come, come, Mr. Catchpole," I cried, something shocked, "this is unseemly jesting."

"No jesting at all," he assured me. "Aren't I dying myself? I shall be in the old girl's company in a few minutes, I dare say. You heard her yourself, sir, dancing on the table that evening. She said she'd been a perfect fool herself, and now that she'd 'got over' she realized it. She said if we didn't have a good

time, or someone didn't have a good time with that dam' money, she'd never forgive us. You see, sir, at first we began to have that miserly feeling, too, and didn't want to spend it. We thought we'd go on hoarding it, living just the same and knowing it was there. She used to scribble out on the planchette saying what idiots we were. That's why she used all that strong language. 'You've got it—now use it!' that was what she always said. 'I'll go with you and share your good time'—and so she has, sir, believe me. We've often seen her sitting at the table with us, nodding over the champagne; she'd have been fond of champagne if she'd allowed herself . . . we've seen her dancing in some of those jazz-halls—we've seen her in boxes listening to Opera—we've seen her sitting in the Rolls-Royce revelling in the cushions and the speed. . . . Remorse? Why, I tell you we've given the old girl the good time she ought to have had years ago."

"Come, come, James Catchpole," I said, "you're delirious. I'd better fetch the doctor."

He smiled at me with compassion and some contempt.

"You're a clever lawyer," he said, "but there are a lot of things you don't understand."

Even as he spoke he seemed to fall into a peaceful sleep, and I thought it was my responsibility to fetch a doctor. Of course I believed hardly anything he said—I thought it was quite likely that he hadn't poisoned Aunt Ursula Beane, but that he had invented the story; at the same time there was the hard concrete evidence of the palace, the servants, the furniture—he had got some money from somewhere.

"Good raw material, eh? Think what you could make of it if you wrote it up!"

I went downstairs, I telephoned on my own responsibility to the address of one of the English doctors. It was Christmas Eve and I could not find him at home. I was quite uncertain what to do; I stood hesitant at the foot of the wide magnificent staircase when I observed a dreadful old woman creeping up

the stairs with a look of intensive enjoyment on her face—Mrs. Ursula Beane!—not a doubt of it—Aunt Ursula Beane! I saw her so clearly that I could have counted the stitches in the darns at the elbows of her black sleeves. I ran up after her, but of course she was there before I was. When I came up to the bedside James Catchpole was dead, with an extremely self-satisfied smug smile on his face.

There's my Christmas Eve ghost!—an hallucination, of course, but you can give it all the usual explanation. There's the story—you can put it together as you will. There's plenty of stuff in it—good raw material, eh?—take it how you will.

THE REVERSE OF THE MEDAL

A HOLIDAY IN ITALY—1912

THE dark-eyed invalid sat on the hotel terrace in the sun, looking sometimes at the sea and sometimes at a great tower of roses—the small cream and pink tight-curved roses of the Italian Riviera, that stood on the little table by his side. The winter sun gleamed on a clean plaza and the neat sweep of the white road and pavement ; the town was more fashionable in the spring than now, and there were only a few people about, these mostly well dressed and melancholy like the man sitting on the bare terrace who was looking sometimes at the smooth blue sea and sometimes at the curled pink roses.

He was a young man and his exotic type of Southern good looks was set off by very expensive English clothes ; a costly rug was over his knees and his comfortable cane chair was filled with fine silk pillows. An English newspaper, a novel, and several opened letters had slipped to the ground beside him ; medicine was on the table but it was concealed by the roses. A look of peevish indifference made dull a face whose chief charm should have lain in sparkling animation. The best part of the countenance lay in the large eyes and sweeping brows, the thrown-back black hair, the low forehead that gave an impression of simplicity—almost of nobility ; but the nose and lips were too coarse, the chin too feeble for real beauty or pleasantness. Still he was effective and generally considered extremely handsome.

Presently he stretched out the long dry fingers of a sick man and picked up the card that lay among the roses. It bore a

coronet and the name of a Portuguese Countess. Her rank impressed him more than her petting; he had taken pains to find out from the hotel manager that she really was of high birth and rank, one of the old royalist Portuguese families that had lost everything in the late revolution—or, if not everything in the strictest sense of the word, at least most of what they had possessed before. She was staying in the same hotel for the same reason; her health was delicate and she was ordered to the south for the winter. Despite the family disasters caused by the downfall of the royal family she had always served, she travelled with a companion and two maids, and everything she did was done well, both as regards money, taste and distinction.

The man on the terrace was thinking of these things as he stared at the coroneted card; they had a great attraction for him, and the peevish expression lifted slightly from his face as he reflected on all the attentions this great lady had shown him, from cups of chocolate specially made, brought up by her maid, to long talks in some corner of the deserted public rooms, or in the barren gardens where the palm trees rose from the sand. She was not young and she was very plain, and to the judgment of a Southern Italian these were two laughable defects; but she was an aristocrat and she flattered him, and the slow stately manner of her advances suited the enfeeblement of a sick mind and body.

He heard her step in the room behind him (the great arid drawing-room with the closed grand piano and the stiff velvet chairs), and had just time to drop her card among the letters before she came on to the terrace. Just as he had also kept it—this card that had come with her first gift—because it gave him pleasure to see her titles and the coronet, so, from the same motives of childish vanity, he did not wish her to know that he did so.

The lady came out into the sunshine. She was thin and brown as a withered twig, but she was exquisitely dressed in

white serge and lace, ermine and satin with ornaments of tiny diamonds, and she had the air, for all her ugliness, of something rare and choice—an aroma of fascinating femininity.

The young man made no effort to rise ; he always took full advantage of his privileges as an invalid, but he smiled, showing his fine white teeth.

“ You are out early,” said the lady, seating herself by the table, “ but one must take advantage of the lovely sun. You are better this morning ? ” Neither could speak the language of the other, so they conversed in French which gave an air of formality to their intercourse.

On the subject of his illness he was voluble ; there was nothing really the matter with him, only a little cough, left from an old attack of bronchitis ; and of course he was run down ; and equally of course he was getting the wrong treatment.

“ But you like your new doctor ? ” asked the lady, anxiously.

“ Oh, yes, I think his medicine has done me a great deal of good, I have had three quite easy nights. No, I mean that I should not be here alone—with no one to look after me.”

“ That is quite true,” said the lady, with a glance of warm sympathy in her large eager eyes. “ I can understand that. You must be very lonely.”

“ I am very lonely,” tears of self-pity at once wetted the invalid’s lids. “ Until you spoke to me I had not exchanged a word with a soul beyond the hotel staff and the doctor since I came here.”

“ It is shameful,” she murmured. “ Why do you not go south to your people ? ”

“ I have been trouble enough to them,” he replied. “ One does not want to be a burden. Besides, the English doctors particularly recommended this climate—not too hot.”

The lady glanced at the pile of letters.

“ You have not heard from your wife ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ She is coming out here ? ”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“ I don't know.”

A dreary silence fell between them ; their bloodless faces grew pinched ; the lady pulled at her gift of roses ; she was picturing the English wife who had sent off her delicate husband alone to cure himself in a foreign hotel, picturing the English home he had so often spoken of, where she was now comfortable, surrounded by relations and friends while he dragged out this lonely, starved existence. There was no lack of means, that was obvious from the young man's equipment, his lavishness with money, his doctors and his treatments. Her maid had spoken of ivory and gold dressing appointments, the profusion of his clothes, the luxury of his room . . . he certainly had come from a rich home . . . the wife must be frivolous—utterly hard.

She had never been to England, but she had met Englishwomen and she believed that they could be this—frivolous, utterly hard, and her hatred of the alien woman increased. She permitted herself daring and tender dreams ; she had had much in her life, never romantic.

The young man was leaning back on his cushions, his dark eyes, so heavily fringed by the thick lashes, were regarding her wistfully, with, she thought, a veiled entreaty. Why should she consider the wife ?—she could not, could not ; it must have been a hideous mistake that marriage, the hard worldly woman with the romantic arduous young man. North with South, flint with fire. Should she not redeem this error and catch at these rays of autumn sunshine that had come so sweetly into her life ? They were so equally matched ; both had birth and money and leisure (she knew quite well that these things were necessary to her), both were in that delicate state of health when crude desires and passionate impulses run low, both could exist

only in this exotic southern atmosphere of luxury, warmth and idleness. The lady thrilled to the spur of romance; he was really very handsome and looked at her with tender and wistful meaning; she felt that she could be so much to him; with hands that quivered slightly with excitement she raised the roses to a delicately flushed face and in that moment resolved on the elopement.

II

THE REVERSE

The lady was not deterred by the wire announcing the wife's arrival; during the last few days she had advanced considerably in her poignant and sentimental flirtation; and though the young man was very chivalrous in his reserve, she had easily learnt how unfortunate had been the marriage, what a failure had been the wife. She thought she would be rather glad to see her rival, to make her feel the contempt and aversion that were her due and then to leave her in the lurch as she had left her husband, to disappear with him under the other woman's very eyes and to leave her foolish and humiliated in the strange hotel.

The elopement was not definitely planned, not spoken of even, but it was very much in the air, very much thought about by both of them, and both knew that the other was resolved on this extreme step.

Into this atmosphere came the English wife. The lady, sitting exquisitely at ease, in the lounge, very finely gowned, very cool and pleasant, saw her arrive; she came without a maid and with very little baggage, and she was, contrary to all forecasts and expectations on the part of the lady, extremely dowdy.

Her dark cloth dress looked as if she had made it herself;

she wore an imitation fur coat, and (horrible contrast) a straw hat of a dismal prune colour ; she was tall and plain, pleasant and clever ; the lady watched her out of sight with a dubious glance.

That evening the invalid did not appear ; he was dining upstairs with his wife ; the lady sat alone wondering about several things—why this woman had come at all, why she was so dowdy, even shabby, so meek and amiable-looking—the prospective triumph was largely robbed of its piquancy and point—there would not be, to a great lady, much pleasure in humiliating that modest, rather pathetic figure.

Into the great, empty drawing-room, perfumed by the freesias lavishly crowded into every vase, the English wife came slowly like an embodiment of the lady's thoughts and sat down beside her on the long settee in the shaded corner behind the grand piano. She introduced herself, in French, with rather faltering simplicity ; the lady replied, with a freezing sweetness. With some relief the Englishwoman took up the conversation.

“ You have been so very kind to my husband, he has been telling me about it—thank you so much.”

“ It was a pleasure to be of any assistance to one so lonely.”

“ Yes, I suppose he was lonely.”

“ Naturally—with no one——”

“ He was never meant to come here,” said the wife, “ he went to his own people in the south, but they didn't get on well together, so he came back here to wait for me.”

The lady smiled, swinging her costly chain with well-kept hands ; she was really rather enjoying the extreme dowdiness and plainness of the other woman, who looked, on a near view, quite haggard and old.

“ You ought to have come with your husband,” she said, coolly.

“ It was impossible.”

“ Oh ? ”

"Quite impossible."

She hesitated a moment, and her keen, humorous mouth set in a firm line.

"I wanted to tell you about that. I think it best to have everything clear from the first—the English way, you know. . . ."

At this bluntness a sneer curled the lady's thin lip; yet in her heart she was startled by the quickness of the other's perception which had evidently seen all there was to see—or had the husband made an indiscreet confession? She sat stiffly, her claws sheathed.

"I have had a long talk with my husband, and think that I understand everything clearly."

Her tone was so business-like that the other was nonplussed.

"Indeed?" she queried, groping her way.

"Yes. Though he did not say anything definitely. He would not, of course. Not that type of man."

"You speak very unkindly of your husband."

"Do I? I don't mean to. I was just stating fact. You see, I know him rather well."

"I suppose so—as he would know you."

"That is just it—I am afraid he doesn't know me at all. That is why I couldn't speak to him. But you look very sensible—I'm sure you would understand at once."

"I am not stupid."

"No—I can see that—therefore, I'm sure you are under a mistake."

"A mistake?"

The English wife looked with kindly earnestness at her questioner.

"I'm rather used to reading between the lines," she said, "and you won't mind if I speak quite plainly?"

"You have been speaking—very plainly indeed."

"Yes—I dare say it has seemed rather crude to you. I've never had leisure for hesitations and subtleties."

"Never had leisure?" The great lady was plainly surprised.

“ No, I have had to earn my living—ever since I was sixteen. I was always good at things, and now I do pretty well with fashion—articles and drawings, you know. I’ve got a name now and I get a good price for the stuff.”

“ You *earn* your living?—but—your husband?”

“ I am coming to that. He was in an office when I married him, but he soon had to leave because of his health—that is four years ago and since then I have had to do everything.”

“ Everything?”

“ All the expenses. Illness is so costly and he had so many whims. I expect,” there was a faint gleam of laughter in her tired eyes, “ that you have noticed that he likes everything of the best; that is what attracts him to you—because you are costly.”

The lady was reduced to silence; she stared with a look almost of panic at the outspoken wife.

“ It has been a great strain. And when the doctors told me last autumn that he would have to go to Italy, I felt it could hardly be done. But I did raise the money and sent him off to his people—but—well, you see they are very simple and I think he had got rather spoilt and he quarrelled with them, and came back here.”

“ And why did you not come with him?” asked the other, rather faintly.

“ I had to stay behind to earn the money—you see, I got a rather big contract for a paper and I could not leave England till it was finished.”

“ I don’t know why you tell all this to me.”

“ Because I know that he never will—and you ought to know,” answered the wife, simply. “ He’s my job, in a way, and I’ve undertaken to look after him, and if you are going to take it on I should like you to know how matters stand.”

“ This illness, then?—he is getting better, is he not?”

“ He will never get any better. Of course he does not know it.”

A dying, penniless man . . . the lady shivered in the shadows.

"Naturally," added the other, "it would be the most *tremendous* relief if you did *take* him away. It has been a great strain, and it may last a long time yet."

"You are a very cold-blooded woman."

"Am I?"

"And I am sorry for your husband."

"You have the chance of making it up to him—if you *really* love him you ought to be very happy—we hear so much about that—the joy of service, the sacrifice of love."

She was not in the least sarcastic but quite decisive and calm.

"So I suppose," she continued, "that you are very glad of this chance of showing how much you care and what you can do for him——"

There was the shortest pause during which the lady gathered her forces to offer a complete denial of everything—to enquire with annoyed irony, what the other meant? But she was too emotionally overwhelmed to do this instantly, and while she faltered, the other made it impossible for her to speak at all.

"Please don't try and deny that what I have said is true. That would be rather foolish, wouldn't it? And cheap. Good night, now, and let me know in the morning what you have decided."

She rose, with a little nod, and left the lady staring into the shadowed emptiness of the hotel drawing-room. She was not much in doubt of the issue of this conversation; as she went upstairs to minister to the querulous invalid her heart was heavy.

"I wish I *didn't* always have to play fair," she thought, "but perhaps after all *she* will take him——"

But during the tiresome vigil of her watch by the sick man (he was very ill that night, from excitement, perhaps) she heard

the furtive packing of her rival, the running to and fro of the maid, the hasty lies whispered to the night porter, of the sudden summons elsewhere—and, bitterly, she thought again :

“ I *wish* I did not always have to play fair.”

COLONEL DE POMENARS AND TWO LADIES

A SCENE IN A FRENCH CHÂTEAU—1918

THE queer figure in the niche in the ancient tower had been old, very old, when that ancient tower was built.

With pain and suffering, with toilsome effort, this image had been dragged up from the abysses of time as a deep-sea monster is drawn from the secret depths of the ocean.

As in the rare monstrous fish, so in this strange grey statue was there something loathsome, almost obscene, as if, in each case, there was something better not meddled with, reluctant to face the light, antagonistic, too old, too grotesque, too mysterious.

The man who found this basalt figure, deep, deep, in the earth of Africa, Claude de Pomenars, the famous explorer, had called it "The Moon at Carthage"; to the casual eye the figure had no meaning. Draped, veiled, masked, almost it seemed there was nothing tangible about the sexless shape save the blunt horned moon set above the flat swathed head.

Goddess, devil, beast or woman, the thing was as famous as the man who had discovered it; during his life it had been exhibited all over the world, then rested awhile in the Musée du Louvre. After his death it came into the possession of his friend, Madame du Vernis, and she placed it in the tower which served as her private apartments in the Château du Vernis.

Everything in the tower chamber was old and beautiful, tapestries, furniture, pictures, but all of to-day as compared with the grey statue.

Madame du Vernis had a very fine taste in everything; she

was a woman a little apart from the life and movement of her day ; she did nothing, had never done anything, never would do anything, yet she gave the impression of an intense and active personality, grave, almost austere, but radiant with ardent life. A childless woman, she was neither humiliated nor thwarted by this fact ; wife of a man, dry, cold, twenty years older than herself, she was untouched by either scandal or bitterness.

Beautiful ; she never used her beauty as an asset. Wealthy ; she ignored her riches.

There was something in her still loveliness, her serene silence, her impassive, yet ardent life, akin to the statue that Claude de Pomenars left her when he died.

He had been killed in the war, at Soissons. Madame du Vernis' château was then a hospital, and the great explorer had requested that if wounded he might be sent there, but he died within a few hours of his wound and the statue came alone to Madeleine du Vernis.

She spent most of her leisure time in the tower chamber that was like a room in a fairy tale, with the mediæval arras, low wide chairs and lancet-shaped windows looking on to the park, and the few steps that led to the other little turret-room where Madeleine du Vernis had her books, her desk and her work, her spinning-wheel and lace pillow.

This clear day of autumn the mistress of the tower was away in the deer park with young de Merinville, the last of her patients who lingered on at the château, still wan, still crippled, still shuddering from contact with the world of strong common things.

His father and his stepmother were guests at the château for a few days, and this afternoon there were others in the quiet house, members of a Committee for the Care of the Wounded, who were organizing a large exhibition in Paris for which men like the Marquis du Vernis were lending their treasures.

His wife had entertained them all very graciously at lunch,

she would entertain them again very graciously at tea, but she did not care to go with them over the château, nor exhibit to them the queer grey statue that of course they must be shown.

The western sun was tinging the mellow-coloured room with gold when the gentlemen, conducted by M. du Vernis, stood in front of that queer, swathed mysterious figure which stood in an alcove especially made by the window and directly under an elaborate iron lantern, hanging from a bracket.

The Marquis, a spare quiet man, indicated the figure.

"This is the de Pomenars' statue," he said.

"Venus?" asked General de Merinville.

"De Pomenars called it 'The Moon at Carthage,'" replied the host.

"Meaning?"

"Ah, General—the meaning—of a man of genius?"

"You think de Pomenars a genius?" asked one of the Committee.

"Undoubtedly," said du Vernis, drily.

"He had that reputation," remarked another, "but whether a great explorer can be called a genius——"

"Ah, Count," interrupted du Vernis, "a romantic career, an attractive personality, a heroic death—to achieve these, is it not genius?"

A suave sentence from a third member of the deputation covered the sub-acid in the Marquis' speech.

"The statue at least is wonderful—horrible perhaps. Venus or who? 'The Moon at Carthage'—— Well, who saw the Moon at Carthage—perhaps that was de Pomenars' meaning? or simply—the unattainable. The thing one will never see."

"Perhaps," replied M. du Vernis, "it is the most important of his African discoveries, he thought her marvellous."

There was a murmur of approval, of acknowledgment, the spokesman of the deputation said gratefully:

"It will be the most valued addition to the Exhibition,

Marquis—with this and the pictures you have been too generous—our only apology is our cause——”

“ Vicomte, if you care to ask for everything in the château I shall be honoured—and de Pomenars—he gave *all* for France, he would be pleased to give this——”

As he finished speaking Madame du Vernis entered; she had hoped that her chamber would be free of the intruders, on learning that they were still there a vague sense of irritation had brought her to her domain.

All the gentlemen turned to face her as she stood, in her plain grey dress and black fur, pale and dark against the blurred tints of the tapestry with a cluster of vivid autumn berries and leaves in her gloved right hand.

Her husband spoke at once.

“ The Committee have selected de Pomenars’ statue, Madeleine. I think de Pomenars would be pleased. I have just said so.”

“ But this is impossible,” said Madame du Vernis, quickly.

“ Madeleine ? ”

“ I really could not lend that, Henri,” returned the wife, nervously. “ Anything else. Messieurs, you will understand, a personal gift from a dead friend, standing in my own room.”

“ Marquise,” replied the spokesman, persuasively, “ the statue will be as safe as in your own château—insurance and all precautions will be undertaken by the Committee.”

“ Insurance ! ” answered the lady quickly, “ Comte, I cannot lend the statue.”

“ But I have promised,” said her husband, coldly.

There was a murmur, polite, delicate, among the gentlemen.

“ Of course, if the Marquise objects,” said one, “ I hardly understood——”

But General de Merinville interrupted, and looking at the lady pointedly, added to the other’s broken speech.

“ I am sure the Marquise can have no real objection. The

exhibition is for the wounded—the incurables. I speak as the friend of the Marquise's childhood."

The eyes of Madame du Vernis shone bright in the shade of her plumed hat.

"But I have an objection, General—and you have half the treasures in France and the best of our poor collection, the Velasquez, the Rubens, the Henri Deux ware and the Majolica. This room and my little boudoir in the *tourelle* only contain my *personal* belongings."

"Then, Madame," said de Merinville, still more pointedly, "since the Marquis has been so generous, you will certainly want to make some contribution—of these personal belongings."

"I have other things," replied Madame du Vernis, in agitation. "Why do you want this? It is even ugly—a mystery, perhaps a fake."

"De Pomenars is the hero of the moment," replied the General. "The public has its idols—he was one—and died for France—no one will think of—fakes."

"Enough," interrupted du Vernis, coldly, "I have given my promise. It is not affected by my wife's caprice. And of course the statue is genuine."

As he turned away, there was a second's embarrassed pause, then de Merinville spoke again.

"The statue goes to Paris to-day, Madame, and in a fortnight will be returned to you."

"To-day!" exclaimed the lady. "Impossible! I really——"

"I will take it down," interrupted de Merinville, "I am expert in—these affairs."

"You'll need tools, General?" asked du Vernis.

"No."

In a moment the tall soldier had lifted the queer grey statue from the alcove and carefully handed it to his colleagues.

"I will have it packed for you," said du Vernis.

"No, Marquis! We have our own men in the car—Madame can be assured of the greatest care——"

Rather glad to escape from the sombre eyes of the lady the two gentlemen carried away the statue.

To the others du Vernis spoke, ignoring his wife.

"Would you like to see the enamels?"

"Forgive me," replied the General, "I will arrange the empty niche so as to be less offensive to the Marquise."

Du Vernis and the other gentlemen left, the Marquis saying, in a tone of cutting reproof, as he passed his wife:

"You are ungracious, Madeleine."

But the lady did not move; her white gloved fingers were pulling at the clusters of ripe berries she held, leaving on the soft leather a faint red stain.

As the door closed de Merinville instantly turned to her, holding out a packet of letters.

"You are very clever, General," she said, faintly.

"Merely observant."

She looked at the packet, thick and tightly tied, that he held slackly.

"I too am observant," she said. "I knew you hated me."

"No."

"Knew you were my enemy."

"No."

"What but hatred could have made you guess that those letters were hidden in that alcove, beneath the statue?"

"I was interested to find out why you adored that statue, why you were here so frequently—why you kept this tower sacred, as an oratory, even when you had your hospital open and full——"

"You spied on me."

"You were not very discreet."

"An indifferent husband has made me careless, perhaps," said the lady, bitterly. "With Henri one hardly troubles to be discreet."

"I was not indifferent," replied the tall old soldier, sternly, "I was very eager to—confirm my suspicions. I arranged for the Committee to be brought here, to covet the statue, to take it away at once."

"So much is obvious. Please tell me why? We have not too long. Your wife may be coming here soon."

"My wife," repeated de Merinville, "I am taking her away to-morrow."

"From contamination, General?"

"Marquise!"

"But you meant it. Please be quick—will you give me those letters or tell me their price?"

"Quite easily. I want you to send Louis home. I want my son."

"Louis! The boy!" cried Madeleine du Vernis, in amazement.

"A man," the stern father reminded her, "a soldier and a de Merinville."

"I do not understand," she replied, swiftly. "He is so happy—here."

"Too happy."

Her serenity was troubled now; she took a full step forward.

"Why, you do not think that I—why, one must smile——"

"He adores you," interrupted the severe masculine voice, breaking in on her broken feminine accents, "you know that, of course."

"Only as a boy adores a woman nearly old enough to be his mother—and I, ah, General, I never had a son."

Not by a flicker of pity did he spare her.

"While your hospital was open it was natural he should be here—now it is closed and your wounded have gone it is natural that he should come home."

She still spoke eagerly.

"He is still only convalescent. His was the worst case we

had. He loves this place. Why should he not stay until he rejoins his regiment ? ”

“ Why should he not come home ? ”

She caught her breath a little and looked, in fixed agitation, at her tightly grasped cluster of crushed berries.

“ General, you have a young wife, as young as Louis—the boy feels ‘ de trop. ’ ”

“ It is because of my wife that I want him home. I am old-fashioned, Marquise, I believe in the influence of a good woman—on a youth—like Louis. ”

She did not look up nor ease the anxious pucker of her brows.

“ A woman like—Madame de Merinville ? ”

“ A woman innocent, good, sweet—like my wife. ”

The lady did lift her eyes now for just a flicker of a glance.

“ Not the woman who was—the lover of de Pomenars ? ” she asked with her serene swift softness.

He answered swiftly also—not softly, he had long had his weapons sharp and ready.

“ If he was your son, Marquise, would you not think as I think ? ”

“ Yes, I should want to keep him from—false women, women who played with love, married women with affairs——”

He challenged her pause.

“ Well, Marquise ? ”

“ I am not one of those women. ”

“ You are not what Louis thinks you. ”

“ What does he think me ? ”

“ A saint—an angel——”

“ Well, that does not hurt him ”—sudden passion strained her voice—“ and it means a great deal to me. You have been frank, General de Merinville—I will be franker—in my life of failure, of repression, sad negation and secret bitterness the affection of your son has been the one sweet and pleasant thing. He has a nature like one of our ancient paladins and I—have not betrayed that nature. That high and remote affection

that he cherishes for me will keep him safe until he really—loves.”

She moved slowly to the lancet window, let her safe gaze rest for a moment on the empty niche, then turned it across the sunny deer park, that prospect so sweetly still in the ruddy glow of evening.

“At least you have him in thrall, Marquise, he has no thought beyond you.”

She answered without turning her head.

“No thought of another woman—but his whole heart belongs to France.”

He retorted quickly and even more drily.

“After what I have said it is impossible that you should permit him to remain here, Marquise.”

“Ah, why?” she asked, serenely. “You think I ought to feel insulted. I am a strange creature, I suppose, General—but I am still willing to keep Louis—for his own sake.”

“The inordinate feminine vanity!” he cried, in deep vexation.

“Perhaps,” she said, “one likes to use one’s power.”

“You will use yours to keep Louis here?”

“If I thought it for his good—Louis is very dear to me.”

The father was moved now, flushed of face and rough of voice.

“Then if you use your weapons——”

Her gentle tones checked him.

“You use—the letters? That is ugly.”

“The whole situation is ugly.”

She moved now and faced him with a look of melting sweetness.

“Ah, General, you were my father’s friend—you remember me when I was—younger than Louis is now. I was like he is now—I had my dreams! The Moon at Carthage, General, the light that never will be re-lit, the city that will never be rebuilt, the romance that will never glow any more. I lost it all, all.

Let Louis keep it, leave him with me and I will see that he keeps it."

"I hardly understand," he replied, sternly.

With the same impulsive warmth she answered:

"I am very unhappy."

"You have the memory of—de Pomenars—doubtless a golden one."

"Yes—I have the memory of—de Pomenars," she agreed.

"Ah, well, then, Marquise, why, after the love of a man like that do you need the devotion of a boy like Louis?"

"Because he is a boy. Tell me—was it not your wife who inspired you to—this attempt to rescue Louis?"

"Naturally," he admitted, "she is hurt, Amelie—at his prolonged absence—she is but a child herself, sensitive, generous, impulsive——"

"Enough! Enough!"

"But," he added, sternly, "she has not influenced me—do you think that a woman like Amelie can have any conception of——"

"A woman like me?"

"You have said it, Marquise."

"I suppose not," said Madame du Vernis, slowly.

"I know," continued the stiff soldier, gravely, "that it is a ridiculous position—an old man, a young girl, but I am not afraid of ridicule—Amelie is so exceptional, so touching——"

"It is beautiful, General, a perfect union—but hardly affects our matter in hand. I want Louis to stay here with me. And you and Amelie want him to go home with you. Well, when I have told you the truth, General, you will understand—and perhaps you also will not wish Louis to leave me."

"Why?"

"Those letters you hold are not what you think them to be, General."

"They are love letters?"

"Yes."

“Written by de Pomenars—or to de Pomenars, eh?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Marquise?”

“They are not written to me nor by me,” she said, clearly.

“Not written to you—nor by you?”

“No—save one.”

“To whom, then?”

“To a detestable woman,” replied Madame du Vernis.

“The woman who broke his heart. I loved de Pomenars—like—ah, well, what does that part of it matter? He did not love me. I was merely his friend, his counsellor—his Egeria, perhaps. He was—the sun at midday to my frigid, weary, spoilt life. I lived in his glory, his triumphs, his toils—enough, he loved this other woman and he was so sure of my steady friendship that he told me the progress of his wooing. She was married, the usual marriage—like mine!—she, well, I had to stand by, he loved her so——”

Now he faltered in his stern attitude of judgment.

“Marquise, I have no right——”

“But,” she continued, calm and merciless, “you would pry into a woman’s heart; you cannot close your eyes now. I will be brief and plain. This woman never appreciated her great fortune! A lover like de Pomenars! She was a born wanton. I think he—tired her with his flights into ethereal realms—the Moon at Carthage did not please her, she liked the electric lights of the Boulevards. De Pomenars coming home unexpected—a precious few hours in Paris, found her with another man—you observe—the old trite situation. He rushed back to Soissons and a few days later received his death wound——”

“Marquise, I beg——”

“Hear me out. He wanted to come to my little hospital here—but he died before they could move him—he sent me this packet of letters, hers to him, and some he had written to her and never sent—with a covering letter scrawled on his death-bed. Give them to me.”

Silently he handed her the packet, she drew out the top paper, then put the others into the empty niche.

Slowly she unfolded the rough paper, a sheet torn out of an Army note-book, and handed it to General de Merinville.

“Read that—you know his writing?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Read it aloud.”

In a low voice the proud old man read out the few lines scribbled in pencil on the lined paper.

“Written in I know not what mood by a dying man. Take this record of a folly and do what you will. Crush her or spare her. I am past it all. I meant to die and have been fortunate. Now there is just this pain and the thought of you. Madeleine, you have been so wonderful, an inspiration, always—ah, if! if! Madeleine, good-bye.”

There was a second's pause, then he said, as he gave her back the paper:

“De Pomenars did love you, after all.”

“He never said so,” she returned, proudly. “You could show that letter to my husband.”

“Marquise, you have shamed me.”

“You are convinced?”

“I humbly beg your forgiveness.”

“Perhaps I was foolish to keep those letters—but I could never tell if I would, as he says—crush or spare her. There is no more to say.”

“The woman?”

“The woman?”

“What of her?”

“She seeks a third lover. She is trying to fascinate a boy—like Louis. What would you?—She runs her course and I mine.”

“She does not know that you have the letters?”

“No,” said Madame du Vernis. “She thinks, I suppose, that he destroyed them.”

The outer door opened quickly, letting in a shaft of sunset light and Madame de Merinville, infantile, rosy, delicate as a Greuze portrait, in white and lavender, laughing, gay.

"Madeleine, are you not coming to give the gentlemen their tea? They are waiting, dear."

Her husband gazed at her with eyes of doting affection.

"Amelie," he said, "I was just begging the Marquise to keep Louis till he can rejoin his regiment."

The childish face clouded, the lovely lips quivered.

"Oh, but we want him at home," the girl pouted.

"Louis is happy here and in such good hands."

Amelie tossed her delicate head.

"It makes me feel that I have come between you," she protested. "Ah—the statue has gone!"

She gazed with what seemed dismay at the empty niche.

"It is coming back," said the General. "The Committee feel that after all they cannot take the responsibility——"

"How dark it has become," interrupted Madame du Vernis; she lit the lamp above the empty niche and the light gleamed on the packet of letters.

Laughing, the girl crept up to the woman.

"Do let Louis come home—it is so dull and I am not allowed to go to Paris yet——"

"You spoilt child," smiled her husband, but Madame du Vernis did not answer.

The fair girl glanced at the packet of letters in the empty niche, then at the still face of the elder woman.

"Louis stays," added the General, glancing at his hostess.

"Now, I must go and see they do not pack the statue."

"Oh!" The blonde beauty flushed into animation.

"You won't be hurt if he stays?" asked Madame du Vernis, looking direct at her.

"Oh, no! Relieved, rather. How should I have entertained my great, big—son? Madeleine, they are waiting for us——"

“ A moment—there is one of my treasures I want to show you——”

The girl hesitated, then came into the room after closing the door on her husband.

“ What is it you want to show me ? ” she lisped, ingenuously.

“ These letters.”

Madame du Vernis snatched them up and held them out.

“ What do you mean ? ”

The girl was not childish now nor lisping, but alert and keen.

“ Your letters—take them, I’ll not be the keeper of your conscience any longer ! ”

“ My letters ! ”

“ Yours to de Pomenars ! ”

Madame de Merinville had seized the packet and instantly thrust it into the bosom of her dress.

“ You are expert,” observed Madame du Vernis.

The fair face, no longer infantile, but ferret sharp and snarling, looked at the other woman, bitter with hate.

“ What do you mean ? What do you want ? ” she asked.

“ *Only to save Louis from you as I could not save de Pomenars—come, let us join the others.* ”

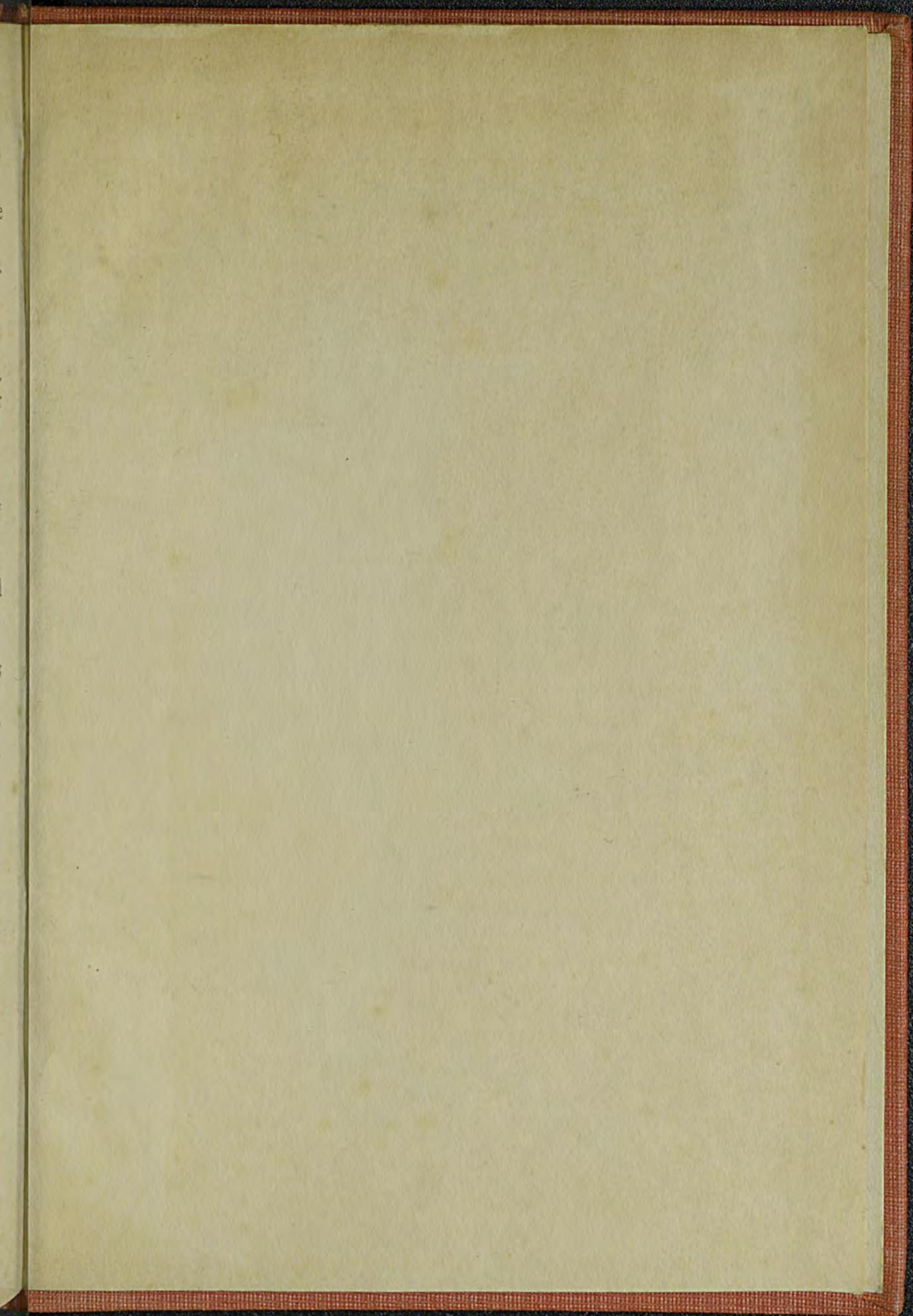
Before the other could answer General de Merinville returned and tenderly drew his young wife’s arm through his own.

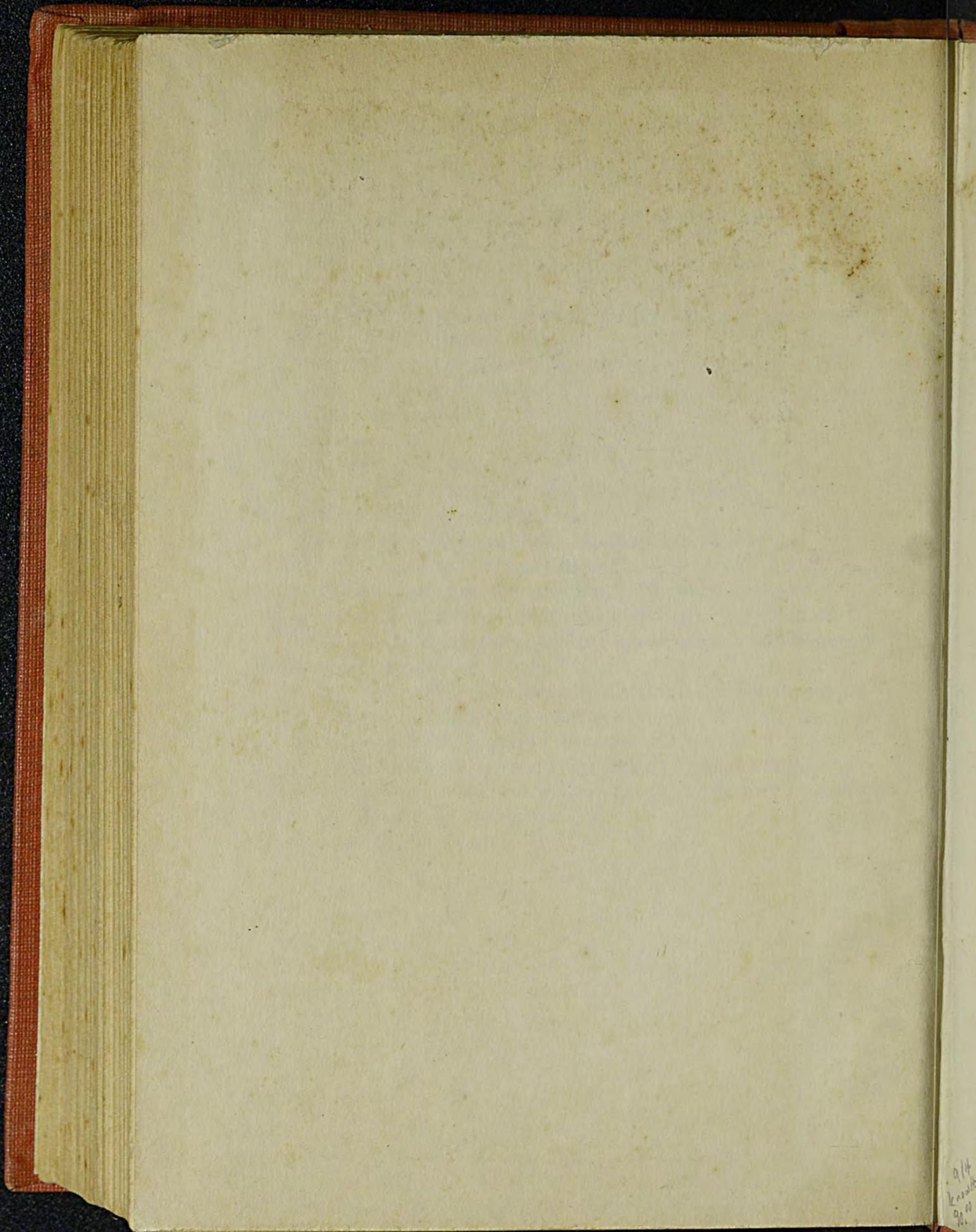
“ You are sad, Marquise ? ” he said, regretfully.

“ Sighing for the Moon—at Carthage ! ” she smiled.

“ The statue is to be returned at once—the letters—— Ah, I perceive the letters are gone——”

“ Into oblivion, General——”





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