

# IN THE FLOWER OF HER YOUTH.

A Novel.

BY MABEL COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF "TOO RED A DAWN," "AN INNOCENT SINNER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# AN INNOCENT SINNER.

By **MABEL COLLINS.**

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# IN THE FLOWER OF HER YOUTH.

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## CHAPTER I.

“**D**OESN'T it seem rather rash to take a vow at seventeen which one has to keep all one's life?”

So said Lil Warrington, poising her pretty figure airily at a window which opened wide upon the green lawn. Her father sat just within, at his writing table; she came out of the sunshine to ask this queer question. Indeed, the sun still caught her hair, lighting it up and revealing its sunny tendency, though her face was made dim by the shadow of over-hanging roses. The outline of her light form was clearly marked against the sunlit background.

Brough Warrington looked up at her and frowned. The frown meant a mental effort, the shutting out from his mind the subject he was writing about, in order to attend to his troublesome daughter. At another time Lil would have regarded it as an impossible wickedness to speak to her father when he

was writing ; but to-day she knew she might do as she would, for to-morrow she was to be married, and Lil Warrington would be Lil Warrington no longer.

Brough pushed back his chair with an impatient movement as he answered her.

“I verily believe,” he said, “that it is a woman’s ruin to be able to think !”

“Papa,” replied Lil, soberly, “you are talking nonsense, and you know it !”

“Oh, yes, I know it,” answered Brough, with a tug at his moustachios; “but, pray, what else can I talk when you ask me such a ridiculous question ?”

“Is it so ridiculous ?” asked Lil ; and, as she spoke, she quietly sank down upon the ground and sat at her father’s feet in a favourite attitude of hers. She was very slender, this girl of seventeen, though tall and grandly formed ; and as she sat there, like a child, with her fair face upturned, she made a charming picture of a very bright, yet simple, girl.

“Why, of course it is ridiculous, and you are an absurd baby, and have been all through this affair. Haven’t I told you all along that your course is plain as a pikestaff ? Either you want to marry Charlie Newman, or you don’t ; and, if you don’t, say so !”

“But I do !” said Lil.

“All right, then !” interrupted her father, “you will have your wish to-morrow.”

“I was only thinking,” went on Lil, with a

dreamy look in her eyes, "that it seems a long time from seventeen to seventy. I may live to be seventy, you know! and, perhaps, Charlie will have got tired of me, or I of him, before then!"

Brough Warrington groaned.

"Confound it all!" he said, dolefully; "all the miseries of your life will come of having brains! '*only thinking!*' Ye gods, why was I such a fool as to let a girl learn to think? Why didn't I have you taught to work samplers and mend stockings? then, perhaps, you would have gone through life blindfold like other women. I advise you to try it, Lil; pretend you're blindfold. Limit your thoughts to to-morrow, and the excitements thereof. You can't exactly throw Charlie over so late in the day."

"And I don't want to, either," said Lil.

"Then that settles the question; so don't be a little muff any more," remarked her father, who, though a master of pure English on paper, was not always elegant as a conversationalist. "Couldn't you go and make a pudding, or something, to divert your attention?"

Lil shook her head. Then she looked at the writing table. "*Must* that article go this afternoon?"

"It ought to," said Brough, irresolution written on his face.

"Let ought stand for nothing just for once in your life!" cried Lil. "Come down the river

with me and the dogs ; I am longing for a row. Do come, there's a dear old boy."

This sounds irreverent from a slender daughter to a broad-shouldered father ; yet Lil had not only reverence but love for this dearest friend of her life.

"But are there not mysterious things you ought to be doing to-day?" said Brough ; "sewing lace on to your dresses, or composing your mind for to-morrow? I know Gran will be horrified if I take you out."

"Never mind," cried Lil, gleefully ; "Gran won't see, for she is asleep upstairs, and my dresses will be all right. What is the good of dressmakers and milliners if I am to bother over the things as well? Come ; it is such a lovely afternoon, and you won't have me to tempt you to idleness again for ever so long !

This argument, of course, settled the matter.

"Come, dogs," said Brough, and immediately a blue skye terrier and a poodle, who had until now been fast asleep under the table, sprang out and fell into the wildest state of excitement. They barked and danced in and out of the window, until their insane transports of delight had attracted the attention of two big dogs, a St. Bernard and a Newfoundland, who had been rolling on the grass. These two rushed up and joined in the fray. By this time Brough and Lil had each put on a straw hat, and they now went out

on the lawn arm in arm, with the dogs tumbling and romping and barking around them.

“Oh, dogs, do be quiet,” cried Lil, “you will wake Gran, and then she will look out of the window and be shocked at my levity.”

But the heedless creatures continued to make the outrageous noise in which they always indulged when their master and mistress went for a walk; and in another moment Lil's prophecy proved but too true. A figure appeared at the open window, where, a little while since, Lil herself had been standing. How different a figure! It is a quaint study to observe the peculiarities of a family as exhibited in a young girl who has all the freshness of her youth still upon her, and then to compare her with her grandmother who is nodding into her grave. One may see how the stock wears, with such an illustration; and in this case there was Brough, hearty with the vigour of manhood, to add to the comparison. Charlie Newman had not been discouraged by the study of the three generations, for, after much acquaintance with papa and grandmamma, he was still desperately enamoured of brown-eyed Lil.

“Lil,” cried grandmamma, from the doorway, “don't go out, child! your wedding dress has just come and the dressmaker is waiting for you to try it on.”

Lil paused, hesitated, and turned round. Her father's arm was linked through hers,

and he turned with her, wearing a very rueful face. A couple of naughty truants they looked as they stood there a moment, knowing they must return, yet rebelling, as was the habit with both of them, against constraint. The dogs, amazed, confused, and downcast at this irresolution, stood beside them, silent, yet open-mouthed, and ready to bark again more gleefully than ever over a new start. But they were doomed to disappointment; and their tails all descended from the perpendicular to the horizontal as they forlornly followed their master back towards the house.

“I must try the dress on!” said Lil, with a sigh. She never loved dress with the absorbing passion which most women bestow on it.

“If you will have done with it in an hour, I shall have finished my article,” said Brough; “we shall still have time for a brief row before dinner, and the dress will not only have been tried on but, practically, paid for.”

“You dear old thing!” said Lil; she quickly put her arms round him and gave him a hug, under which caress he grunted, perhaps appreciatively. She could only just manage it, for, tall as she was, she was a little creature beside him. Then she ran away over the grass and disappeared in the house with her grandmother.

Brough followed her at a more leisurely pace. He had to bring himself back from

that holiday mood into which it was so fatally easy to fall. He had to brace himself up again into the state in which serious work can be accomplished. So he slowly returned to his writing table; and the dogs, looking downcast, as though they had lost all hope and joy in life, sat themselves down about him in various attitudes of despondency. Disappointment is a keen thing to the creatures who live in the present moment; but they have full compensation; their pleasure is perfect. These dogs, whose instinct of fidelity was so strong that they could not entertain the idea of an excursion, except at their master's heels, knew nothing of Lil's imminent departure; it darkened not their dimly-loving brains. How they would look for her and miss her when she was gone! yet none the less would they feel delight in their plunges into the cool river, and wild romps upon the green grass to-day.

It was different with their master. All the while he worked and held himself to his subject, he was conscious that, to-morrow, Lil, his Lil, a girl, as he thought, unlike all other girls, was to be married.

He was glad of it even while he rebelled against it. For he believed in early marriages, and preferred that his Lil should win her experience while in the heyday of her girlhood, rather than hesitate till she had grown an atom staid.

Brough Warrington was a Bohemian in the true, old, charming sense of the word. He lived to enjoy life ; he loved all things bright and gay. He knew, that if he held Lil to himself, as he would have liked to do, until her girlish teens were out and he had caught the full sweetness of her fresh young life, the demureness of possible old maidenhood would descend upon her. Marrying in the very bloom of her early youth, she would have the chance of developing into the rich, warm, happy woman he hoped she would become.

But it was very hard ; for Lil had been his right hand for so long. She had filled his life ; she had been his secretary, his companion, his baby, his critic, and his worshipper ever since she grew out of childhood. Lil's mother had died when she was a mere baby, and left her as the sole legacy of an intense love, to be a keen responsibility and an incessant pleasure to her father. He had set himself one task with regard to her ; he would make her love him, in spite of his being her father. It appeared to him that too often the idea of stern parental duty and some other confused notions separate the generations from one another. He wanted this girl to really regard him as her friend. He made her his companion and trained her mind after a fashion which, if more women had the chance of it, would produce a new type of mothers. Her brain was developed, instead of her

memory crammed; the restless activity of the growing creature was encouraged, and directed into wholesome channels instead of being crushed.

What a glorious girlhood was that of Lil Warrington's! a little princess in her own home, she grew, unchecked: yet her surroundings were of such an order that she grew safely. She never saw the inside of a school, nor had her mind poisoned and diluted by associating with imperfect specimens of girls. Her friends, so few she could count them on one hand, were her father's friends also. They were her father's contemporaries, men of his own sort, who came to visit him at long intervals in his isolated home, and who paid all homage to the quaint baby princess. When Brough had lived in London and made acquaintance with the mysteries of its many-sided life, he had been called by a certain set in which he moved, the king of Bohemia. His shoulders were so broad, his height so aggressive, his voice so noticeable, that he was always a marked man among his companions. Moreover he liked to have his own way, and made men do as he pleased after a fashion of his own, which was part of his personality; and thus he came to be called the king in a special circle of gay Bohemians. When he settled down in the country after his wife's death, and devoted himself to his little daughter, his old friends

who came to see him called her princess Lil; and Lil liked the pretty nick-name, without even wondering what it meant. It seemed to be part of her life, part of herself; she stared when she heard herself called Miss Warrington, as she came to be when she grew tall and slender.

And now this princess Lil would exist no longer. So soon! and her quaint, bright, lonely, happy life would be over. She would be Mrs. Newman, and have to keep house and behave with propriety.

Brough always laid down his pen and paused when this idea occurred to him. It was difficult for him to imagine this child of his a young wife in a suburban home, ordering dinners and returning calls. A certain dismay smote him when he thought how little her training had fitted her for such a life. But he had great faith in Lil's strength of character, which, as he believed, would carry her through the most unfamiliar difficulties. And then, too, Brough's conscience was a very spasmodic affair. He was a general optimist, a little too inclined, perhaps, to overlook other people's troubles, but still so childlike in character that his lighthearted selfishness was easily forgiven if only because of its infectiousness. Everybody loved Brough Warrington, save certain staid and Philistinish reviewers.

For Brough, busy at his writing table,

trying to put the affairs of a little girl out of his head, was a literary lion of the day, idolised and hated as such men are. Writing was his profession, and he loved literature as the purest and noblest of the arts. Yet he had to do plenty of journeyman's work in it, like many other successful and well-known authors; and with all his incessant industry he could but keep this country cottage, and could give Lil no dowry but a few new dresses. And Lil, who all her life had learned to regard a tradesman's bill as meaning many hours' hard work at a writing table, was grateful enough for these. She regarded her wedding dress—mere white muslin, with a little old lace which Granny brought forth from mystic hoards—with a respect which few girls would have bestowed upon anything less than a new costume from Worth's. Lil's ambitions in the matter of dress were strangely simple. She loved to look well; she loved to wear flowers fresh out of the garden. But she had no idea of the charm of mere cost, which is so powerful, as a rule, with the civilised feminine mind. Indeed, had her dress been white satin, it would only have given her a heartache, for she would have regarded it as so much more work of her father's.

Lil is standing now, in her little muslin-draped bedroom, with the white dress upon

her, and a bright flush in her face which makes her bewitchingly lovely. The dressmaker is critically regarding her on one side; Granny on the other.

"It is beautiful," says the dressmaker, decidedly.

Gran's reply is an undecided sort of groan.

The old lady was in a dilemma. She did not know how to criticise the garment, yet it annoyed her. The dressmaker had really accomplished a success! Lil's figure was shown to perfection. This in itself puzzled old Mrs. Warrington. Women did not have figures like that in her young days; there were no perfect curves, no long, beautiful outlines. The shape of a woman was arbitrary then, and quite unlike the actual thing. This bewitching form, so carefully set off, distressed Mrs. Warrington. It seemed to her that there was something immoral and wrong in it. Yet she could say nothing about that, for she well knew that Lil's own rebellion would rise against a pointed waist and a full skirt; not to mention the dressmaker, who inspired Gran with some awe, as a person who had to be paid. She would have liked to complain of the frivolous flounces, and the superabundance of muslin in the train, destined only to lie on the floor and get dirty. She knew, however, that it was of no use; so she contented herself with saying:

“I suppose you will make your husband pay for it when that dress is got up? In my days we ironed our dresses ourselves, and then we thought twice about it before we had them covered with flounces that would take half a day to iron.”

The dressmaker laughed a little to herself at this, and Lil's cheeks flushed more deeply. Gran's speeches of this sort always had the power of oppressing her with a general sense of her own incapacity; and now they cut more keenly than ever, for in this imminence of getting married, she took upon herself the various responsibilities of economising and managing. For Charlie Newman was decidedly not rich.

“Oh, but he will not blame me like Gran does, when I make mistakes,” thought Lil, quick tears, born of a feeling half pride and half humility, rising in her eyes, “and, surely, if I use my brains I can find how to do things!”

She put her hands up to unfasten the dress hastily, for she was tired of standing to be looked at. But just then came a knock at the door.

“May I come in? May I see it? Let me see your dress, Lil.”

“Please come in, Lady Lynne,” said Lil, cordially enough, but with a faint look of annoyance in her eyes. She liked Lady Lynne, but she hated her to seem so at

home in that house. She harboured a dim, undefined jealousy of her.

“Mr. Warrington told me you were trying on your wedding dress, and I ventured to come up. It is charming, quite a success. What a sweet little figure you have, Lil.”

Lady Lynne was some inches shorter than the girl; but she always treated her as a small baby. Why this worried her, Lil would have found it hard to tell. She liked other people to regard her as a child; but sometimes it was intolerable from Lady Lynne. Afterwards she could guess the reason. It was not because Lady Lynne really regarded her as very young and small that she used this manner, but because she wished so to regard her. It was artificial, like many other things about Lady Lynne; the colour of her lips and the brightness of her eyes, for instance.

She brought a quite new atmosphere into this little bedroom, which had already seemed full to overflowing with two such different people in it as Lil and her Gran. Now Lil found it to be stifling. Yet Lady Lynne had a sweet fragrance about her, and she was very pretty to look at. She sparkled and glittered and fluttered, as only a woman of a certain type can. Her white slender fingers flashed with jewels, her dress rustled with a delicate, soft sound; she was so

exactly the opposite of old Mrs. Warrington in every detail that it was difficult to regard them as belonging to the same planet.

Gran stood aside with the grim disapproval written on her face with which she always regarded Lady Lynne. Standing there in her black dress, made in the style of her own girlhood, her white hair smoothed away under a large white cap, with no smile to soften the sternness of her strongly marked face, she looked the picture of venerable austerity.

Mrs. Warrington belonged to the Plymouth Brethren. Their gloomy creed, which consigns half creation to eternal flames, had become part of her nature. She fully believed that of the four women who stood together in this room she alone had any chance of salvation. And she had the courage, uncommon in the present generation, to believe in an eternal torment of physical combustion.

Lady Lynne, undisturbed by Gran's disapproval, purred and fussed over Lil, while with an experienced eye she surveyed the whole effect of the costume, and pointed out one or two necessary re-adjustments to the dressmaker, who obeyed orders with alacrity, feeling that she now was in contact with a superior genius.

Lady Lynne was a woman of fashion, heartily and entirely. These two women,

old Mrs. Warrington and Lady Lynne, had contributed all of feminine influence that had entered Lil's life. Each had the power to distress and disturb her, and had used it. Gran paid visits at her son's house, at long intervals; and sorely had these visits been dreaded by Lil, who knew that Gran considered it her duty to upbraid her for all unfulfilled feminine duties, such as mending stockings, or making her own dresses. Nothing could make Gran see that Lil's usefulness to her father was of another sort. Lady Lynne's disturbing influence had been much less manifest to Lil. It had merely consisted in confusing the child's clear mind by her atmosphere of assured worldly wisdom. She was the one neighbour with whom they had any intimacy; and she was proud that Brough, who would not take the trouble to enter into the local society, was glad of her friendship. The fact was he thoroughly understood this shallow, bright, butterfly creature, and he thought her intense femininity good for both himself and Lil.

The two women held before poor little Lil such different types of what she ought to be! And, try as hard as she would, she could please neither, but must remain what her father and her own nature had made her.

As a rule she saw but little of either of these ladies; now, when to-morrow's event made her of special interest to them they

seemed determined to be about her and make her feel her own deficiencies.

No one else ever saw that she had any. But Lil herself was so unable on the one hand to grasp the idea of life as Lady Lynne entertained it, or on the other hand to come up to Gran's standard of domestic virtue, that she always felt herself abashed and sad when they tried to improve her.

Standing there in her white dress, while the dressmaker pinned it and adjusted it here and there, she felt like a caged bird. She longed to throw it off and be out with her father and the dogs, away from these too critical eyes. While Gran looked at her, she was conscious that her hair was wild and loose; when Lady Lynne surveyed her, she knew that her hands were sunburnt and her style unfashionable.

"What do I care?" she said to herself. "Papa is satisfied with me, and Charlie loves me! Were women intended only to please other women?"

She stood still, as patiently as might be, and was greatly relieved when Gran went away; and when at last the sacred dress was taken off her and laid aside ready for to-morrow's wear, with what delight she put on again the serge dress she had worn all day!

"Are you putting on your boating costume again, so late in the afternoon?"

asked Lady Lynne. "Will you not dress yourself and come for a drive with me?"

"Thank you," said Lil; "but I am going to row Papa a little way down the river now. He will be ready soon, I hope."

"Ah, well," said Lady Lynne, with a little gentle sigh; "you will grow more feminine when you are married, I am sure."

Lil's heart beat quickly; she always longed to answer this sort of speech rebelliously, but she would not, especially to-day.

"What do you mean?" she asked, very gently. "Am I really unfeminine?"

Lady Lynne, looking at the sweet, girlish face bent so earnestly upon her, could not say "yes." How was it possible even for her, with her effeminate and butterfly standard, not to perceive the warm womanliness in Lil's face, the innocent spirit of gentleness in her big brown eyes.

"No, dear," she said, with an unusual kindness in her tone, "only unconventional. You will find out what that means, by-and-bye. Of course you must expect to be that, brought up as you have been, by a man, and never having been to school. It is a sad loss for you; and you must try to make up for it by observing other women, and learning to do as others do."

Lil came nearer to her. A mood of intense gentleness was on the girl. She

yearned to do right, to please, to understand what was expected of her.

“Dear Lady Lynne,” she said, “cannot you tell me—a little—where I am wrong?”



## CHAPTER II.

“H, Lil! it is absurd to pretend you do not know; you are not blind or foolish?” exclaimed Lady Lynne, with a touch of quick impatience in her tone. She was constitutionally incapable of guessing that some other people might have a different sort of vision from her own. Still less was she capable of guessing that she herself was blind to some things quite visible to others; for instance, the charm of a rich, glowing, unfettered girlhood such as Lil’s, was outside of her perceptions. She did not desire to worry the girl. She honestly felt that there was something outrageous in the straightforward simplicity which gave a certain masculine colour to Lil’s character. There is room enough for improvement in both sexes, but men are, as a rule, more just and clear sighted than women, partly because they see more of life. Lil had seen nothing of life; but she had imbibed a just and generous tone of mind from contact with her father. And she was daring enough, at seventeen, to think sometimes for herself and even to question Lady Lynne’s wisdom. On occasions this annoyed that lady exceed-

ingly, for more reasons than appeared on the surface. She was well aware that Lil, in some respects, was stronger than herself. Now that Lil was in so soft a mood she saw her advantage and spoke sharply, knowing her word had a better chance than usual of being effective. Lil coloured and drew herself up a little. Pride,—not vanity, but pride, a hot and generous pride, was the dominant quality of Lil's character. She looked straight at Lady Lynne with her clear brown eyes.

“I can trust papa,” she said, loftily, “and he has always told me that if I feel no shame I have done no wrong. I am not ashamed that my hands are sunburnt; papa likes me to row him and I enjoy doing it! I am not ashamed that I wear a blue serge dress instead of silk and lace; how could the dogs jump in and out of the boat if I had silk on? Besides, we are not rich, and I shall be no richer when I am married! I am sure blue serge will suit me then.”

“Well,” said Lady Lynne, provoked now by Lil's loftiness, “if your husband is satisfied it will be all right. Perhaps he is satisfied about that affair with young Swift? If so, he is more easily satisfied than most men are.”

So saying she rose with a flutter and rustle, and a shrug of her slender shoulders; she had fired her shot and was ready to go. But Lil

was not so ready to part with her. She turned and faced her with eyes ablaze.

“What do you mean?” she said.

Lady Lynne returned her earnest gaze for a second, and then laughed airily.

“You are a born actress, child,” she said, “but it is ridiculous to play with me. You know what I mean. Of course, if your father chose to take no notice of your unconventional adventure” (an emphasis on the “unconventional,” of which italics can convey no idea) “and if you would not marry young Swift—who, I must say, behaved like a gentleman when he asked you! it was no concern of anyone else; and now it only concerns Mr. Newman, therefore I have no more to say. Goodbye, till to-morrow:”

“No, Lady Lynne,” cried Lil, passionately, “you shall not go away like this without some explanation. You have never said such things to me before, why do you say them now?”

Lady Lynne raised her arched brows in deprecation.

“Mere accident, my dear child,” she said; “I mean nothing.”

“You do!” cried Lil; “you must tell me what you mean. I remember going out rowing with Dr. Swift, although papa wished me not to see any more of him. Very sorry I was that I had done so, when I found papa really annoyed; but he said, I remember, too,

that I was too young to know a scoundrel when I saw him, and that you were to blame for introducing Dr. Swift to me."

"Oh indeed"! said Lady Lynne, stiffening as if she had just been starched all over. She was getting angry. "A nice thing for Mr. Warrington to say, when it was I who pointed out to Dr. Swift that, as a gentleman, he must ask you to marry him. I was delighted with his good feeling in doing so; most young men would have called it Quixotic to do any such thing."

Lil looked perplexed, and a little inclined to be amused, in the midst of her anger.

"I don't understand at all," she said; "Dr. Swift implored me to marry him, over and over again. I suppose he meant what he said, but I don't see how it could be Quixotic."

"You little flirt," exclaimed Lady Lynne, with a well acted look of horror; "how can you talk like this, and look me in the face? Of course it was Quixotic on his part, after you had compromised yourself with him as you did."

"Compromised myself!" repeated Lil, growing suddenly quite pale. She did not really understand what this meant, for she had never been told anything about it; but she had read novels, and had some faint idea of the horribleness of the bugbear Lady Lynne was holding up before her.

"Why, of course!" cried Lady Lynne, "did you not go away with him one afternoon and

never came back till the next day? Most girls would have been turned out of doors after such an adventure, I can tell you."

Lil drew back a step, and put her hand on a chair to steady herself. She was trembling all over. Did this mean anything? It was all new to her, in this form. Her father had seemed terribly disturbed, when the thing happened a year ago; but he had said scarcely anything about it, and he had forbidden anyone else to speak to her on the subject. He cared little what people thought, so long as he saved Lil's mind from being poisoned; and he had saved it. She hardly understood Lady Lynne now; she only felt her words were very terrible.

"But I did no harm" she said; "we could not come home in that awful thunderstorm. How could we? It was impossible. Perhaps we never ought to have gone on the river on such a sultry day, but I suppose we were very thoughtless; I had no idea that we should be caught in such a storm. Papa was frightened when I didn't come back, but I knew he would think I had sheltered somewhere. What could I have done?"

"Why, you dined with him at an inn, and stayed the night there," exclaimed Lady Lynne, almost viciously; Lil's innocence or ignorance made her angry.

"Well?" said Lil, with a bewildered look; "we were very tired and hungry and Mrs. Man-

wood, at the White Horse, got us some dinner. I have many a time been there with papa, before and since; she was very kind to me, and dried my wet clothes and gave me hot drink when I was in bed."

"Oh!" said Lady Lynne, with a world of expression; "you know how to tell your story very nicely. I suppose you have told it like that to Charlie Newman?"

"Told it!" "exclaimed Lil, "why should I? I had forgotten all about it; forgotten Dr. Swift; until you reminded me."

"Naturally," said Lady Lynne, "you are engrossed now with your new lover. Well, my dear, all I can say is this, don't compromise yourself so openly in future. It is very unwise. A lady should live delicately. A vulgar woman lets everybody see her diamonds and her lovers; a lady is chary of letting the world see too much of either. Good taste is the law of life which is necessary to a woman; without it she is nothing. Take my advice, dear; it is meant in good part, indeed, though, while you are so young and quick tempered, you think I am unkind. All I say is, try and break yourself of being so unconventional; your father may put up with your going off in a serge dress and a straw hat, with a wild young doctor. and not coming back till the next day; but I don't think your husband will like such adventures!"

Lil's face was growing crimson again, and hot words were burning on her lips; but before she had time to speak they were both startled by a rattling sound upon the window-panes, as though there were a severe momentary hailstorm.

"Oh, papa is waiting for me!" said Lil, and snatched up her straw hat. It was a well-known signal. When Brough was out of doors, and wanted her, he pelted her window with handfuls of the dried peas with which he fed his beloved pigeons. The arrangement seemed to him perfect; it suited him, Lil, and the pigeons, who immediately came circling down from the house top to gather up the peas.

Lady Lynne quickly went out of the room, and rustled down stairs; the conversation had lasted quite long enough for her and she was glad of the interruption. She went out through the open windows of the pretty sitting room, and joined Brough on the gravel walk, where he stood amid a fluttering, restless circle of ever hungry pigeons.

A splendid specimen of a type now very rare, was Brough Warrington. A man with very little self-consciousness, but a vast amount of self-content; a man with no desire to arrange the affairs of the universe on a better plan, or make suggestions to the Creator; but with a very definite determination to make the utmost out of his own life, to see all discoverable beauty about him, to taste the in-

most sweetness of the present moment ; wholesome, natural, broad of shoulder, and broad in character, without an atom of morbidity or mischief in him.

Lady Lynne appreciated him thoroughly, just so far as she could understand him. Simply as a man, she had long ago decided that he obliterated all the other men of her acquaintance ; as a man of letters she admired him, too ; as a scholar she thought him very wonderful. But there was more of Brough Warrington yet, and of this something more she could as little form an idea as the plough boy can of the existence of a social science. She had not the faculty with which to apprehend it.

Brough liked to talk to her. Her society was a rest to him because she never made any demand, but was always gay and agreeable. It was part of her creed that a woman's power lies in never boring her admirers with anything serious, but always making of herself the most charming object within his range of vision. To look pretty, to be always gay and good-tempered in the society of men, were, with Lady Lynne, the whole duties of woman. It is a creed which has its merits. Brough felt the fascination of it, though very well aware of the shallowness of the nature which could be satisfied with it. But we like slight and fragile things about us for ornament and pleasure, if not for solid use.

Brough walked with Lady Lynne to the garden gate. A wide gravel walk led from the house, ending with a little bridge to cross over the stream that circled Brough's garden. The house, a low, quaintly constructed cottage, was built upon an island, which lay very near the land at one side; here was the bridge, and the principal entrance to Brough's secluded demesne.

All the birds of the county knew and loved that greenest of lawns, hidden from river wanderers by a thick belt of trees; here they were never shot at or frightened, and they found, in addition to the many worms of the early morning, plenty of peas and bread crumbs all day. And they found also a man who loved them, valued their friendship, and watched their ways with real interest. They surely knew something of this, for no thrushes ever sang more gloriously than those which haunted Brough's limes.

Lady Lynne's little carriage stood waiting for her in the road; Brough handed her into it, and then watched it drive away. Quickly then he turned and went, with his long, rapid strides towards the house, to join Lil, who stood waiting him on the pathway, with a cluster of pigeons close at her very feet. Her eyes looked very large, Brough thought, as he approached her. Perhaps they were very wide open, for she had just seen something to which she had been blind

before. Did that woman, that flighty butterfly of a woman, want to come into her place in this house, her place and more? If not, thought Lil, with the wonderful wisdom of just-about-to-be-married seventeen, why did she smile like that at Brough, when she fancied they were unobserved? Well, thought Lil to herself, I am leaving my home, I have no right to be jealous of any one who may come into it! But she was jealous, none the less. She hated Lady Lynne at that moment. For Lil was too loving not to be very passionate. But she was very proud too; and she quickly determined not to tell her father of her conversation with Lady Lynne, which a moment ago, she had meant to do; for she felt that Lady Lynne had been very unjust to her; she was bitterly confused and hurt by what she had said. But Brough had turned away from Lady Lynne, with a pleasant smile on his face. Should she trouble him by her foolish grievance? No, especially on this her last day, when she wanted to be perfectly happy with him. So she stopped her tongue, and tried to smile; but the smile was a very nervous one, and when the dogs came with a rush to bark their delight, frightening the pigeons into sudden flight, she shrank back.

“Papa,” she said, “I believe I am too tired to go now!”

“Too tired!” he said, in staccato tones of amazement. He objected on principle, to

anybody ever being tired. "Here's a nice state of things! This comes of getting married, and being in love. By Jove, I wish that fellow Charlie were here; you wouldn't be too tired then to go out, I'll bet."

"I am really tired, papa," said Lil, pitifully. "I've been standing for ages with that horrid dress on, and Granny and Lady Lynne, and the dressmaker all criticising it."

"Poor little baby," said Brough, with sudden sympathy, "that is enough to make any fellow ill, I'll allow. What infernal nuisances milliners and marriages are! Let's have a bottle of fizz, to raise our spirits; I feel as cross as an owl. Sit down here, and do as I tell you, and in five minntes you'll feel better."

This cottage, where Brough was master of the ceremonies, was a very bright and pleasant bit of Bohemia. It was a very innocent one, with Lil as its princess; but still it had the unconventionality which, to some Philistines, seems as wicked as vice itself. Lil sat down in a garden chair; in a few minutes Brough appeared again, carrying affectionately a small bottle of champagne and some glasses. Soon the bottle was tossed away upon the grass (Brough liked getting things for himself, but never put any thing back into its proper place) with all the dogs racing after it, tumbling over each other in wild play.

“Ha!” exclaimed Brough, after a drink from his tall glass, “that’s good. Now look here, baby, take my advice; when you’re married, don’t go and let yourself get miserable about things. If you feel bad, drink some champagne, or go and have a lark, and then you’ll keep jolly. Never mind what people say, or think it necessary to do what other people do. The old women will expect you to cry and be miserable when your affairs get in a mess, as do everybody’s now and then: I say *Don’t!* Remember, you were born princess of Bohemia, however much you may go and Mrs. Newmanise yourself; and the right thing for a young women of your bringing up, is to do exactly as you like, and be jolly under all circumstances.”

Lil sat still and silent for a moment, while Brough took another pull. She was thinking, “it is quite clear that I must judge for myself; it is impossible to reconcile these different teachings.”

“But, papa,” she said, aloud, “that is delightful, I know, but I can’t carry it out now; you see I am going to be a housekeeper, and I shall have to know the price of coals, and learn to darn stockings; and, oh, I am so ignorant of all a girl ought to know.”

“I call that remark cool, to say the least of it, considering that I have been educating you for the last seventeen years,” said Brough, with a twinkle of fun in his eyes; “this is the

result of an overdose of Granny. You are never such an ungrateful young woman on your own account."

"Oh papa!" cried Lil. Her impetuous remark, springing from a consciousness of incapacity, had not struck her in this light.

But Brough drowned her attempt to speak with his big voice; he had a habit of not listening to other people, when he wanted to talk himself.

"I'll back you, against any girl you like, for finding a quotation in Shakespeare or any of his contemporary playwrights, within ten minutes, and in any of the modern poets, within a quarter of an hour. I'll back you against any, except the best critics of the day, to give a decent criticism of a new book. I'll back you to translate an ode of Horace against any young college prig, Charlie Newman himself included. I'll back you to write a page of good English prose against the whole tribe of illiterate journalists. I'll back you to point out the flaws in your father's works against any Saturday Reviewer."

"But papa," cried Lil, resolutely, making herself heard at last, "none of these accomplishments are of any use in keeping house or ordering dinners."

Brough sat himself down deliberately in a wicker chair, which creaked ominously beneath his heavy weight, and, taking his hat off, threw it on to the grass. A shy, yet

confiding young robin, who had given its whole affections to this large, but gentle man, immediately perched on the brim of the straw hat, and looked into it. The inside of that hat, was a place it loved to get into, but it took some time and a great deal of courage to fly from the edge to the inside. Brough was accustomed to the companionship of this little creature, and its pretty movements did not arrest his attention. He was set upon solemn speech.

“Now, observe this, baby,” he proceeded to say, with much emphasis, “I did not bring you up to the profession of getting married; I did not do so, partly because I consider the habit of bringing up all young women to the same profession is at the bottom of half the evils of social life; and partly because I thought you shewed capacity for something better. Not that I did not want you to marry! I believe in early marriages; I’m confoundedly glad you are going to be somebody’s ‘missis,’ and that you have had the good sense to choose a fellow who is a gentleman and a scholar. Now, the vocation of a married woman is one of the easiest in the world, and that is why the little scamps like it so well; you have only to use the brains which you possess, and which I have done my best to cultivate, and you will find the whole matter simple enough. But just remember that your domestic life is only a part of your life,

as it is part of your husband's ; that your relations with him are the bright spots in your existence, as in his, and not the one object of your career. You have your own individual life still to live, and your own brain power to use. At any time, circumstances may throw you on your own resources, and you will want to return to the profession of literature for which I have educated you."

"Yes, I think I understand," said Lil, "but how am I to keep up my work? Lady Lynne says a married woman should never work for money, it annoys her husband, and degrades his idea of her."

Brough threw himself back in his chair, and laughed. The robin, scared at the sudden uproar, flew out of the hat, and, perching in the lime tree overhead, looked down curiously at this queer human spasm of which he was a witness. Brough, seeing his hat was now at his own disposal, picked it up and put it on before replying.

"If you'll take my advice, baby," he said, with a sudden return to seriousness, "you'll look after your own opinion of yourself, instead of attending always to what other people think of you, which is the kernel of the Lady Lynne sort of creed."

"Delightful," thought Lil, to herself, wise Lil! "he never can think of marrying her, when he speaks of her like that."

"If you stick to your own feelings of

what is right, and follow the light of your own pure instincts, without allowing your mind to become perverted by the thousand and one false arguments which ordinary people regard as genuine, you will find yourself all right in the end. At all events, you will keep your own self-respect by following that plan, and that is worth the golden opinion of the rest of the universe. And, now, I propose we go and send these disconsolate dogs into the water, for there is no time to go in the boat; come, baby!" One of Brough's most constant personal charms was that he utterly refused to grow up or grow old; he was a big boy half his time. He hated having to be in earnest for long; in fact, he considered it injurious and immoral to waste too much time in being serious.

"Come, baby," he cried, boisterously, "you'll be an old woman before your wedding day arrives if you go on thinking over the difficulties of your career so desperately hard. Make up your mind to follow out my old recipe for darning stockings, 'patch'em with sticking plaster.' And, as to dinners, that fellow, Charlie, is much too intensely in love to think about what he puts inside him, for at least three months; and, by that time, you'll have found out all about it, for you're a clever little chap, you know. Only don't poison the poor boy in the meantime. I really do pity that young man, he is so ridiculously in love;

and fancy it's all being about this little minx!"

Lil crimsoned and laughed. This view of the question changed her mood. She knew very well that she could not easily make Charlie see her shortcomings, and if she had been like most girls, altogether thoughtless, she would probably never have been made aware of their existence. But, if Lil's mind had a tendency to over-balance itself in any direction, it was in that of doing right, as she called it. This was not a religious idea, but an ethical one. She had always maintained that she could not be content to live with herself, unless she was properly acting her part in life. Brough was in the habit of calling her "abnormally conscientious," and a "regular little casuist." But characters, though they can be moulded, cannot be changed; and in Lil, this tendency, which was much stronger than in her father, grew with her growth.

But the mere mention of Charlie Newman, and his passion for her, converted the grave little casuist, into a lovely, laughing girl again. She preferred not to go on discussing this new subject, upon which her father delighted in teasing her, so she rose and danced away over the lawn towards the water. The dogs started simultaneously, and rushed after her in a wild and sudden excitement. One big hound, her special favourite, caught

her dress in his mouth, and looked up at her with that laugh in his eyes, which is seen sometimes in dogs who are much with men and women. Lil flung her arms about his neck, and struggled with him for the possession of her blue serge gown. It certainly would not have done for Lil to wear silks and laces. In another moment, she was on her knees on the grass, laughing and flushed, holding the big dog down on his back, while he still clung to her skirt, and with all the other dogs jumping over her, licking her hands and barking with delight. The noise called Gran to the window, where she stood, a picture of stern amazement, with up-lifted hands of horror.

“Poor child,” sighed Gran to herself, “a child of wrath, totally unregenerate. Oh, that I could bring her to the Lord! Oh, that I could convince her of her state of sin, and show her the awful doom of eternal flame which lies before her. Poor, ignorant, sinful child! If I could only teach her to sew a little, it would be something. I asked her what they gave for coals, to-day, and she had no idea. I believe that housekeeper cheats them out of pounds and pounds.”

This was a favourite sorrow with Granny, and she returned to her arm-chair to nurse it. Very religious persons, especially if they belong to one of the gloomy faiths, are often very suspicious. A rooted belief in original

sin is not readily compatible with a belief in human nature.

Brough and Lil caught sight of Gran's figure at the window, and hurried away beyond the trees, like two naughty children. The irrepressible boyishness of Brough's nature made him an absolute enigma to his mother. There was something to her, strange and almost wicked, in the happy fashion in which Brough and Lil went about together; it shocked her, as the unintelligible often does shock narrow minds. She regarded a certain gloomy dignity as necessary to a parent; without it surely he could gain no respect. She was greatly puzzled sometimes to find that she might talk for hours to Lil, without producing any effect, while two words from Brough were instantly attended to. She put this down to unregenerateness. It had never occurred to her, in the long course of a devout and industrious life, that love is the strongest power in the world. She was so accustomed to bow before the cruel Jehovah of the Hebrews, and to credit him with all the bloodthirsty and barbarian propensities which the Hebrew prophets and Plymouth Brethren preachers have been able to imagine, that any other type of government was beyond her mental grasp.

A whole world of love and delight belonged to Brough and Lil, the very existence of which was unknown to Granny. She re-

garded them as two wild, untamed creatures, when they went off to the water with their riotous dogs.

But Brough never cared what other people thought of him, and Lil had learned to take the same independent position. When Granny or Lady Lynne harassed her into a sense of her own inefficiency, in various matters which they thought all important, they did so, not by the weight of their opinions, but by making Lil's quick imagination turn upon herself, and then she would wonder whether she really was not very much wanting.

In her love of out-door life, of the dogs, of the garden, and of the water, she could not be made to see any wrong. However she were lectured and called a young hoyden, she danced off by Brough's side with the greatest joy and contentment. What days and weeks and months had they not passed on this island, in their happy life of mixed work and play, undisturbed by Gran's criticisms! Lil was so content when helping Brough among his books and papers, or rowing him about on the river, that she was firmly convinced these occupations were righteous for her. All Gran could do, when she came on her annual and much dreaded visit, was to make Lil wonder whether, in addition, she ought not to have attended a little to what seemed to be considered the true feminine sphere of small account books, pudding recipes, and

sewing. But the old housekeeper, who loved Lil and her father, had one weakness. She would not be interfered with; and Brough wanted Lil all the day round, so she very soon gave up these dreams of woman's work. Thus it was that her mind was a little troubled, as to whether she might not make sad havoc with Charlie Newman's income, which was too small to admit of keeping a housekeeper. But Brough talked her into his belief that anyone with brains can accomplish any task by using them, and so, helped by the glorious, ignorant confidence of youth, Lil was prepared to plunge into her new life.

Brough set himself to-day to be a child of nature, like the hounds who loved Lil so well, and not to know that to-morrow she was going away.

She had been his companion in his long walks, and on the river; he did not care for his dinner unless she sat opposite him at table; in his work she was his right hand, and accustomed so silently and easily to find books or quotations or papers he wanted, that he hardly knew he did not get them himself; when he was so busy writing that he must be alone, he was not content, unless he could see her in the garden, or at her own little table in the next room, which was placed just within sight of his. He had revelled in the growth of her bright, active intellect, and had watched with intense interest, the action

of her pure and unperverted instincts. He had a vivid faith in an ideal of his own of the womanly nature, and he believed, that Lil, untouched by base influences, unhampered by small tasks, unperverted by the ugly teaching that she must sell herself to the highest bidder in the marriage market, might, in her prime, realise this ideal. He called her his "Miranda," for he saw that she was as innocent as that lovely heroine. But now that her Ferdinand was about to carry her away from the island, was she strong enough to keep her originality of character and purity of mind? He thought so, and he knew her better than anyone else.

The dogs were all in the water, swimming after various pieces of stick, which it was their bounden duty to bring back safe to land.

Lil stood at the water's edge, with Brough at her side, his arm through her's. When the dogs came, panting and joyous to shore again, the whole party went back upon the lawn, that the wet creatures might rush about and shake themselves to their heart's content. They knew well that they had to get to some extent dry before they were admitted into the house, and that they must make the best use of this time, in which Lil and Brough walked up and down the lawn. In the midst of the scampering, tumbling dogs, Lil moved, in a sudden serious silence. Suddenly she spoke.

“Papa,” she said, “I begin to wish it might be to-day, always!”

“You little humbug!” cried Brough, with amiable incredulity. “When you know you’d break that small heart of yours and cry your two eyes into jellies, if that fellow Charlie didn’t put in an appearance to-morrow. Come, we are getting too sentimental. It is just dinner time, and you must go and ‘fix your hair,’ as the Americans say, else Gran will be shocked at your dishevelled style. Now, dogs, you are too damp to come in yet, so you must sit outside and drip a little.”

He took Lil in, and dexterously shut the window on the dogs, who stood outside in a damp and disconsolate state. This proceeding was always gone through, and the dogs always regarded it as unjust; however, there was nothing to be done but make the best of it, so they soon sat down on their haunches, and began that extraordinary canine process of licking themselves dry.

Brough and Lil were also engaged in their toilette. Brough’s dinner-dress, consisted of a loose velvet coat; Lil’s was white cashmere, with roses in her hair. The two looked very pictorial, as they came into the dining room together, Lil clinging to her father. Gran was awaiting them, stern and uncompromising, in her black stuff gown, and stiff white cap. It is a strange thing that anything charming or artistic is supposed not to agree with a

state of grace. Gran might have been a handsome old lady, but there was something so stern, unbending, and gloomy in her whole aspect, that it was no wonder Lil in her babyhood had distinctly objected to kissing her. Gran forgave, on principle, but like all people who forgive on principle, and not from impulse, she never forgot. She still remembered Lil's infantine sins of this sort. They fully confirmed her in her opinion that Lil was a child of wrath.

This was Lil's last dinner at home, and much she wished Gran need not have been there. But it seemed accepted as a matter of course by all parties, that Lil must have a sort of maternal guardianship on this great occasion, so she submitted, with as good a grace as she could, to the invasion of the last cherished moments of her dear home life with her father.

Brough, for his part, did not want any dinner. This was alarming. It was an event almost unprecedented in his career, but then it was also something novel to have a daughter married. He began to wish, with the philosophic temper of middle age, that it was the day after to-morrow. The worst would be over then. So do people who have arrived at years of discretion face some painful operation. But Lil, with the tender-heartedness of early youth, longed to linger over these hours which seemed to hurry away so quickly, and to bring

her to the time when she would have to say good-bye to her girlhood.

Restlessly, all the evening, she wandered from one corner of the quaint cottage to another. She hugged the dogs, and kissed the very books and pictures on the walls, indeed the walls themselves. For Lil had not one painful association with her childhood or her youth; she had grown like a flower, happy in her life.



### CHAPTER III.

**L**IL'S wedding was to take place at the little village church, which was only a few yards distant over the common ; and there was no crowd to come and gaze, so everyone was to walk across, even Lil in her white dress. The near neighbourhood of this church had been a sorrow to Brough for years, for it possessed a most atrocious bell, which always made him cross on Sunday ; to-day was the first occasion on which he could rejoice that the distance was so slight.

This quiet corner of the world, where things could be done with so little fuss, was but a brief journey from London ; so Charlie Newman was coming down by a morning train, with the only relation who showed any interest in his marriage. This was a cousin of his, a young barrister. His next nearest connections were a very rich old uncle, and another cousin, the old uncle's son ; of them he knew little, for the old man always imagined Charlie wanted money if he came to see them, or was making himself agreeable with the idea of a legacy. The result was

that Charlie, who was very independent, never went near the old man. His own father and mother had long been dead ; and so it came about that Alfred Davies, a showy-looking young barrister, not over-burdened with briefs, was the sole member of his family who appeared on this eventful day. He could not call Davies his "best man," or give him any official position, because Lil had announced her intention of doing altogether without bridesmaids. She had neither sisters, nor school friends ; the dogs, birds, and her father, were all her early playfellows. Lady Lynne and old Mrs. Warrington would be there to see the wedding, and that was all the feminine support which Lil could command, or thought at all necessary. So young Davies came down merely as an amiable relation ; he had no particular duties. Nevertheless, his position was by no means an enviable or easy one. Charlie Newman was in such an irrational frame of mind that morning that he insisted on going breakfastless, and much too early to catch the train. Alfred was allowed to swallow a few, hasty mouthfuls of food and drink a cup of coffee, with Charlie standing over him, watch in hand. But Charlie, himself, declared he could not swallow ; and Davies saw, from the moment that declaration was made, that trials were in store for him. He would have eaten his own breakfast were

he going to be married or to be hanged ; but Charlie was made of very different stuff.

Having began the morning in this fashion, naturally, Charlie was in a state of exhaustion by the time they arrived at the little village station. Davies had stolidly assumed the conduct of the expedition ; he evidently thought Charlie quite unfit to take charge of money, tickets, or himself.

It was a glorious morning, fresh and fair as if it were the first that Nature had ever produced. They walked down from the station on to the common and looked about them. It was not yet time to go to the church. Charlie felt nervously for the wedding ring, and then relapsed into silent endurance of the passing moments. The two well-dressed young men, standing in the sunshine on the common, were conspicuous and remarkable figures in this rustic neighbourhood. Several very small children gathered to gaze at the show. Davies looked at his cousin with a glance half of pity, half of contempt.

“Don't you wish you'd had some breakfast ?” he enquired, with the straightforward cruelty of the practical man.

“Well,” said Charlie, “I believe I do feel rather faint.”

“I wonder whether anything could be got at that small inn,” remarked Davies ; “I shall feel responsible for it, if you faint

during the ceremony." Charlie groaned at the mere thought of it; and they began to move over the common towards a hostelry of very uninviting appearance. But their steps were arrested by a sudden shout, which startled them both; for a moment ago, the place seemed empty of human life, save that of the very small children.

It was Brough Warrington, leaning over his garden gate. "Halloa, you fellows!" he shouted with all the force of a formidable pair of lungs, "where are you off to?"

They turned and looked across at the figure at the gate. There was something about Brough Warrington which was quite inimitable; he was himself, and no one was at all like him. He stood there, his arms on the gate, leaning upon it in an attitude habitual to him; the villagers were accustomed to see him here, and no more observed the fine picturesqueness of the figure, than they noticed the sunset, which he came here every evening to watch. He was dressed with great care this morning; he wore a much newer black velvet coat than usual, and there was a fresh blue ribbon round his straw hat. A small man could scarcely have faced even this small society in such attire on his daughter's wedding morning; but Brough was so big, there was something so remarkable in all his attitudes and movements, his personality was so vivid and independent,

that no one would even have thought of suggesting any other dress than that he might choose to wear. But the whole effect of the man puzzled Alfred Davies considerably. He had dwelled all his days in the camp of the Philistines; he knew nothing of life outside the respectable commonplace and the disreputable commonplace. He put up his eye-glass to stare at Brough.

“Who on earth is that?” he asked of Charlie, in amazement.

“That,” said Charlie, “is Brough Warrington, the author, ‘King of Bohemia,’ and my future father-in-law; I’m uncommonly glad to see him.”

So saying, he walked rapidly towards the garden gate where Brough stood. The dogs, who had grown familiar with Charlie, during many river expeditions, now recognised him; the two big hounds jumped the narrow arm of water which divided the common from the garden, and bounded over the grass to greet him. Brough had a pet theory that a sensible dog knows a gentleman the moment he snuffs at him, and will hold no converse with a cad; so that he always viewed the dogs’ advances to Charlie with satisfaction. Watching the meeting now taking place, he burst into a shout of laughter, for it was very evident that Charlie was particularly anxious to be amicable with the hounds at a distance and to preserve his spotless trousers from their caresses.

"You look extremely unhappy, old fellow," he observed, as Charlie drew near; "it's a good thing you don't get married every day, if this forlorn aspect is a necessary part of the proceedings. Come in and have some brandy and soda."

"That's exactly what I want," exclaimed Charlie, "only I should never have thought of it; this is my cousin, Mr. Alfred Davies."

"Come in," said Brough, opening the gate wide.

"But it's not the correct thing to come in till the ceremony is over," remarked Alfred, pausing in the gateway.

"Oh, hang the correct thing," said Brough, impatiently, "we don't do the correct thing down here, do we, Charlie, old fellow?" He put his arm through Charlie's, and led him off towards the house, leaving Davies to follow. A key-note of antagonism was struck between these two. Brough had classified Davies immediately as "one of the barber's block type," while Davies was intensely disgusted at being unable to classify Brough at all.

"Ye Gods and little fishes!" he heard Brough say, in his resounding voice, "no breakfast! well, I don't advise you to come in contact with any of the women in the establishment; the housekeeper turned me out of the kitchen just now, when I tried to find out if Lil had had anything to eat.

But if you'll wait here, I'll go and forage for you."

Charlie accepted this offer with great thankfulness, and remained, with much humility, just where he was left. Here he was joined by Davies, who was gazing through his eyeglass at everything around him. The whole place had a quaint, unconventional air which really puzzled him. He belonged to the numerous class that depends entirely on tradespeople for their surroundings; anything original, even in the management of a flower bed, surprised him.

Brough soon re-appeared, bearing his spoils—brandy and soda and biscuits. He looked in a much worse temper than when he went in.

"You and Lil are a couple of fools," he remarked, fiercely; "I can't think how in creation you come to be so much alike. She hasn't eaten any breakfast either, and those silly women do nothing but fuss over her dress. I'm going to look after her, so you must entertain yourselves."

Charlie was quite ready to do this. He wanted some Dutch courage so badly, that anything intoxicating appeared a boon from Heaven, to this usually abstemious young man.

So Brough started off again on further philanthropic missions. He went on tip-toe into the pantry; all the women were

upstairs looking at Lil. He grinned with delight as he surveyed the various dainties which were standing all ready for the wedding breakfast, and selected the most delicious morsel for his felonious purpose. Putting what he thought Lil would eat on a plate, and taking a bottle of Nierstiener under his arm, he marched boldly upstairs and invaded the sacred retreat, where the finishing touches were being put to the bride's costume. Lil was busy pinning white roses from the garden upon her white bonnet and on the bosom of her dress; this she would do for herself. The housekeeper, seeing Brough's unexpected figure, his resolute countenance, and the plate in his hand, rushed downstairs to see what havoc might not have been committed. For Brough was an entirely unreliable person to allow loose about a house; he would never consider that things were wanted for certain meals, but would demolish them when he felt inclined, or get up a picnic party in the garden at a moment's notice, with any material which he could find. The maids ran down, too; and only Gran was left. In some respects Mrs. Warrington had natural common sense, and though she felt shocked at Brough's cool and unapologetic entrance, she was glad to see that he intended to make Lil eat. So she went away, Lil being so nearly dressed, to complete her own stern attire.

“Now then, baby,” remarked Brough, with that severe frown on his forehead, which had always made Lil laugh even in her early infancy, when she really ought to have been afraid of him, “you’ve got to stop fussing with your fripperies, and just attend to yourself. Starvation doesn’t become a young woman, and certainly doesn’t improve her complexion.”

Lil was as white as her dress, and knew it. So she humbly sat down and submitted to be fed.

“You two are as mad as March hares,” went on Brough, while he plied her with very small doses of wine, and jelly, and chicken. “He’s come down in a state of exhaustion.”

“Oh!” interrupted Lil.

“Oh, yes, he has come. And I should say, having inspected you both, that you will probably both live over the ceremony. But you’re, each of you, as nervous and excitable as if you were going to marry a boa constrictor. It’s quite clear that you were created for each other.”

“That’s one comfort, under the circumstances,” remarked Lil; notwithstanding her nervous temperament, she had inherited her father’s inability to be serious for very long together. This did not mean, with these two, that they were really less in earnest than other people; rather the reverse. But they

both did their thinking quickly, and there was not an atom of gloom about either of them. Lil loved to live cheerfully, like her father; only she was not always so confident of being successful in doing it. She was intensely receptive, and was instantaneously affected by the condition of those around her. Brough's invasion enabling her to forget her dress and think about Charlie instead, had already raised her spirits.

A noise outside attracted Brough's attention; he looked out of the window. "They are off to the church;" he exclaimed, "by Jove, it is time, too. Put on your bonnet, baby, and I'll go and shut up the dogs."

So saying, he started off on an enterprise, the difficulty of which had never occurred to him till the moment arrived. Dogs who have never been chained or shut up during some six or seven years of a free and easy existence, are not easily disposed of. The history of Brough's efforts to get them all into any safe place was one which he would himself have shuddered to relate. His brow was wet with his exertions, and yet he had done nothing. At last, he got the two hounds into a sort of outhouse, and closed the door on them; the little dogs, much too clever to be caught, standing at a safe distance and surveying the proceedings with loud tongued amazement. "Brough! Brough!" cried his mother's voice. "Lil and I are going on, we

are late." Brough turned to go, but, at the sound of his departing footsteps, the big dogs put their noses in the air and howled dismally, with the evident intention of going on with the hideous sounds indefinitely. Brough rushed back, opened the door an inch to threaten them into silence—in an instant, they had slipped through and bounded away. Brough gave chase, and when he reached the front of the house, he beheld Lil's white figure afar, just approaching the church door, with Gran at her side, and the whole collection of dogs, large and small, walking demurely behind her, as if they had been expressly hired to do duty as bridesmaids on the occasion. Brough resigned himself to circumstances. There was nothing to be done now, at so late a moment, except shut them out of the church. Lady Lynne's carriage was standing in the road, so she must be already in the church; there was no one else to come, so Brough saw some hopes of keeping these too-faithful hounds from actually assisting at the ceremony. He came quickly to the door, just as Lil entered, and in time to silence Gran's exclamation of horror as she looked behind and saw the dogs. "Don't let Lil know," whispered Brough, "and I'll keep them out." Brough felt terribly responsible, for he had undertaken this part of the proceedings voluntarily. He had taken it for granted that no one else

could manage the dogs but himself, and he felt rather ashamed now of his own incapacity. Gran went on, leaving him to struggle with "those dreadful brutes," as she always called them. He shut them all out successfully, save one pertinacious little skye terrier, who slipped in and trotted up the aisle to where Lil stood on the altar steps.

The small wedding party was all assembled now; the clergyman and clerk were ready; the ceremony begun, and Lil, trembling like an aspen leaf, tried to listen. They stood there, these two young people, one twenty-three years old, and the other just seventeen, to take vows upon them, which death or disgrace alone hath power to annul. The courage of young creatures is a thing for their elders to admire; it is one of the powers of the world. Springing from mere ignorance and inexperience, it takes the form of a giant confidence, and leads every fresh generation to enter bravely upon the most perilous undertakings; just as the puppies in the kennel will play with the whip without fear, so young people take the crosses of life into their embrace with enthusiasm.

Just when Lil bravely uttered her "I will," there was a sound at the church door, and immediately all the dogs trotted up the aisle and mixed with the group in front of the altar. Lil's favourite hound planted himself solidly at her side and stared aggressively at the

clergyman, who, though a familiar acquaintance, looked to the canine intelligence, a strange and doubtful character in his surplice. The situation was awful, and Brough returned the piteous look which Lil gave him, by one of deep contrition. Then he looked behind to see what troublesome person had produced this state of affairs. He could see a man's figure standing near the door; and he fancied it seemed familiar.

Soon, to Lil's great relief, it was all over; the signing in the vestry and all of it. In a group they came down the church, Charlie and Lil in front, Brough and Lady Lynne behind; the clergyman had given his arm to Gran, and Alfred Davies brought up the procession, looking through his eye-glass at Brough, Lil, Gran, and the dogs. The whole thing puzzled him. He began to think these people must be gipsies. But Lil, he had to confess, was undeniably delicious, and Lady Lynne struck him as decidedly civilized.

At the church door there was a great pause. It arose from a man stepping forward, and holding out his hand to Lil.

"Let me be the first to congratulate you," he said, with a smile, and a sparkle in his eyes. He was a tall young man, effective looking, high coloured and with a tendency to stoutness. The smile, the sparkling eyes, which looked so agreeable to the others, seemed to affect Lil very differently. She dropped her

own eyes to the ground, the moment after she had raised them to his face. "I thank you," she said, gravely, and moved on without taking his offered hand.

"Let us go home quickly, Charlie," she whispered; "I hate that man; why is he here?"

"I'm sure I don't know, if you hate him," said Charlie, whose spirits were rising with incredible rapidity now the deed was done; "shall I shoot him, or duck him in the river? No, that would spoil my trousers. Who is he, by the way? Does he matter?"

"Oh, no," said Lil, the pride returning which surprise had startled away, "he does not matter at all."

They were half across the common by this time, and Brough was close behind them, with Granny.

"Ah, Dr. Swift," Lady Lynne was saying to the tall young man, whose presence Brough had only acknowledged by a nod, "you have been to my house, I suppose?"

"Yes, and they told me what was going on, and that I should find you here; so I came over to see the fun."

"I have promised to go to the breakfast," said Lady Lynne, "but I shall be back early in the afternoon. Take my carriage, and tell them to give you some lunch. Send the carriage back for me. I can't ask you to stay, except to dinner, for I've no other visitors.

Isn't it absurd for me to want chaperoning; but this is a wicked world, you know! Good-bye for an hour or two."

"So she's married, is she?" remarked Dr. Swift, as the lady picked up her silk train, preparatory to crossing the common.

"Yes, and over head and ears in love, this time. No chance for you now, sir."

"It seems not," said Dr. Swift, with a laugh, as she went away.

Alfred Davies, who had lingered a little, overheard these parting words, spoken rather louder than the rest.

"An old lover of the bride's," he said to himself, as he walked on. He had not yet been introduced to Lady Lynne, so, being a most conventional person, he did not dare to speak to her, though he would much have liked to offer her his arm.

Soon they were all gathered in the pretty dining room of Brough's cottage. Lil felt miserable and wanted to run away; she hated this sort of thing. Her pet hound came and put his nose on her knee, as if he thought she was being ill-used in some way or other. Lil could have cried at his sympathy; but, looking up, she caught sight of Brough's countenance wearing so abject an expression, that it roused her out of her own forlornness.

"Oh, papa, don't look like that!" she said, "or I shall not go away, after all."

"No use saying that, Mrs. Newman," said

Alfred Davies ; “ you are bound by the law.”

The corners of Lil's mouth fell suddenly ; it sounded so terrible, that she felt altogether crushed by this legal view of having got married. But soon some champagne and the persistent merriment of the others, made both Brough and Lil grow more cheerful. The breakfast lasted a long time, for all present were intimate friends except Alfred Davies, and he found the breakfast itself a sufficiently interesting occupation.

But at last Lil disappeared to change her dress ; and then the party soon broke up. The clergyman and Lady Lynne left first ; then Alfred Davies walked across to the station and took a train to London ; and, eventually, Charlie and Lil started off to catch an express for Scotland.

When the shadows of the limes began to lengthen on the lawn, the island and the cottage seemed utterly deserted. Old Mrs. Warrington had announced her intention of staying a few days longer to cheer Brough, and prevent his feeling lonely at first. Brough to escape this process of cheering up, started off for a long walk with the dogs.

A phase of his life had come to an end. He had lost his Miranda ; what would the island be like without her ? “ Infernally dull ! ” Brough said to himself, and bit his moustachios. He loved the country, he liked the

simplicity of life possible there. It pleased him to walk about among the rustics, and, though he lived in their midst, be unknown to them, practically; whereas in London he was too well known, and his striking figure constantly arrested attention. But though he found existence more delightful on his island than anywhere else, he was by no means adapted for a hermit, and he knew it.

“I’ll go to town for a week or two,” he said to himself, as he strode away over the fields; “I’ve been down here too long.”

So he resolved; but he could not go at once. It grew dark, and was near dinner time; he must go home.

The house was lit up when he got back, and Gran sat in an arm chair reading. But how empty it was! He just checked himself from calling out “Baby, where are you?” No use; Lil was gone; and, though she might come back again, she would never again be his Lil.

This was intolerable. Brough announced his intention of going to town the next day, and ordered his portmanteau to be packed for a week’s stay.

“Then I’ll go home to-morrow,” said Gran, with an angry consciousness that her presence could not compensate for the absence of that child of wrath, that brand unsnatched from the burning, that “little scamp Lil,” as Brough was wont to call her.

## CHAPTER IV.

**Y**OUTH, health, and happiness are three of the most glorious possessions man or woman can have in this world of ours. Preferable by far to the Koh-i-noor, or the autocracy of All the Russias. And these three things had Charlie and Lil, his wife, when they came home to their suburban cottage. That little castle of theirs seemed to them a perfect palace; for were they not together, and alone in it, absolute monarchs, to do as they might choose.

The cottage was one among many, all just alike; a collection of nests where lived innumerable city clerks and their wives and babies. But the cottages were semi-detached; there was a square yard of ground in which seeds might be sown with some hope of their developing into plants, and there were small lilac and laburnum trees here and there. To Charlie who had been living in London itself for some years, occupying solitary lodgings in a gloomy square, the place seemed a rural paradise. Lil wondered at first whether she would be able to breathe in it; but love glorifies its surroundings. It seemed so

adventurous to these two to be dining in their own house together, that they forgot how very small the dining room was.

This new young couple were quite an innovation in the neighbourhood and were much stared at when they went out in the evenings for their long walks, arm-in-arm, and accompanied by Lil's notable puppy, a young dog with a surprising facility for getting into trouble. These three together explored the whole neighbourhood before they had been at home a month, for Lil felt as though she were imprisoned in the little garden. And it was so natural to her to be out of doors that unless it were very wet, or she had some task to accomplish, it never occurred to her that the house was a place to stop in. She had learned from her father to read while she walked, and, whenever she had no immediate reason for staying in, she was out in the air, a book in her hand and her dog following her. The other ladies of the neighbourhood regarded her with some curiosity as she walked about in her dark serge dress and her straw hat, and if Charlie was with her they were still more interested. For the two were so evidently absorbed in each other; Charlie seemed to see nothing but the face under that straw hat of Lil's. And they always appeared to be so gay and light-hearted that these other ladies, whose souls were burdened and weighed down by wash-

ing days and mending baskets, sighed and wondered how it was, ending invariably with the reflection that "things would be different when there were half a dozen children."

But there was more differences than arose from the absence or presence of half a dozen children between this little household and the others. Lil, with all her earnestness of nature, had learned one grand secret which belongs to Bohemia; not to be easily made anxious about everyday trifles. This has very much to do with the fact that Bohemia is a gay country, and Philistia a gloomy one. In the house of the Philistine if there is anything wrong with the servants, or if the dinner comes to grief in any way, it is a solemn and awful fact making everybody seriously uncomfortable and altering the whole atmosphere of the day. But in that other light-hearted society, if there are no servants, the master of the house will open the door without shame or apology; he has just painted a picture or composed a poem, and little cares he for standing on his dignity. If the dinner is a failure, he brews a bowl of punch to raise his spirits, hoping fervently that to-morrow may see happier events, but refusing to yield his inner brightness because the mutton was raw or the partridges burned. In this school Lil had been trained, and though she set about her housekeeping tasks with much spirit and determination, it never occurred to

her that to play the character correctly she ought to think of nothing else from morning to night and worry incessantly over the small details which would not always come right. On the contrary, she laughed when she failed, and if the eatables were doubtful, suggested picnicing on a pot of strawberry jam or something equally absurd and unsubstantial. Charlie had not yet reached the stage of life when the smaller comforts of existence become absolutely necessary; he liked to see Lil laugh, and he looked forward to coming home in the evening as to an adventure. There was never any knowing what Lil might have done; there was no monotony in the life in this cottage. Indeed, how could there be? Children do not find play monotonous, if they are allowed to play in their own fashion. And life was all playtime to these lovers as yet. It was not work, it was pleasure to Charlie to go to the office which he hated; for now he went there not merely for the seemingly selfish purpose of getting his own bread and butter, but to buy dinners and breakfasts, gloves and bonnets for a slender, brown-eyed, laughter-loving princess. And the coming home in the evening, instead of being dull work, as of old, was now a daily delight. For there was Lil, always at the gate looking for him, her loose hair blowing off her forehead, and her big-pawed puppy sitting up gravely at her feet. The dog was grave:

Lil seldom was. "Can you guess what has happened to day?" were generally her first words. And then they go arm-in-arm into the house, laughing over the details of some extraordinary encounter of Lil's with the butcher or the kitchen boiler. It was like children playing with a doll's house. Everything seemed funny and delightful because the two were so absurdly happy.

The furniture of this small cottage was gathered by degrees, and it assumed, week by week, a prettier and brighter appearance. Lil loved every inch of the little place and was perfectly happy arranging and decorating it. Indeed she began to marvel at her own domesticity. The truth was that the four walls of this house were not, to her, those of an ordinary dwelling; they were the visible encasement of her love. Any place in which we are perfectly happy is a place we glorify and transform. Lil wondered sometimes whether there were such another charming nest in all the world as this miniature home of hers.

"I can't imagine," said Charlie, one evening, when they came home from a long walk and entered their sitting-room, "why men have such an idea of waiting till they are well off before they marry. It seems to me the greatest mistake in the world. It is twice as delightful to pull through the breakers together. Don't you think so, Lil?"

“Of course I do,” said Lil, with her light laugh, which came from an internal and seldom failing spring of cheerfulness. “But then” she added, with her quaint little air of gravity, “men are different; they are not all so easily satisfied as you are!”

She was standing in the bow window of the room, with the last rays of light falling upon her. The same Lil, slender, graceful, a peculiar air about her form as if there were strength enough there to make life a holiday; the readily smiling mouth and grave brown eyes; the same Lil that looked into her father's writing room the day before her marriage. Yet changed, for then she held the shadow of a doubt in her heart, now she had none. She had not been quite sure all through her engagement whether she really wished to be married; now she had given herself and her love so entirely to Charlie Newman, that already she was incapable of imagining existence without him. Her smile was always bright and sweet; but when it was for him it had that mysterious meaning in it which is only seen in the smile of a woman for the man she loves.

Charlie looked up as Lil spoke and was startled, as he had been more than once of late, by her growing beauty of expression.

“I am not easily satisfied,” he answered, crossing the room to where she stood. “I asked for the thing I most desired in the world, and I got it.”

“Oh!” said Lil, inclined to ask “Does that mean me?” but refraining, as she met Charlie’s eyes, from so evidently unnecessary a question. He stood at her side, holding a stray lock of her brown hair in his hand and pressing it against his own brown moustache, gazing at her the while as if she were the one being in the world. And so she was to him. He desired to see no one else. She filled his life and made it new. Until now he had never dreamed that existence could be so joyous a fact. It seemed to him as if he had been born again since this light-hearted girl had declared herself to be his property.

His property!—he was thinking of that as he stood looking at her; was it possible that she belonged to him, this woman whose individuality was so bright, so separate, so real? Yes, she was his; united with him indissolubly.

Lil was thinking of it too. A peculiar sympathy existed between them which they had been dimly aware of ever since their first meeting. It was not always necessary for them to speak in order to convey a thought or an idea. It seemed as if a mysterious link existed between the two minds; communication was possible without words. The sympathy, so intense as to produce this peculiar consciousness of each other’s thought—was vividly realised by them and added a certain sacredness to the love which united

them. Perhaps it might be accounted for by a certain similarity between the two. Both were of excitable, gay, nervous temperament, of bright, sunshine-loving disposition, quickly cast down by clouds in the natural or mental sky. Charlie's eyes were gray-blue, but his hair was brown, like Lil's, with almost the same touch of sunshine colour in it. Standing together, as they were now, they looked as though a blood-relationship united them instead of the relationship of love. Only their eyes contradicted this; no observer could have mistaken them for brother and sister.

Charlie was about half a head taller than Lil; he looked down into her eyes and saw her thoughts there. Lil's eyes were perhaps her most peculiar charm. They were of a clear brown, not very dark, they had in them a certain luminous expression, a straightforwardness, a perfect honesty; their quiet gaze imparted a sense of rest, it was so pure and steady. Charlie felt when he let that regard penetrate his own, as if his soul leaned upon hers and found an exquisite repose in the sweet contact.

"Is it true," he said, answering her glance of love, "that you belong to me? Is it not very strange that it should be true?"

"Is it true?" repeated Lil. "Can it be true? Is it possible for one human being to belong to another? I am myself, you know, after all. What has a man got who owns a slave?"

The power to beat him and make him work. He cannot command the man's passions or emotions. Neither can you command mine, or I yours."

"But you can charm them!" answered Charlie. "And in that you have a power greater than any given by law. But still you know we have each a hold upon the other—a legal one. We are no pagan lovers! No votaries of a passion known only to our two selves. We have taken on us the legal bonds, entered the holy sacrament. We have been married in church! The law holds you now as my chattel; I can do what I will with you, provided I do not desert you, or starve you, or make visible black and blue marks on your pretty skin. How do you like the sound of it?"

"Not much," said Lil; "I never did like the sound of it. I think it is horrid."

"But you can't help it now," cried Charlie. He caught her hands and kissed them. "These hands are mine to kiss. You have done it, and it is no use thinking it horrid now. You are mine."

"I don't think it as horrid as I did before I was married," admitted Lil, with a smile. "And yet," she went on, "it seems very terrible, the idea that a woman should make herself somebody's property. I wonder girls ever have the courage to marry ordinary young men."

“Oh, then, I am not an ordinary young man?”

“I don't think you are,” replied Lil, seriously. “I am sure I should be very much afraid at the idea of belonging to any of the other young men I have ever met. Fancy Alfred Davies, or Dr. Swift! Oh, it would be horrible, indeed. I should expect them to scold me and treat me as a sort of white slave. Why, it is unbearable even to think of.”

“It is not so unbearable in the present case?” inquired Charlie, mildly, observing two bright spots of indignant and rebellious colour appearing in Lil's cheeks.

“Don't be absurd!” was her reply; “you know it isn't; if it was I should run away. I never was intended for a saint or a martyr, or to be a patient suffering creature.”

“No,” said Charlie, “I think you have the blood of a little rebel in you. I know you don't like being bound to anything, even to me.”

“Oh, I am resigned to that,” answered Lil, a gleam of fun in her eyes. “At least for the present, indeed,” she added, more gravely, and with a sudden smile full of sweetness, “I think my rebellious spirit rather rejoices in its chains. I like the sense of having given up some part of my individuality, of having merged my career and my life in yours. It is an easy vocation, mine, merely to take care of someone I like very much. I think

it is charming. I used to harass myself with wondering what I should be or do, when I was older. Now I need not think of that any more, it is all settled for me. I have only to look after you."

"But I don't quite agree to that," said Charlie, "you are rather too good to be given up to the sole task of taking care of me. I should like you to do some writing now and then"

"Should you?" said Lil. "Then I will. That is so delightful, to be told what to do and to do it, instead of having to decide for oneself. It is so easy to obey; I suppose it must be natural to a woman?"

"Yes, to most women, because they have no brains, and it saves them the trouble of trying to think."

"That is why I like it, I suppose."

"I don't think so. I fancy you like the idea of obedience, but would object to the reality. Supposing I told you to do something you disapproved of?"

"I shouldn't do it," replied Lil, with considerable decision. Charlie burst out laughing.

"A moment ago you were rejoicing in your chains!" he exclaimed.

Lil coloured a little. "You see I have been taught independence," she said, rather timidly; "you must teach me better. But I dare say it is all nonsense, my saying I shouldn't do it; I expect when it came to

the struggle between doing what I liked or pleasing you, I should give in very quickly."

"You think so now," he said; "let us wait till these pretty new chains are a little rusty, and then see."

Lil cast a look of reproach on him, an eloquent look which made him thrill.

"How can you talk like that," she said; "the chains which unite us can never grow rusty. Surely it is not the legal bond which holds us together? Are you conscious of that? I am not, indeed. I don't know whether I understand it. It seems to me so funny that if people found they didn't like each other, still they would be married. But with us is it not something else—a real bond, I mean—which exists between us?"

"Oh!" said Charlie, "you consider the legal bond an unreal one, do you? But it isn't, as you would quickly find out if you tested it. We are bound together as though by links of iron."

"Ah!" cried Lil, putting up her hands, "don't say that. It sounds so terrible."

"Why? I would not mind literal links of iron which bound me to the one being I cared for, to the prettiest, sweetest girl on earth! Realise it, Lil, it is delicious. We cannot be separated. No one can come between us. Oh, I like it. Do not you?"

He stooped down to look into her face which now was downcast. She raised it and smiled.

"Of course, I like it under the circumstances," she said. "How determined you are to make me confess it."

"It is pleasant to hear you," answered Charlie. "It is fun to make my little white slave vow she loves her slavery."

"Well, I do. Now you have it," she said. "Do you know it has grown dark while we have been talking this nonsense. I don't believe you can see my face. Come, I must light the lamp. I wonder whether it will smoke to-night?"

"Probably," said Charlie, who had discovered by this time that accidents *will* happen, "but, if it does, I can smoke too; I will have a pipe and try to be philosophical, while you are investigating the subject."

The lamp did smoke and was taken out again in disgust.

"I believe I spent an hour over that thing this morning," remarked Lil, sorrowfully; "I begin to think I am very stupid."

"At cleaning lamps, perhaps," said Charlie; "but then a woman who could do everything would be unbearable. And no one ever supposed your talents to lie especially in that direction. Let me come and assist you with my masculine intellect."

The result of which proposal was that they went into the kitchen together, and Lil took the lamp to pieces, while Charlie smoked his pipe and looked at her. The minor trials

which upset people's tempers when they grow older, could not disturb these young creatures, rich in their love and happiness. Lil did not care what she did or where she was so long as Charlie loved her. This is an ideal state, yet one which was very real to Lil. It was familiar to her; for with her it was a sort of second nature to live for someone else. Until she met Charlie, her whole life had been absorbed in her father's; she had never imagined living apart from him or having any interests other than his. If she pleased him she was content. Now all this was transferred to Charlie. And her career, at present, was easy enough; it was not difficult to please Charlie. Smoky lamps, stupid maidservants, doubtful dinners, were nothing to him while Lil presided. She was the brightest, most charming creature he had ever come in contact with, and her presence made the little kitchen appear to him as delightful as an æsthetic drawing room.

The cottage was an old-fashioned one of two stories; the kitchen opened out from the dining-room. Lil couldn't get used to the London habit of shutting the front door; anybody might walk in at almost any hour and investigate the whole of the small establishment. Thus it was that while Lil was peering into the mysteries of the lamp, and Charlie was exercising his masculine intellect by smoking his pipe and thinking

how pretty her bright head looked in the Rembrandtesque illumination of a solitary dip, somebody came through the dining room and stood at the door of the kitchen.

“By Jove! domesticity with a vengeance,” said a voice, unmistakeable in its strength and volume.

“Papa!” cried Lil, and in an instant had disappeared into Brough’s capacious embrace, while Charlie, rising to the emergency, lit the lamp.

Soon they were established in the sitting-room, Brough in the biggest armchair—one which Lil informed him she had bought on purpose that he might have something substantial enough to sit on when he came to see her. Lil dropped on the ground, in her old attitude between his knees. Charlie, pipe in mouth, stood on the hearthrug and observed the group. How often he had done this, in Brough’s cottage, when he was falling wildly in love! There had been times, in those delightful Bohemian evenings, when he had imagined Lil to be something of a panther-woman, ready to play him fair or play him false as she might fancy. He had come out of surroundings so ordinary and commonplace that she and her father appeared to him creatures of another kind from those he was accustomed to; and sometimes, when it seemed too good to be true that this gay Lil could learn to love him, he had thought the

two might together be laughing at him in their sleeves, playing with him. Now he knew that Lil with all her brightness of mind and originality of character was as innocent, as simple, as honest as a piece of pure nature can be. And so he looked at these two, father and daughter, with new eyes. He admired them both, infinitely more than when they were still something of a mystery to him. Then their unconventional character had charmed him from its novelty, now it interested him far more, because he knew it sprang from real originality of mind.

But while he looked at the group, so like what it used to be, yet so unlike, he saw something which startled him. Lil saw it at the same moment.

"Papa," she exclaimed, "you are tired, ill, I believe. I never saw you look so before!"

"Only rather done up," he answered. "I've been knocking about. The fact is I've been going a little too fast. I came away from home the day after you got married and haven't been back yet, and this infernal city doesn't suit me at all."

"Mercy on us!" said Lil, sitting down in a heap and surveying her father with amazement. She had never known him stay in town for more than a few days together.

"I've met with a lot of friends, of course," went on Brough, who evidently felt his

haggard looks required explanation, "and have been dining out, and supping out, and breakfasting out rather too often. It's no end of a nuisance to know such a host of people."

"It wouldn't matter," remarked Lil, "if they weren't all so fond of you. You should be disagreeable and then they wouldn't ask you to dinner."

"Impossible," remarked Charlie. "When a man is one of the best talkers and best tempered men in the world, people naturally like him."

"Hulloa," said Brough, "you used not to have such a specially high opinion of me, that I remember!"

"I have been learning to appreciate the family constitution," answered Charlie.

"But you do not mean to tell me, papa," said Lil, with great severity, "that you have been dissipating all this time, just because you had not me to keep you in order."

"I do," answered Brough. "What's a fellow to do in that cottage with nobody to talk to but the dogs? Besides, my mother insisted upon staying to cheer me up, and I really could not face that; I don't know what would have become of me without you to protect me; why, she might have converted me. Oh, it's all very well to laugh, my dear boy, but the strongest intellect gives in before successive days of being talked at by an old lady who is impervious to reason. There

was no way of uprooting her except by coming away myself, so I adopted Falstaff's policy and fled from the enemy."

"She is coming to see me soon, now," said Lil, very seriously, "and I am trying to learn the price of things by heart. But I know I shall forget at the critical moment; I never could learn things by heart."

"People with brains never can," remarked Brough; this was a favourite theory of his. He had no memory himself, and found this a convenient way of accounting for the fact.

"But Gran isn't there now," observed Lil.

"I know that," replied Brough. "I am aware that for some time past I have had no excuse, so you need not awe me by that stern countenance, baby. I shall have to go back and do a tremendous spell of work, for I am all behind-hand, and I have agreed to produce a new book in the course of next year on the English drama. I should like to have you to help me in that, baby; I wonder whether you would have time?"

Lil looked from her father to Charlie. If their wills did not agree, would she be able to have one of her own, or to decide between them?

"Of course she would," said Charlie, "I object to her absorbing her whole time in the cultivation of the domestic virtues. You intended her for something better, and by-and-bye I hope she will not have to give so much attention to details."

"Well said, old fellow," exclaimed Brough. "I approve. Don't let the child become head-cock-and-bottle-washer and nothing else. So far I must say she does you credit. I never saw her look better. And now I must be off. Don't look so amazed, Lil. It is a supper party to celebrate the first night of a play, by my friend Edmund Laurence. I went to the theatre with him, but it was too hot or I was bored; at all events I thought I would come over and look at you in this unceremonious fashion. I did not mean to come so soon, you know, baby. I'll come again in a month or two and stay longer, perhaps."

"Oh, papa," cried Lil, with her arms round his neck so tight that suffocation seemed imminent, "don't go so soon, or do come back to-morrow!"

"No; I am going home to-morrow; I am over head and ears in unfulfilled engagements. Don't tempt me, you little scamp."

"But you will be so dull at home alone," whispered Lil, her conscience pricking her terribly. Why had she ever got married and broken up the dear old happy life? She felt herself to be desperately wicked and selfish.

"Ah, well," said Brough, "I don't know what to do about that. I suppose I shall have to follow your bad example and get married."

"Oh!" said Lil; she fell back and her arms dropped at her side.

“Now, I must find a cab and be off or Laurence will never forgive me. I promised to be there by twelve. What’s that? it looks like brandy and seltzer!”

Charlie, who had disappeared a little while since, had just presented himself, carrying a large glass.

“How many brandies and sodas do I not owe you,” he observed, “not the common B. and S. of hospitality, but timely drinks which enabled me to pass critical moments of my life. I should never have had the courage to propose, and should certainly have expired before the marriage service was over, had you not come to my rescue.”

Brough put down his glass, emptied by one of those vast drinks to which he was addicted, and burst into a roar of laughter. It sounded more like himself, and cheered Lil a little. Then the two men went out to look for a cab, and Lil leaned over the gate of her small garden and listened for the last sounds of her father’s boisterous voice. It sounded cheery enough now, as it came to Lil across the road. But she had a heart ache, the first one of her life. She cried herself to sleep that night.

## CHAPTER V.

LIL wanted to go home, as she called it! and stay with her father. This idea was speedily nipped in the bud.

“You got married with your eyes open,” remarked Charlie. “You knew you would not live with him when you were married. You had much better let him get used to it! I have no doubt it is very dull down there alone; but he must find some fresh alleviation, for you are Lil Warrington no longer; you are my wife.”

Lil received this last piece of information without making any reply. Charlie was rather fond of telling her of this fact, of which she was perfectly aware; and when she had been wanting her own way in anything it always reduced her to silence. She did not know whether she admired it or not, this consciousness of power which Charlie sometimes displayed. It is a feeling not uncommon among young husbands; they only see, with human shortsightedness, the immediate appearance of their life-long bargain; they have got their pretty white slave, and the feeding and keeping her is as yet a novel pleasure.

made a shade more charming by the sense of power and possession.

So it was with Charlie. He viewed Lil across the breakfast table, where this discussion had been held, with delight. She was his. She could not fly away from him like the wild bird she used to be; she was tamed, domesticated. She was all his own; and he said this to her, coming round to where she sat by the fireside, and said it in such sweet words and with such a tender look in his eyes, that Lil smiled her answer.

"Well," she said, "I know I must not go, but I wish there was anyone there who cared for him. The old housekeeper is very good, but she would not understand what I meant if I asked her how he is. If he eats his dinner and does his work she will think he is quite well and happy. I don't like to think of him, all alone there; yet what can I do?"

"I expect he has got over it by this time!" said Charlie, mischievously. "He won't go on pining for a little girl like you."

"That may be," said Lil, sedately, "but I want to know whether he frets over it or not; and how can I, unless I go down?"

"Going down, yet, would only make matters worse," answered Charlie. "Let him get used to being without you. If you are anxious about him, write to someone—write to Lady Lynne."

"Oh, no!" cried Lil.

“Why not?” asked Charlie. He was busy lighting a cigar, before he started out, so he did not pay much attention to her words. Lil said no more. She would not complain. She was ashamed of being jealous of Lady Lynne; yet she was desperately jealous. She could not easily reconcile herself to thus making an advance to her and appealing to her kindness. She had not forgiven her for what she had made her feel about Dr. Swift. The sense of shame which Lady Lynne had roused in her she connected with that lady, and not with him. But the thought of Lady Lynne made her think of this old admirer; and any association which suggested him was disagreeable to her. She had never said anything further to Charlie about him than those words, uttered at the church door, “I hate that man.” She had thought then, “I will explain; I will tell him about it.” But happiness makes short memories, and who can be expected to think of old follies amid the wonder of new happiness? Lil was married now, and to the only man whom she thought worth notice in all the world, save her father. Every day that she lived with him she admired Charlie Newman more and more. Her only shame with regard to Dr. Swift was that she should ever have tolerated his society, for by comparison with Charlie she could see that in reality he was not a gentleman; and she was glad to think of her old flirtation as trivial and

ridiculous, and a thing which it was beneath her to remember. It was just a trifling sore place in her memory, and she disliked Lady Lynne for having made it more sore than it need have been. For she was still unable to see that she had done any real wrong, or compromised herself at all. Strange though it may seem, it is indeed possible for a really innocent girl to keep her innocence even after she is a woman, and is supposed to know good and evil. Lady Lynne had succeeded in producing in her, on that day before her marriage, an uncomfortable and unfamiliar sense of shame; and she dreaded being brought in contact with her again. But she disliked, more than all, appealing to Lady Lynne about her father. She had no right to be jealous of her; yet how jealous a woman can be, without right, and sometimes without reason!

All this passed through Lil's mind as she sat there, leaning her head on her hand and looking seriously into the fire, while Charlie lit his cigar. But, that done, he interrupted her thoughts effectually.

"I am going to see Alfred Davies, to-day," he said, "and should like to bring him home to dinner."

Lil looked up, horror-stricken. So far, she had only been obliged to set forth her culinary triumphs before Charlie, who was still too much in love to care particularly about his

dinner ; a visitor was something much more terrible. But her common-sense told her that she had been spared this trial a long time ; so she only said, " all right," as Charlie hurried away, and then set herself to consider the matter.

She was afraid of the butcher—terribly afraid of the butcher—for he knew his business of selling, and she knew nothing about hers of buying ; and he generally cheated this proud looking young woman who entered his shop with her head held high, and her heart in her mouth. She had no idea how animals are constructed, and was filled with the vaguest notions about the various joints. But her first week's expenses at that shop so alarmed her that she set herself to study the matter as a new science, and now she knew a little more about it. But she could not conquer a certain terror of all the tradesmen, who seemed to her such superior beings, with such an intimate knowledge of their business. And she, alas ! was so utterly ignorant of hers. She was even a little afraid of her stupid maid-servant, for that young woman knew a great deal more about household affairs than her mistress did.

People forget all these agonising experiences, common to young housekeepers, and every generation of wives is launched upon the world in the same state of delicious ignorance. But in Lil's case it was much worse than in most, for she had been taught to disregard the very

details which now she found it so essential to understand. The result was perhaps good on the whole. She had no time to think about her father, or Lady Lynne. Her one object was to please Charlie and, somehow or other, to turn out a decent dinner.

So she sat down with a cookery book and determined to decide exactly what she wanted before she faced the butcher. The morning was soon gone, and the afternoon was spent in the kitchen. With a large brown holland apron over her dress, Lil stood over the kitchen fire, afraid to leave her saucepans or her ovens for a moment. She thought once or twice what Brough would have said to the spectacle. But she knew she was doing right, under the circumstances, and her only fear was, that after all this industry, her dinner would come to grief.

But it did nothing of the kind. Lil found her father was right, and that a brain accustomed to being used can be turned in new directions with ease. She studied her cookery book as she had studied her Latin grammar, and came forth successful. The only unfortunate circumstance was that the little maid could not be trusted to "dish up" the dinner, so that Lil was unable to appear until it was on the table; when she came into the dining-room looking so charming, with her flushed cheeks and bright eyes, that Davies was startled into a compliment. Charlie surveyed

the scene with satisfaction; it is wonderful how men at once despise and appreciate the domestic virtues.

"This is a pretty little place," remarked Davies, "and I must say you seem uncommonly comfortable. I should like to get married, too; I am tired of knocking about in lodgings and dining every day at the club."

"Why don't you?" inquired Charlie, with the air of a man of experience, who can recommend his own course of life.

"Well, you see," said Davies, "it takes a long time to make a good living at the bar. And it is not every lady who has the talent for making love in a cottage agreeable. I am sure Mrs. Newman is a bright and rare example. I always dread the sordid, bread-and-cheese side of it; some infernal butcher calling for his little bill, and my wife crying because there isn't any dinner."

"It's a matter of management," answered Charlie, with that delightfully wise and superior manner which young men of his age are wont to assume, "and of keeping strictly within one's income."

"Ah, well, that is exactly what I don't believe I could do," said Davies; "I hate short commons, and sticking at home because I can't afford to go out."

"You would like to have a home and to be a gay bachelor both at once?" remarked Lil, slyly.

“That’s a severe way of putting it, Mrs. Newman,” said Davies, “but I don’t mind confessing that the difficulty with me is what all men, who want to marry before they have obtained any success in life, have to face. It is the giving up of all one’s personal pleasures. You see Charlie here is such a desperately domesticated fellow. He never did care for his club, and I can quite believe that he never wants to go out of this house when he is once in it.”

Lil laughed at this; it was a very shrewd hit.

“When Charlie was a small chap, I well remember he always liked to play with the little girls,” said Davies. “It’s that poetic taste of his, I suppose. Men who write poetry are always fond of women, and contented with their society. I’ve noticed that in others, and as to Charlie——”

“Now, Alfred,” said Charlie, interrupting him, “we don’t want any old love stories here. I am ready to confess that I have always been in love more or less, ever since I was breeched. Are you interested in old love affairs, Lil? If you are, I propose fair play, at all events, and that we should all relate the history of our pasts. I object to being the only person exposed.”

“I’m not going to tell tales of myself,” said Davies, looking up at Lil. “Are you, Mrs. Newman? The only fun in telling old stories is when they are about other people.”

“Of course,” said Lil. Davies, looking at her, kept his gaze fixed; for Lil had flushed from brow to chin, even her neck had crimsoned. It was partly that she had a momentary fear of this proposal being carried out; she would never have dreamed of refusing to tell her own stories if it had been expected of her, and she, involuntarily, and to her intense disgust, thought with horror of speaking of Dr. Swift before this Davies, whom she could not learn to like. But it was partly that she was a little tired and nervous.

Davies dropped his eyes at last, and turned the conversation; but he had noticed Lil grow uneasy under his gaze, and the fact pleased him. Being an ordinary man of the world he always suspected everybody until he knew they were innocent; and he thought of that little scene at the church door of which he had been a witness. He was very shrewd, too; and he immediately said to himself, “So she has never told Charlie about that old lover of hers! Women are all alike, after all.”

“Keeping within one’s income isn’t always so easy as it looks,” he said aloud. “I should much doubt my ability in that direction. Now, if that old uncle of ours would die and leave us each a neat little legacy, it would make a difference, wouldn’t it?”

“He won’t leave either of us a penny, you may be quite sure of that,” said Charlie. “He hates us both, like poison, because we should

inherit if his son dies. And I don't believe his son will live; he takes too much care of him."

"Oh!" said Lil. Charlie had never talked of these expectations, they appeared to him too remote to be worth a thought.

"Didn't you know your husband has the chance of being a rich man, Mrs. Newman?" said Davies, noticing her evident surprise. "It is true enough, and I have the honour, at present, of being your husband's heir."

Lil paused a minute, to take in the meaning of this last remark, and then quickly said, "But there is no real chance, is there?—is this son really delicate?"

"Yes, he is," said Charlie; "but even if he should die, my uncle is as tough as an old horse; he will outlive me. And then, I expect, the boy will marry soon; he is nearly as old as I am. In fact the less thought about such far off possibilities the better."

"Quite so," said Davies, "but that crusty old fellow doesn't know how to use his money. I'd rather you had it, for with all your wise speeches about management, I think you would understand spending a good income, Charlie."

"I don't know," said Charlie, "I am perfectly contented at present. We will leave the future to take care of itself. What more could I have than I now possess, if I were the richest man in England? A large house and

plenty of servants don't make much difference in one's life. The only appreciable difference to me between riches and poverty is that wealthy men have all the arts at their feet. That, I confess, I envy. Art is the sunshine of life, and under its influence one's being expands and grows. Lil was the first really cultivated and developed woman I had ever met ; and I consider I am a new man since I have known her. I have expanded and changed as I never supposed it was possible for me to change."

Lil flushed and frowned ; she did not understand being regarded, in the abstract, as a work of art. Davies did not follow the idea ; it confused him.

"I've never gone in much for art, myself," he observed ; "you are a different sort altogether. As I said before, men who write poetry are always different. I daresay you would buy pictures, and be a sort of patron, if you came into this fortune ; now my notion would be to give dinners, get together a first-rate cellar, and have what the Americans call a good time."

"I daresay I should do that, too," said Charlie, "we never know what we may become, or what latent tendencies may develop in us, until we have been tried by the changes of fortune. What do you think, Lil ?"

"I would rather not think of it at all," said Lil. "There is little likelihood of any change

for us ; and indeed I do not desire one. What more can one be than happy ?”

“ True enough,” said Davies, “ only that is such a very uncommon frame of mind. Most people I know are always wanting something different from what they have got.”

“ I don’t think I like change,” said Lil ; “ it gives me the heart-ache.”

Davies put up his eyeglass and looked at her. This was a malady he had never experienced, and he was interested in anyone who openly confessed to it.

He became more sensible, as the evening passed away, of the charm of this bright little house. He knew nothing of the magic which created the delightful atmosphere ; he was ignorant of the very alphabet of love. The only meaning he attached to the word was that of selfish desire. He could not guess that these two young people were so closely attached, so united by sympathy, that they gave spontaneously and with delight, each to the other, and had forgotten the existence of self. This union, so innocent and joyous, produced an air of ease and pleasure about themselves and everything connected with them. Nothing seemed difficult, or hard or tiresome, for every task was glorified by the sense of its accomplishment being achieved, not only for oneself, but partly for one dearer than self : no moment seemed monotonous or sad or dull, for there was a presence ever near

which filled each instant with that life which is the joy of the world.

If he had been told in so many words, Davies would not have understood that here, in this cottage, the power which keeps the world alive and makes men's hearts keep warm within them, was present in all its strength and glory. Most men pass through a whole lifetime, cheered by mere passing sips of this beverage of the gods; but these two had the full cup in their hands, and gathered strength and courage and beauty from it, with every passing hour that let them look into each other's eyes.

Davies did not know what it meant; but even he was aware that life was so pleasant here it was no wonder Charlie did not care for his club. "I don't think I should care to go out if I were in your place," he said, as he shook hands with his cousin at the gate; "I shall think about getting married."

"Do," said Charlie, "and, meantime, come and see us again soon."

Charlie turned back and went into the sitting room, where Lil sat in a low chair; she had drooped into an attitude of weariness, when left alone.

"Are you very tired, Lil?" said Charlie, noticing this.

"No, not very," said Lil, looking up with a smile of delight at his approach. She thought he would have gone farther with his cousin;

it was joy to her to feel how quickly he returned to her side. She looked so fair and sweet as she sat there in the lamp-light with this smile lingering on her lips that Charlie found it difficult, for a moment, to believe she was all his own, and that she would not suddenly change and vanish and be Lil Warrington once again. And with that fancy came a half-mischievous, half-jealous spirit into him.

"What did you blush so furiously for when I proposed telling our love stories, at dinner?" he asked. "Have you got any terrible secret buried in your bosom?"

"No, indeed," said Lil, but with a quick rush of warm blood rising to her face again; "it was merely that I thought of that Dr. Swift who was at the church door when we were married, if you remember!"

"But you said then you hated him?"

"So I do," said Lil, heartily.

"Then he doesn't matter to me," remarked Charlie, with renewed cheerfulness. "Did he want to marry you?"

"Yes," said Lil, a disconsolate tone making itself evident in her voice.

"And did you want to marry him?"

"I should think not!" she exclaimed.

"Then if you never wanted to marry him, and if you now hate him, I propose we forget his existence. I can't recollect anything that happened before we were married; I daresay I was engaged half-a-dozen times, but I'm sure

I forget all about it. There can be no more absurd mistake than to mar the beauty of new relations by raking up the memory of old ones. For my part I firmly believe that I was born again when I met you ; I am quite a different person ; all those other girls were slow and stupid ; it must have been a former life in which I was capable of admiring them. It is really impossible for me to imagine existence without you, and therefore I can't imagine ever having been without you ; so that my past becomes non-existent."

"Yes, yes," said Lil, "only I feel ashamed of ever having flirted with anybody that wasn't as nice as you are !"

Charlie burst out laughing.

"You little absurdity," he said. "Well, I have nothing to say about that, except that I'm very glad you did not think Dr. Swift as nice as I am, because then you'd have married him, and I should have had to be content with one of the other stupid girls."

"All other girls are not stupid," said Lil, seriously, "there are some much more delightful than I am."

"I don't believe it," said Charlie, with emphasis.

"It is so, though !" said Lil. "Perhaps you will meet with one some day."

"Impossible," said Charlie. "To begin with, you are unique ; you have a cultivated brain and a white little soul, instead of a mind

crammed with nonsense and all sorts of prurient ideas picked up from nurses and boarding-school teachers. It does a man good to associate with a woman whose nature has been allowed to develop on its own pure plan."

"But," said Lil, timidly, a little abashed before all this enthusiasm, and confused too, for she had no standard to measure herself by, "I know papa's teaching has been something very special for me; but I am sure there are other women who have had opportunities as good, and made even better use of them!"

"A few, yes. But I don't believe there's any woman in the world that bears the least likeness to you."

"Oh," said Lil, with a little sigh of satisfaction, "as long as you think so it is all right, I suppose? It will not hurt me, perhaps, to be flattered to-night, for I shall be thoroughly taken down to-morrow, when grandmama comes!"

"I believe you are really afraid of that old lady," said Charlie.

"In a sense I am," answered Lil. "She has different eyes from mine. I never could learn to see the things she found fault with, at home. I did not know, till she showed me, that the wainscoting was only dusted now and then instead of every morning."

"Well, you can dust all the wainscoting before she comes, that is if we have any; I'm sure I don't know."

“Oh, but she will show me ever so many things I have never thought of. And she makes me feel so wicked, I really don't think I am! I believe it's all because we are quite different, but still, she makes me feel guilty if only for being different from her!”

“For a strong minded young woman you are more easily made to feel guilty than I could have imagined possible,” said Charlie. “Even I can tease you in a minute or two into thinking yourself all a mistake and quite a trouble to everybody and no use in the world. Can't I?”

“You, of course,” said Lil, with a look which contained a whole world of love and devotion, “but then it is all-important that you should approve of me.”

“Oh, it is, is it?”

“Of course, what should I do, otherwise? My life is yours; I should have no reason to exist if I didn't please you. And that will make me a little less afraid of grandmama than I used to be; because it really doesn't matter whether I am a child of wrath if you are satisfied!”

Charlie laughed again. “I don't doubt your being a child of wrath,” he said, “but I am satisfied all the same; so according to your view of the matter you needn't trouble about granny or anybody else.”

“Oh, no,” said Lil, “I never shall again.”

“You will have an easy life, then,” said

Charlie, "for you will find it wonderfully light work to please me."

"Shall I?" said Lil.

"Yes; I shall always be pleased while you are happy."

"Ah, that is delicious, for how can I help being happy?"

And so these two, like a pair of love-birds, looked only into each other's eyes and forgot the whole world outside their own circle of sweet content. There was joy in mere life, in the simple passage of time, through this enthusiasm of early passion.



## CHAPTER VI.

**G**RAN arrived, punctually, of course. She had never been late in her life, but was, as a rule, half an hour too soon for any appointment. Lil knew this and was ready. Everything was in perfect order by the time old Mrs. Warrington was expected, and Lil had even made efforts to fasten back her curls more decorously than usual. But those curls were very wilful and disliked restraint as much as Lil herself; she felt the loose hair blow over her forehead again as she ran down to the gate and she felt, too, Gran's look of disapproval. Lil belonged to the type of woman with whom tidiness in dress is an unattainable standard, perpetually aimed at. She was always picturesque, even in a cooking apron; for the artistic nature in her affected everything she touched or wore. But she was too full of a generous vitality to be thoroughly tidy; her dresses wore out in a strangely short space of time, and when she undertook to arrange them herself the result was rather a pictorial effect than any excess of neatness. But to-day she had dressed herself with the utmost demureness; and with the consciousness that her

cottage was in perfect order, met her Granny bravely. Mrs. Warrington was growing infirm very rapidly and could only move slowly from the gate to the house, with Lil's help. At the open door she stopped and put her arms round Lil, giving her a peculiar solemn embrace, which in Lil's early youth had been her horror, for it tumbled her hair more than ever, and smothered her face in black alpaca. But to-day she submitted patiently.

"My dear," said Mrs. Warrington, "I am glad, and indeed thankful to see you in a home of your own. I used to have many fears for you in the future, your father being so reckless and improvident that no provision was being made for you. Now, my dear child, you are saved from want, and I thank the Lord for you in my prayers every day. In His infinite mercy He has given you food and raiment, as He gives to the lilies in the field. A very nice Brussels carpet, indeed, my dear; how much a yard was it?"

They had entered the sitting room now. Lil flushed hot. She had posted herself carefully as to the price of coals and candles; she had never thought of the furniture.

"I don't know, Granny," she said, sorrowfully, compelled to use her old answer, which Gran had so often repeated after her with scorn; "I will get the bill and see." She felt some triumph in this reply; a collection of

receipted bills appeared to her a proud possession.

“You *don't know*,” repeated Mrs. Warrington, with a look of incredulity and amazement. “Never mind, if you do not wish to tell me; I only thought it handsomer than the new Brussels in my best room. But young people like pretty things, I know; I dare say this would have been too expensive for me. My treasure is in Heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt. Don't you find moth in that goatskin rug? I think they are nasty things, there's always moth in them.”

“I don't think there are any moths in that,” said Lil, with a deprecating humility which the old lady well understood.

“You haven't noticed, perhaps,” she said, with a profound contempt; “look it over yourself, instead of leaving it to your maid.”

“May I take off your bonnet?” asked Lil, in the hope of changing the conversation. Her plan was successful, and the large old-fashioned black bonnet was changed for a big white cap, which had come in a cap-box. It is a noticeable fact that people who are supposed to have given up all pomps and vanities are most particular in the details of their severe costume. It was a formidable business to get Granny into her cap, and quite distracted her mind from the hearthrug. But, unfortunately, it brought up a still sadder subject.

“Now that you are married, my dear child, I had hoped to see you wear a neat cap, or at least have your hair in smooth braids. Remember that now you have entered the holy bonds of matrimony it is not righteous that you should delight the eyes of any man; you must look to your husband only, and forget the thoughts of vain admiration which fill the sinful hearts of young women; and to your husband you will be sufficiently ornamented by that carefulness and industry which make a virtuous woman.”

Lil had hastily arranged her curls during this speech, and, knowing the subject of her personal appearance to be a very dangerous one, she made an effort to escape from it. She never could understand why her mere appearance should so irritate her Granny. The truth was, not so much that Lil was too pretty, but that she was too irrepressibly picturesque for the severe taste of the old lady, who had been reared in a very different school from that of her granddaughter. Lil's graceful figure, in its tight fitting dress, her hair which was soft and wild like that on the brow of a baby Greuze, her attitudes, unconsciously artistic, her gay, vivacious manner, all these things outraged Mrs. Warrington's sense of propriety. Had Lil worn black ill-fitting alpaca, put her hair over her ears in smoothly brushed bands, and always sat upright in her chair, Gran would have been

ready to believe well of her, and would have been prejudiced in favour of her, as a virtuous young woman. As it was, she was just the reverse, and had been so, all Lil's life, and would be, to the end; much as she loved the child, she was prepared to believe evil of her, simply because Lil was not cut according to the pattern familiar to herself. Yet everybody who knew her would have called Mrs. Warrington a reasonable being, with a good share of common sense. This kind of unconscious bias is usual enough among us; our judgments of others are too often a mere bundle of prejudices and baseless opinions. Mrs. Warrington would have seemed an unusual old lady in a fashionable drawing room; but she had a conventionality of her own, and one form of orthodoxy is as difficult to deal with as another. Lil had never been able to decide which tried her patience the more; Lady Lynne's fashionable Philistinism or Mrs. Warrington's stern code of order and morality. All the sweetness in the child's life had come from her father; and it is small wonder if she clung to his teachings and could not learn from either of these two women to aim at what they would have called a more feminine standard. He liked her to look like a study by Greuze, and so did Charlie; so she determined to avoid this terrible old subject of her appearance.

“Will you come and look at the house

before dinner?" asked Lil, with a little inward tremor as she spoke. Would the house seem all right to Gran's inquisitorial eyes? Would the dinner be all right? The little maid-servant was in charge of an early dinner, which Lil had prepared with great care; she still felt doubts about it, for extraordinary things sometimes happened when she left the kitchen. But Gran could not be left without offence; so Lil must needs do the best she could.

Gran was only going to stay until the afternoon; she did not like being out after dark. Charlie was delighted with this arrangement for he did not at all desire any theological controversies with the old lady; he had done battle with her before his marriage, and now, having won Lil, he desired peace, and peace was not very easily to be obtained, in Mrs. Warrington's presence.

Lil's star was in the ascendant, she thought to herself, as the day passed on. Gran did not find more fault with the house than might have been expected, the dinner was a success, and Lil was triumphantly positive about the price of everything on the table. In the afternoon Gran was established in the big arm-chair in the sitting room, and Lil sat, as demurely as possible, opposite her. She felt gently elated at her success in her new character of housekeeper. Granny really had not crushed her very much. Lil, being unused

to the way in which women regard such matters, was unaware that the fact of her being married had made her a more important person in Mrs. Warrington's eyes. Like the rest of the world, the old lady preferred people who had a definite position; and she knew very well that an unmarried woman has none. It was a real relief to her to see Lil, at so safe and early an age, sitting soberly on her own hearthrug. She took occasion to tell her so, once more.

"You see, my dear," she said, in her slow, measured tones, and with the solemnity which since her conversion had become a second nature, "it is a great comfort to me, before the Lord takes me to himself to know that you are provided for; your father is so careless and extravagant, and you have been so oddly brought up, that I have often been very anxious about you. I feel contented now to prepare for my grave, for I think your husband is a very worthy young man, with a proper sense of the duties of life. I am contented, although I cannot say I am rejoiced, for I would rather have seen you the wife of a true Christian than of a godless heathen."

This sounded to Lil rather like calling Charlie names behind his back; but she was determined to be good to-day, so she bit her lips and held her tongue.

"Is it possible," said the old lady, suddenly

lowering her voice a whole tone (this was a trick which she had learned from her favourite preachers); "Is it possible that I am to go alone when the Lord takes me to his bosom? that without either son or daughter I am to stand among the elect and see my beloved children cast by His hand, because of their unregenerate hearts, into the torments of Hell fire? Consider the welfare of your soul, my dear child, and resolve to turn to the Lord and lead a godly life while there is yet time. I do not blame you for what you are; your unregenerate nature has been untrained; you have had no guiding hand to lead you to the Lord, for He knows how little I have been allowed to say to you. Your father has wilfully turned his face away from the gospel of truth and gloried in the sayings of the heathen who speak vain words in the hardness of their hearts. You had no mother's teaching to help you; but I do not know that you have lost anything by that, for I never approved of your mother; she was a vain and frivolous woman given over to the admiration of the foolish works of her own hands."

This meant that Lil's mother had been an artist; it seemed to Lil a curious way of expressing it, but she still said nothing.

"I pray every day for you, my dear child," continued Granny; "I wrestle with the Lord for your salvation, and I have hopes yet that you may remember your soul before it is too

late. You are very young, and there is, humanly speaking, time for the sense of your sinfulness to fill you and bring you to the Lord. But, though you are young, you stand always ready for the hand of the avenger. Do not blind yourself to your awful position. Any day you may be struck down by death and given up to eternal torments. If you cannot feel the awakenings of grace and are unable to realise your state of sin, promise me, at least, that you will endeavour to avoid those evil amusements which make the Lord angry. Give me your promise that you will never enter a theatre or any place of public entertainment, and I shall be more at rest."

"I can't do that, indeed, Granny," said Lil, rising uneasily from her chair. Often before had Gran endeavoured to extort this promise from her, but always unsuccessfully.

"My dear," said Gran, with great earnestness, "consider before you reply foolishly! Think how little it is to give up these evil entertainments and how important it is to please the Father of us all, who can shrivel you to dust by a flash of His lightning, and cast you into Hell fire for evermore."

This kind of thing always made Lil want to express her feelings; it seemed too dreadful to hear so many friends abused! Her mother, her father, were both condemned, her husband described as a godless heathen, and her Creator credited with an unreasonable cruelty which

would have disgraced an overworked London magistrate. Familiarity is a tremendous power to dull the edge of terrors; and Lil had become a little accustomed to these speeches. But she was never used to them as most people are, to whom all remarks which have a religious tendency are accepted without particular inquiry into their meaning, and who repeat them with the faithfulness of well-trained parrots. "Most people" may be thought too wide a generalisation. Is it so? How is it then, that so many good "church people," who know their catechism well, and have sworn to give up the pomps and vanities of this world, yet live in palatial houses and wear diamonds, have their dresses from Worth and their coats from the Prince of Wales's tailor? These things are a mystery; and it takes a Herbert Spencer, at least, to penetrate the confusions of the ordinary human understanding. Lil, having been educated outside the orthodoxies, and well trained in Latin and English, had the unusual faculty of understanding words in their proper sense. Thus it really hurt her when she heard Gran talk as she did now; and she had to bite her lips to keep back her first answer. Then she said:

"I don't think you know what you are asking me, grandmama. I cannot promise a thing which really does not seem to me right. To begin with, I have promised to help papa in writing a book which may involve my having

to study the stage, for it is upon the English drama; and, though I have read a great many plays, for I am very fond of them, I don't know much about what they are like when they are acted. And when I think of all that I have learned from Shakespeare, I feel afraid to make such a promise, for I know the drama is a glorious form of art. And I have never seen Othello yet, or Hamlet, and so many others!"

Lil had almost forgotten whom she was talking to. Her thoughts had flown to certain passages which were written deeply in that memory (which was so treacherous as to the price of coals!), and which she longed to hear spoken by a true actor. The drama had been her passion since she was a little child and her father had first given her "The Tempest" to read. She had lived in the world of Shakespeare for weeks together, and almost forgotten that there was another world in which she had to live, more patent to the touch, if less vivid to the mind.

Her eyes had grown dreamy, as she thought of the art which she loved so intensely. She stood in the centre of the room, her hands clasped before her. She was facing the window through which she could see the entrance to the garden, but she saw, not that window, but something more real to the eyes of her mind, until suddenly she became aware that someone was opening the gate. A gentleman

stood there—and the familiarity of the form roused her attention.

“My dear!” said Granny, with a deep sternness; Lil’s last words had startled her as being evidences of a terrible sinfulness of soul. Lil seemed not to hear; her eyes were fixed on the window; her lips were a little parted, her breast was heaving, whether from the last moment of mental excitement, or from a sudden sensation of nervous apprehension she herself hardly knew. Gran, finding herself unheard, or at all events unnoticed, rose slowly and came towards Lil, intending to wrap her in one of her solemn and stifling embraces, while she implored her to consider the state of sin in which she was plunged. But, just as she approached her granddaughter, Lil, who had until now been standing motionless, darted suddenly to the door of the room.

“Ann! say I am not at home. Don’t you understand? There is a gentleman just going to knock at the door; if he asks for me, say I am not at home!”

“What in the world is the matter with the child!” said Gran, standing alone in the middle of the room and gazing after Lil in great amazement. Her mind moved slowly; the hinges had grown a little rusty; and she could not imagine how Lil could be so quickly distracted from the subject they were discussing.

Lil softly closed the sitting-room door

and stood inside, breathless, with flushed cheeks. She had acted on sudden impulse, and now had a doubt as to the wisdom of her action.

"Oh, I am afraid he saw me, for he looked at the window," she said.

"Never tell an untruth," said Gran, sternly. "Why could not you say you were engaged?"

"I did not think of it," said Lil, humbly, "and besides, 'not at home' has come to mean that, really."

"That is no excuse for you," said Gran, who was very angry at being interrupted when she was bent upon conversion. "Who is this gentleman you are so anxious to avoid?"

"No one that matters, Granny," said Lil, hoping she would turn from the window; for she had an instinctive dread of Gran's prejudiced judgments. But the consciousness of being one of the elect had not quenched the common place quality of curiosity in Mrs. Warrington's nature. She watched for the visitor to go out of the gate, and even put on her spectacles to see him the better.

"What!" she exclaimed, "it is Dr. Swift!" Lil had sat herself quietly down by the fire, when Gran turned and slowly brought to bear upon her the horror-struck gaze of those keen old eyes through the gold-rimmed spectacles. Lil was confused; she knew it, and try how she might to quiet herself she could not hide it. She was disturbed more than she

would have cared to own by Dr. Swift's calling on her. She hated to have to remember him, even; she had believed she would never see him again; and it startled her beyond measure that he should come to her house and ask for her. Yet, what was there in it? He was an old friend, after all, she told herself, nothing more. Why should Gran think fit to stare at her so?

"You have that man coming here in your husband's absence?" said Gran, dropping each word distinctly, as though she were knocking a nail firmly into somebody's heart. "This is the result of your wild bringing up? I had thought better of you than this. I had thought my own child must be a decent woman. But how could I expect it, when your father has been a friend of publicans and sinners all his life? I am being bitterly punished in my old age; but the Lord knows whom he chastens. I never really believed what Lady Lynne told me of your shameless adventure with Dr. Swift; I thought her an idle scandalmonger; but now I must believe her, instead of my own child."

"You must not!" cried Lil; "she did not tell you the truth——"

"What," interrupted Gran, sternly, "do you mean that you did not go out boating with this man, and come back the next day?"

"I did," said Lil, her eyes and cheeks aflame "but——"

“Say nothing more,” said Gran; “do not perjure your soul by more lies. You have admitted that this is true; you cannot deny it. Tell me nothing else; I don’t want to hear any lies, or any more shameful admissions from your lips. I know the vileness of the unregenerate human heart. Give me my bonnet, child, and let me go home. I am weary with battling for your soul with the evil one!”

“But, Granny,” cried Lil, passionately, “you are all wrong! What do you suspect me of? Dr. Swift has never been to this house before; and as to that stupid old affair of the boating, there was no harm in that; I only took refuge from a thunderstorm. And I would not even speak to him all the way home, because he kept asking me to marry him.”

“Did he? Then he was a very right minded young man, if it is true. But I cannot believe what you say now; I heard you tell your own maid to tell a lie for you.”

“My dear Granny!” exclaimed Lil, in amazement.

“Don’t try to deny *that*, because I heard you! Remember the fate of Ananias and Sapphira, and keep your mouth shut that no more evil come out of it; else the Lord may strike you where you stand. But I defended you to Lady Lynne, and would not believe what she said of you! It was all your father’s

fault that I did not have the truth from you long ago. If he had let me speak, and I had known this, you should have married Dr. Swift."

"Oh, thank Heaven I had papa to take care of me!" cried Lil, her eyes suddenly filling with tears. She had never guessed that he had saved her from this.

Gran was tying her bonnet strings with fingers trembling with nervous anger. Lil, going through her accustomed task mechanically, was carefully putting the big white cap in its box. She had learned, ever since her infancy to fold each string separately and arrange the cap with the utmost reverence.

Gran paused and looked at her.

"You shameless girl!" she exclaimed. "It is all your mother's fault that you are what you are. You have not got it from me; I have been an honest and God-serving woman all my days. It is her blood that has come out in you; she, too, was a wicked, foolish woman, dressed like a Jezebel, and always looking hither and thither for admiration."

"You shall not speak of my mother like that," cried Lil, forgetting her own wrongs in this other sense of injury, "she was a good, sweet woman, and so everybody says, but you."

"She was a painted Jezebel," said Mrs. Warrington.

“How dare you,” said Lil, now thoroughly roused; “I can’t imagine how you can say such false things. But it is always the same; you never have a good word to say about anybody; it seems to be part of your religion to believe evil of everyone; I am very glad I am not religious!”

Mrs. Warrington tried to reply, but could not; this audacious speech of Lil’s had literally taken her breath away. She snatched her bonnet box, and hurried off with tottering steps to the garden gate, where her cab now stood waiting for her.

Lil watched it drive away. “Oh, how angry she is!” she said to herself; “well, I am glad I have told her what I think at last; I have wanted to, so often. I have done it now. I wonder whether she will ever forgive me, or whether she will hate me always, like she does mama? Oh, how could she say such things! I hope she won’t get ill with being so angry! Poor old Gran.”

And so, her mind driven this way and that, she walked restlessly about the room, trying to grow calm. She did not know how late it was, and could think of nothing but the scene she had passed through. She was quite startled when Charley walked in, in the dusk; she had no light but that of the fire, and was so nervous that she gave a little cry when he came to her.

“Oh, it is you!” she said; “I am so

glad! Oh, Charlie, I have had such a dreadful day!"

"You poor little thing, how hot you are! Has the Granny been scolding you? Has she poked into all the corners and found some dust?"

"It is worse than I could have dreamed of. She has been so angry, and provoked me, and I don't know if she ever will forgive me!"

"This sounds bad," said Charlie, stirring the fire and creating a blaze. "There, I can see you now. How bright your eyes are! What has all the row been about?"

"Charlie," said Lil, with an air of sudden resolution, "I want to tell you something. It seems to me too ridiculous to tell, but they have teased me so that I must."

She knelt down on the hearthrug, in the full blaze of the fire light, and turned her face up to him. He, leaning against the mantel-piece, looked down into her eyes; their pure gaze held his while she spoke.

"Dr. Swift has been here to-day."

"What, your old flame, that you hate so!—been here?"

"Yes; I did not see him. But his calling made Granny say such dreadful things to me. And the reason why they seem to think I care about the horrid man is this:—Long ago, he used to stay at Lady Lynne's; he liked coming to see us, but papa could not bear him.

Sometimes he met me when I was out, and papa did not like that. One foolish day he found me, out in the boat, alone with the dogs. It was fearfully hot, I well remember, and I was so tired. He offered to row me a little way, so I let him get into the boat. We went on, and the heat ended in a thunder-storm so terrible I was frightened—and oh, so wet. We were near the White Horse, and the old landlady, who was always kind to me, dried my clothes, and let the dogs sit in the kitchen; and got us some dinner. We could not go back, it was so wet; the landlady said I should get a chill that might kill me if I went home in the rain. So we stayed, and she took care of me. I remember playing chess in the evening on an old chess-board; and then Dr. Swift asked me to marry him, and I was so vexed! and all the way home next day he teased me to marry him! But I would not; I hated the sight of him. That is all there ever was of the flirtation that Lady Lynne and Granny scold me so about. What do you say, Charlie?"

"That you are a dear little innocent baby, and that I should like my dinner."

"Oh!—I have never even thought of dinner," cried Lil, starting to her feet. Dr. Swift, Granny, everything of the past was forgotten in a moment; the immediate interest of dinner, and the pressing need of alleviating Charlie's apparently famishing condition drove

every other idea out of her head. She flew away into the kitchen to see what wonders Ann might be working there; and Charlie followed timidly in her wake and looked through the kitchen door, much more interested in his wife's present culinary abilities than in her bygone love affairs.



## CHAPTER VII.

**A**S the time passed on Lil grew accustomed to her daily tasks; she would have been absolutely happy, but for one anxiety which oppressed her; and that was concern for her father. He did not often write to her, when he did he assured her that he was "all serene" or "uncommonly jolly." These vague phrases did not satisfy Lil; she grew restless and uneasy. She had expected him to take the change of circumstances in a quite different way, to come and see her very often and be his old cheerful self. But this spell of dissipation, followed by a long spell of hard work, puzzled her; it made her think he had not lost her with as much ease as she had fancied. The one solitary visit paid so strangely in the late evening, as though an irresistible impulse had drawn him there—why did he come in that way, and not come again? Charlie told her that Brough was very wise; he knew he had to face the fact that he had given her up altogether to somebody else, and he was doing it bravely. Lil had to be content with this, as she could suggest no better explanation.

But she grew more restless about him, with every brief, unsatisfactory scrawl that she received from him. Amid the sweet bright content of her own home, her heart went out yearningly to the father whom she had left. She realised, perhaps, more than ever, how much she loved him, through this sense of separation. His existence made one of the glowing spots in the world to her, indeed, but for him and Charlie, the world to her would have been empty. With them in it there was a fulness which made her life joyous. Lil was rich, for she had an abundance of love, and this made her eyes so bright and her voice so soft; for Lil was made for love; she would not have been able to understand that life could exist without it. She was gay because she was so happy. But she wanted everybody else to be happy too; she was still young enough to think this a state of things which was to be expected. And she could not rest now in her own perfect content, because her keen sympathy told her that her father was desolate.

She could get nothing from him that satisfied her, and when she wrote to the old housekeeper, that worthy lady's reply frightened her more than ever. For it spoke of Brough having grown more fanciful with his food, "and taking walks as no Christian should in the middle of the night."

This epistle had such an effect upon Lil,

that she silenced her pride, without any further hesitation, and wrote to Lady Lynne.

In a fever of anxiety she watched for the postman during the next day or two; at last the morning post brought her a dainty little envelope, coloured and scented, and bearing the correct spider's-legs sort of lady-like handwriting.

"Mr. Warrington looks as well as ever," said this dainty little letter; "of course the housekeeper can tell you more than I can as to his life at home, as I have not been to the cottage since your marriage. But, whenever I have seen him, he has seemed to be as bright and well as possible; and I see him nearly every day. It is quite a rare thing, if he does not walk over in the afternoon to my house."

Lil dropped the letter for a moment and drew a deep breath. This was something new indeed!—What did it mean?

"Let me see what more there is in this horrid letter," she said to herself, and picked it up again.

"Dr. Swift has been down here to say good-bye to me. He has entered the navy as a medical officer, and is off, on what he calls a long cruise. He tells me that he came to say good-bye to you, and that you refused to see him, though he knows you were at home. Was this wise? I advise you not to offend him; it is very foolish ever to make

an enemy, but most foolish to make an enemy of a man, who has any power over you. You must learn to play your cards more carefully; a woman can seldom afford to be brusque or uncivil to an old lover; in your case it seems to me most rash. But, of course, I cannot expect you to follow my advice; you always would get into trouble by your wilfulness, and I can see you are little altered. Try to remember that you are judged always by what the world thinks of you, not by your own ideas."

"Oh, I will read no more of it!" cried Lil, and she threw the letter away from her. "How can papa like that woman well enough to go and see her every day? What the world thinks, indeed; what world is there to judge of me? Papa and Charlie are all the world I have. I wonder whether papa will be the same if he marries Lady Lynne!"

The sense of change, and change, too, perhaps for the worse, came upon her for the first time in her fresh young life. She it was who had originated this change—she it was who had got married first. But she had not realised it as change in her own case; it had seemed to her only an added fulness of life, a new richness which she was taking upon her. She had never thought how completely it would separate her from Brough, how far removed from him her new existence would be, until she was actually married; she had not under-

stood that her whole being would be poured out into a new channel, that, instead of a daughter, she would be a wife. She saw it now, she saw that she it was who had severed the sweet old links of love and habit, which had united her with her father. It was very natural that he should set about forming some new tie; for if she had been blind to it, he had seen clearly enough that his daughter was gone from him altogether. But Lil clasped her hands tight, and knitted her pretty brow, when she thought of its being Lady Lynne that was to come into his life and fill it with her butterfly presence. Lady Lynne—who had never understood her, never really liked her—would she not make Brough see with her eyes in time? Would she not separate father and daughter more completely than any one else would?

It is a difficult thing for a woman, who loves her father as did Lil, to accept a step-mother with a good grace at all, but when that stepmother has known her all her life, and been kept always just outside the charmed circle of affection, it is bitter indeed to have to take her into its very centre. It is always possible to imagine someone unknown, who would be perfectly acceptable, even in such a position as this, but the faults of any one well known are so familiar, and the difficulties of association are so clearly defined! Lil felt her heart grow heavier and heavier as she

thought of it. "If he does marry Lady Lynne," she said to herself, still cherishing the "if," "then he will be gone from me; Charlie will be all that I shall have. And is not one such dear boy enough for me? Yes, much more than enough! I have to grow a great deal, before I shall be satisfied that I am enough for Charlie." And so she put away her letter, and set about her daily tasks, determined not to have a heart-ache if she could help it. For, as Charlie said, she had got married with her eyes open, and if she had had any sense, it would have been easy to guess that her father might himself marry again. "But oh, I never thought of it till the very day before I got married, when I saw that look in her eyes," said Lil to herself. And, spite of all her attempted philosophising, she was not resigned. The inevitable had to be accepted, but it was not easy to do it with the grace of a true disciple of Epictetus.

For a day or two she was miserable, but she set herself to conquer her misery, for a very good reason; the sympathy between Charlie and herself had become so intense, and their union in mind and heart so close, that their moods fluctuated in unison. If one was vexed about anything, the other immediately drooped, and high spirits in either were more than contagious, they were reflected instantly. It would have been hard

to say which most often was the leader, and set the fashion of the hour. They went hand in hand through the happy days, leaning each on each. How glad and gay are these early years of life, when no harsh thing has met us on our way; when earth seems to hold a great and hopeful future; when we believe the world full of other human beings as happy as ourselves.

Lil was still full of the charming illusions of youth; she looked to each coming year to bring a more glorious unfolding of love; she fancied everyone about her to be as generous-souled as herself.

True she had already learned to fear and dislike a few people, but she told herself that was, perhaps, because she misunderstood them. She told herself this about Lady Lynne and about Dr. Swift. She had no idea that anyone would wilfully annoy her. Above all she had no idea that with some men the Byronic theory of love is the only one; they can love and hate in a breath, and, indeed, do not know love as a gentle passion, but as a fierce and aggressive one. But Lil, like the rest of us, was doomed to discover many strange things as she grew older.

One bright afternoon, about a week after her correspondence with Lady Lynne, she went out to give her puppy and herself a "constitutional." A parting look at the preparations for dinner was the principal duty before she started.

She had not yet acquired the proper style of "dressing" for a walk; she could not learn to put on a bonnet and veil, and wear a mantle, which would produce an elegant figure, so long as her arms were kept folded. All that kind of thing, so natural to a woman like Lady Lynne, was quite foreign to Lil. Her straw hat hung by the side of Charlie's in the hall, and her principal equipment was a book. With this open in her hands, and her eyes half the time on the page and half the time on the sky, and with her dog trotting close behind her, with puppy-like confidence in her guiding footsteps, Lil went out into the air.

She seldom noticed the passers-by, and so it was to-day. Had her attention been given to the people in the road, instead of to people in the play she was reading—who seemed to her so much the most significant—she would have observed coming towards her, a figure, the sight of which would have effectually roused her from her dreams. But she only saw the sunset light in the sky, and her mind was full of Juliet and her love. The play so charmed her now, and knocked so intelligently at her heart, that she often read it over, and wondered that she could have supposed she understood it in the old days when she had read it first.

"You will not pass me without a word!" said a voice at her side. For an instant she

was quite bewildered, for she knew no one in the neighbourhood, and could not guess who would speak to her like this. But the voice had an intolerable familiarity; she knew, before she raised her eyes to his face, that it was Dr. Swift who stood there.

“I am going away in a day or two, and may not see England again for a couple of years. Surely you will say good-bye to me?”

“Good-bye,” said Lil, with the utmost simplicity, and moved on a step as though she supposed the conversation to be at an end.

Dr. Swift burst out laughing. “You are as innocent, as natural, and as unlike other girls as ever,” he said.

And then, before she knew what he was doing, he had slipped his hand through her arm, and was walking close at her side. Lil suddenly crimsoned, drew her arm away, and stood back with an air of offended majesty worthy of a princess.

“Oh,” said Dr. Swift, “you are not quite the same as you used to be. You did not mind my walking arm-in-arm with you in those pleasant old days by the river.

“When I was very tired sometimes you helped me, I know,” said Lil, tears of vexation rising in her eyes; “but I am not tired now.”

“Come then,” said Dr. Swift, “let me walk with you a few steps, and I will not touch

your arm if that is such an offence. You look very angry. I have given you no reason to be annoyed with me."

Lil reflected before she spoke, and remembered that he had not; it was Lady Lynne whom she was angry with. That lady had made Lil feel guilty, where before she had felt innocent; had made her regard a man, who otherwise would have seemed to her a mere ordinary acquaintance, as a dangerous person. But that was no reason, after all, why she should be rude to the man.

"I have only a moment to stay," said Lil, covered with embarrassment from the double consciousness of having been, perhaps, unnecessarily indignant, and of a great unseemliness in her talking to this man after all that had been said to her about him.

"You were in no hurry when I met you," said Dr. Swift, with a good-tempered laugh, and a merry look in his eyes. "Your thoughts were wandering somewhere else, and I am sure you did not know whether you had a moment to stay, or a hundred. Why are you so positive about it now?"

"Because I really am late, I find," said Lil, looking at her watch, and making a great effort to recover her self-possession and do the right thing. "Will you not walk back to the house with me?"

"May I come in if I do? You would not let me come in before."

"My husband is at home, I believe, by this time," said Lil, with great dignity. "If you will come with me, he will be happy to see you."

"I don't want to see your husband," was Dr. Swift's reply. Lil lifted her eyes to his in amazement at his rudeness.

"Then, good-bye," she said.

"I saw him at the church-door when he had just gone through the ceremony which made you his property," was Dr. Swift's answer. "I don't want to see him again, I assure you. You liked me once; why do you speak to me now as if I were a crossing-sweeper? How am I altered? Look at me and say."

She did not know how to answer him on the instant, and so she raised her eyes to his face, unconsciously obeying him.

Most people would have thought Dr. Swift very handsome. Lil did not think so now, for she had learned to admire a gentler masculine type. There was something savage in the admiration with which this man regarded her, something so unlike the tenderness which she saw in Charlie's face, that it half frightened her.

Dr. Swift admired Lil more than any other woman he had ever seen, and she appeared to him to have developed, and become even more attractive since her marriage. He liked, too, the air of resistance with which she met

him; it was something entirely different from the conventional modesty that girls wear, as they wear anything else which is the fashion. It was real, this fire in Lil's eyes, the blush on her face came straight from her quick sensitive feeling. She was no doll, no inane presentment of a woman, worked by a machine, constructed on the same pattern as that which works all the other dolls of society. Here was a strong, passionate, individual woman. The vigour of Lil's face and movements roused this man's admiration, as the tiger's feline grace awakes the hunter's desire to kill. He was attracted to her by the strong, rich element in her character. It made him desire, fiercely, to prove himself the stronger of the two.

Since the rash day when, in the fever of a first hot love, he had asked Lil to marry him, he had decided altogether against marriage. Not that he was broken-hearted in any sense, but he really could not imagine being again provoked into making so reckless a proposal. For marriage presented no charms to him. He regarded women as a means of excitement, much as he regarded champagne, or quick horses, or anything else which roused and stirred him. Domesticity offered no pleasures to him, and the intimate relations of marriage with domesticity were enough to scare him from it. He had the nomadic instinct deeply implanted in him, he

liked change and variety in every phase of life. If Lil had ever really responded to him, he would perhaps have wearied of her in a week. What fisherman would care for his sport, if the fish sprang to him out of the water? If she had met him now with the masked manner of most women, he would have gone away thinking little of her, save as a bright figure in his past. But the simplicity with which she revealed to him her feelings, her inability to hide her indignation at his manner, interested him. She stood there like a primeval woman, insulted for the first time by the look in a man's eyes, and endeavouring to guide herself by the light of her own instincts, unaided by any conventional or familiar code of conduct. The idea was quite new to Lil that any man should distress her by his admiration. If she had ever been to a boarding-school she would have learned to expect this sort of thing, and rather to like it, while knowing just how to pretend not to like it.

"No," she said, quietly, after a moment's gaze at his face, "you are not much altered. You are a man now, while there was something of the boy still about you, when you used to stay at Lady Lynne's.

"You are very much altered," said Dr. Swift, "though the change is of the same kind. A slim girl, not ready to take offence, you were then a lovely playmate; now you

are a woman, with any amount of injured dignity ready to hand. But I don't mind that; it suits you very well; I like that look of devilry that comes in your eye, as if you would bite me if I came too near. It makes you splendid! By Jove, what a spirit there is in you if one roused it. Does your husband know how to bring you out, I wonder? I don't believe he does. That's right—offended dignity again—it suits you amazingly. Now tell me, Mrs. Lil, does your husband know of that little escapade of ours on the river?"

"What do you mean?" said Lil.

"You know, as well I do, how we went off in a boat, had a splendid time in a thunder-storm, and came coolly back next day. That was a glorious spree. What a jolly little girl you were then. Does he know about it? Have you told him?"

"Certainly I have," said Lil, with great composure and cheeks as red as fire; the catechism did not suit her at all, yet she felt a great relief that she could answer it.

"And isn't he jealous? didn't he beat you, or swear at you?"

"My husband is a gentleman, not a brute," said Lil, getting very angry and hardly knowing what she said, for her heart was beating so fast.

"That means a milksop," remarked Dr. Swift; "I thought he was no match for you, and now I know it. Well, listen to me,

Mrs. Lil, you may think your husband knows all about it, and is not jealous; you flatter yourself he has no reason to be. I assure you I have only to tell him that story—nonsense, I have only to meet him with a certain manner, to sneer at him as delicately as maybe, and I can convert him from this tender, forgiving creature that he is, to a furious, jealous tyrant. Even milksops have feelings.”

Lil looked at him in absolute perplexity for a moment, then she drew her brows together in a frown.

“Are you threatening me?” she asked.

“You may call it so, if you like. I will threaten no more. I will try to please you. I am going away for a long time; will you meet me here to-morrow for one pleasant talk before I go?”

“Certainly not,” said Lil. “How could any talk between us be pleasant after this?”

“I have put my foot in it. Come, Lil, forgive me; you were born in Bohemia, where people are free and forgiving, don't grow stern because you are married. If I have said disagreeable things, it was because I admired you so much, I could not help it. Don't throw me off altogether. I shall never marry now; I have no home in the world; I shall be a wanderer always. I should like to think when I am away on the sea in a ship full of men, that one of the prettiest,

pluckiest girls in the world has a memory of me stowed away in her heart, and will smile when I come back again."

Just then Lil saw in the dim light a figure approaching. Thank heaven! it was someone she knew. As he came close she stepped towards him.

"Is it you, Mr. Davies? Are you going to our house?"

"What, Mrs. Newman! it is so dark I did not know you. I came over so late in the afternoon because I thought I might catch Charlie."

"Yes, he will be in by now and wondering what has become of me. Good bye, Dr. Swift."

With a bow, into which she put all the haughtiness she could command, Lil left the doctor and walked away with Mr. Davies. It was only a short way to the house, and they were soon there. Lil talked and laughed; her spirits rose suddenly, for she was much relieved to have got away from Dr. Swift with such ease. And besides there was a little high-pressure, a certain excitement of her sensitive nerves to throw off. Davies was rather quiet; he was putting together various small incidents which he had observed. They were slight enough, the things he had seen, yet, with a mind constructed as was his, they seemed sufficient evidence of what he would have described as "something behind

the scenes." A man's disposition is much affected by his education; men in business, men in society, men at the bar all judge as they are taught to judge. Opportunity is a terrible and significant word to men of law. If man or woman has had the opportunity of doing any ill, it seems highly probable to the legal mind that the ill has been done.

Charlie was standing at the gate when they came to it; the dim outline of his figure was just visible in the gloom.

"Why, Lil, is it you, at last?" he said, a tone of anxiety sounding in his voice.

"It is evident you are not often out when he comes home," said Davies, laughingly, as he opened the gate for Lil. He looked hard in her face as she passed him, and even in that dim light the sweet steadiness of her eyes perplexed him. Her cheeks were aflame, and her heart was beating much more quickly than she liked, but the spirit that looked out from the windows of her soul was stable as ever. He did not understand her, she was of a type unfamiliar to him and beyond his grasp.

"That girl is too clever an actress," he said to himself; "I am glad she is not my wife."

"How are you, Alfred," said Charlie, who, now that he had Lil's arm in his, felt capable of noticing somebody else. If, at a moment when he was accustomed to her presence, she

was not with him, he hardly knew himself. It had come to this that his time was cut into two separate pieces; one part of it he lived with her, the other part he existed without her. This last was only at his office in the city, where, if she came by chance, she looked, to his eyes, like a bluebell dropped in the street. She gave him all the freshness, the woodland sweetness of his life. Once away from his work he would not leave her; clubs or bachelor parties had no charms to offer him; together they went out, if at all.

"I don't believe he'd have spoken to or seen me if I had come in before her," thought Davies; "just the man to be fooled by a clever girl like this."

"I am very well," he answered, "and have come to tell you some news; I am going to be married."

"The effect of a good example," said Charlie. "Who is the lady?"

"You don't know her," said Davies; "she is a stunning girl. I should like to bring her to see Mrs. Newman some afternoon. We shall have to begin life much as you have begun it, and I want her to see how charming a cottage can be."

"I shall be delighted to see her," said Lil, as in duty bound. "One of the charms of a cottage is that the dinner has to be looked after, and I must ask you to excuse me now."

“Then, good-bye, Mrs. Newman,” said Davies, rising; “I shall be gone in a moment, for I have an engagement to dinner.”

“Good-bye,” said Lil, not at all sorry to have to say it, for she knew her own dinner preparations to be of the slenderest.

When she was gone, Davies turned to Charlie—

“Why can’t that old fellow kick and leave me a legacy?” he said. “I shall have to borrow money to furnish with. I daren’t write to him myself, he always swears at me for a beggar. Don’t you think if you told him I was going to get married, the appropriateness of a substantial wedding present might occur to him, especially if you told him I was marrying ‘expectations?’ That may ‘fetch’ the old fellow.”

“A silver snuff-box, or a clock with a gilt cupid on it, which will go for a week and stop for ever”

“No, no, bank-notes I mean.”

“He gave me nothing,” remarked Charlie.

“You don’t need it as much as I do.”

“Why? because my income is smaller than yours, and your chance of getting on double mine, and I did not marry ‘expectations.’”

“Nonsense, I mean that you’re such a much less expensive sort of fellow; you haven’t got the tastes that run away with money; a pipe and your slippers seem to satisfy you. It’s no use my saying I can live

in that way, I can't. And I don't suppose Lydia will be as clever a manager as your wife, at first. She has been a spoiled child, accustomed to be taken care of always."

"Lil knew nothing of housekeeping" remarked Charlie; "she has learned all she knows through a series of bitter experiences. However, I will do what you like. I shall be writing to my uncle in a few days about some business in the city, which I have been arranging for him. I will tell him of your marriage, and see if the news will stir his generous impulses. But I don't think he has any to stir."

"Thanks, Charlie, you're a capital fellow. Good-bye." And Davies, having got what he wanted, was soon gone.

Dinner was waiting, and the lovers sat down together. They thought more of each other than of any other thing in the world. Beef and mutton were not without taste because of this infatuated condition, but they had a glorified flavour which was common to all eatables, and made them all seem alike delightful. When the two sat down to table there was, every day, a sense of satisfaction to each in the simple fact that the other was opposite, that the bright union of their lives was perfect.

Lil remembered her recent annoyance suddenly, as she sat there. Alfred Davies and the hurry of being late, and her little amusement

at finding Charlie awaiting her so anxiously, had driven Dr. Swift out of her mind. But in the midst of a silence the memory of meeting him returned to her. She grew crimson and her eyes were wet, in an instant, like violets under the evening dew.

"Charlie," she said, "I was late this evening because I met Dr. Swift, and he would talk to me. I hate the man; I cannot imagine why he supposes I can care to see him."

"Probably he cares to see you."

"I suppose that is it," said Lil, with a little sigh. She did not seem at all gratified by the persistence of her old admirer. "Well, he is in the navy now, and his ship is ordered away, so I hope I have seen the last of him."

"That is all right, then. Don't talk of him any more, if you can't do so without such flashing eyes. I am glad that expression is not meant for me."

"For you!" said Lil, turning her eyes upon him; and, as she looked, the fire that was in them melted into a glance of ineffable sweetness. As Dr. Swift roused, by his presence, the fierce side of her nature, so Charlie called forth its tenderness; she leaned gradually towards him now, as though he attracted her; it seemed as if the mysterious sympathy which exists between the physical nature of people who love deeply, was drawing her by its magic chain; suddenly she put out her hand to him.

“Oh, let me forget that man!” she said;  
“I want to remember no one but you.”

“Not even your father?” said Charlie, curiously. He had never yet felt jealous of any one but Brough.

“Ah!” said Lil, drawing back, and a thoughtful look coming into her eyes, “that is different. I could not forget him if I tried!”

If she could but feel as confident that Lady Lynne could never separate her from her father as she felt that Dr. Swift could never come between herself and her husband!



## CHAPTER VIII.

**B**ROUGH WARRINGTON, left alone in his cottage, certainly did find Lady Lynne's ever-charming companionship a great solace.

Lady Lynne was a widow ; not exactly young, though very nearly ; not exactly beautiful, but with a style which was almost as effective as beauty.

She had earned her experience ; she understood men, or thought she did. Up to a certain point her knowledge of their likes and dislikes was great. She knew how to please them ; and, perhaps, it was no wonder that she did, for she had devoted herself to the cultivation of the art.

She felt Brough to be her superior ; never, even when she was in town for two or three months every season, did she encounter any man who gave her this feeling so strongly as Brough. She delighted in the consciousness of her littleness when by his side ; for she was effeminately feminine, and such women enjoy being mastered, as do horses and dogs. But in women of this type there is another element, which, fortunately for us, is not found in the

horse or dog—slyness. Lady Lynne feared Brough when he was in earnest; yet she believed she could manage him and have her own way, and enjoy her small tyrannies, if she were his wife; and this by simply hoodwinking him. Her plans and projects would not always bear open confidence and discussion; but with a man who was in the clouds half of his time this was unnecessary. When Brough's mind was busy he believed anything he was told about the details of life. He had not got Lil's habit of asking straightforward questions; a habit which had made Lady Lynne detest her. Lil had never had a secret in her life, and could not imagine that there should be hidden nooks and tortuous paths in the lives of other people. Thus, in her early youth, she had made Lady Lynne vow revenge upon her more than once.

Lady Lynne had a nice little income which just enabled her to keep her pretty little country house, and her pair of ponies, and allowed her to go to town occasionally. But she was growing tired of this somewhat narrow life. She had set herself for a coronet when first she was left, a sparkling gay widow. But the only coronet offered her had been burdened by such a lean and disagreeable specimen of male humanity that she recklessly refused it. She would not accept any offer which brought her merely a little additional comfort. She wanted position; to be some sort of centre,

and have a drawing-room of her own, the entrance to which should be coveted. She had not yet seen her way to getting this ; and, as she was no longer very young, she was growing more set upon obtaining it as soon as possible.

She thought she saw, for Brough's wife, a position which might be worth having ; not ready-made like that attached to a coronet, but ready for a clever woman to make. It appeared to her that he was not made the most of ; not used to advantage. What was the good of a man being a celebrity if he was to live shut up in the country ? When Brough did go to London he mixed, as all artists love to do, with people of his own sort. This, said the lady, was a great mistake. Actors frequent the society of actors, artists love the atmosphere of studios, authors love to meet those who, like themselves, do a little thinking. But such social meetings are of no use to them as far as success in life is concerned. Lady Lynne was a thorough woman of the world, with all that reverence for success which the world has. Brough's delight in midnight discussions with other men of his own sort seemed to her a delusion, a mistake. These hours which he could spare from his work should be devoted to society proper.

She was convinced that a "lion" like Brough, properly put forward by a woman like herself, would be a trump card. And, as she was as much in love with him as it was possible

for her to be with any man, she naturally cherished her conviction warmly.

Brough possessed that strong masculinity of character which makes a man absolutely demand some woman's presence in his life. The men and women who have their own sex most deeply implanted in them are those who hunger for the social influence of the other. Brough found life dry without a feminine atmosphere about him.

Lil's mother had so far fulfilled his ideal of womanhood, that he found it impossible to kill her memory, or fill her place. He did not know how to fall in love again; he had passed through the passion with such intensity, and it had been so bitterly scorched out of him by the agony of loss. To such a man, one who revels in the natural life and finds keen exhilaration in the mere fact of healthy existence, death is an intolerable horror, however he may summon philosophy to his aid. Lil's mother had possessed a bright and beautiful personality; it took Brough some years of life before he could realise that this personality, so strong and rich, had actually passed out of the world. He had no capacity for becoming misanthropic and he cherished the idea, during Lil's childhood, that when she had grown up he might fall in love again and find a new youth in a new union. But he was aware, now, that this was impossible. The great experiences of existence cannot be repeated. The strange

charm of human life lies in the impossibility of suffering the same sensations twice; whether they be sweet or sad, the moments are always new. Disappointment arises from the fatal delusion of unimagi-native minds, that a pleasant day or a happy hour can be repeated an indefinite number of times with success. The effort to chain down the infinite variety of nature to a monotonous succession of similar events fails, and then comes a sense of disgust. Brough had observed life sufficiently to know something of this; he resolved, when he found that no woman he met could waken gain the old thrills of passion, that he would not expect them. Why should he desire to love a woman to the degree of worship twice in his life? Why not yield to a different set of impulses, and make love to a woman who roused the less ideal part of his nature? Such a woman was Lady Lynne. She knew how to use the magic power of her womanhood, just as an actress understands her art. It seemed to Brough that he could tell precisely the effect which Lady Lynne would produce when he met her, just as having once seen Ellen Terry's Portia he would know what to expect when he went again to see it. But he enjoyed this, as playgoers enjoy familiar acting. He liked the effect which Lady Lynne's art produced upon him; he liked to be roused, just as she roused him; amused and pleased, just as she amused and pleased him.

There was no illusion about it ; he knew she put on her smile when she met him as the actress puts on her paint. But as we grow older we cry out less for our illusions. We let them go and are well content if we get something practically pleasant instead. Lady Lynne's unfailing brightness and invariable power of pleasing was something very practically agreeable to Brough. In the midst of his solitude and constant mental work her society supplied the stimulant he needed. It was like having a good novel always at hand or a perpetual stall at the *Gaiety* just within easy access.

And so it came about, that every afternoon, at the time when Brough had been accustomed to go on the river with Lil, he walked over to Lady Lynne's with his dogs at his heels. The stalwart figure, coated in invariable black velvet, sometimes soaked by the rain, always wearing a straw hat with blue or crimson ribbon round it, came daily swinging up the gravel walk to Lady Lynne's front door. The dogs had to sit in the porch while Brough was inside ; the Persian carpets which lay on the floors of Lady Lynne's rooms could not be desecrated by damp paws. Lady Lynne's rooms were small, but dainty to a degree which abashed even Brough a little. Coming out of the rain and the wind, or the sun and dust, there was a sense of fragility about Lady Lynne's little drawing-room, which made him feel very like a

bull in a china shop, and compelled him to behave with unusual decorum. Though she lived in the midst of the sweet, fresh country, Lady Lynne's atmosphere was as entirely one of scents and laces, gossamer and glitter, as if she were a queen in Mayfair and had the season and its artificialities always with her. Her garden was full of flowers, but she liked to wear diamonds far better; and, indeed, they became her as no tender blossoms would have done. The open air life of our moist island gives richer complexions and brighter eyes than any cosmetics can produce; yet Lady Lynne, following her nature, shut out from her drawing-room the air of the sweetest of English counties, and put on her cheeks rouge instead of roses.

Even this part of her character amused Brough; it was so unlike himself that it interested him.

In youth, while the stem of the tree is but slender, we yearn for sympathy; something to lean upon. But later we lose that desire, and find, in contact with a character entirely different from our own, a new excitement and fascination.

To Lady Lynne this man, with his breezy atmosphere and racy modes of thought, was something as foreign and delightful as is the air of the mountain peaks to a valley-dweller.

It amused her when he came in and sat

himself down carefully upon one of her gold-backed chairs ; making himself as small as he could, and yet looking so large amid her collections of knick-knacks.

She was sick of widowhood. She had waited long enough ; she was determined not to wait too long. Better fly low than sit always alone with drooped wings.

She determined one day, as she sat alone at her drawing-room window watching for her unfailing visitor, that she would marry him, if he asked her. This "if" was a very unimportant one to her mind. She believed in the power of her sex.

It was a wet day—a day on which few men would walk out of doors even to see their lady-love. No one but Brough, Lady Lynne felt very certain, would come to see her on such a day as this. But he would come, of course. He was a man of large build, never afraid of the elements and always a lover of nature and her caprices. Lady Lynne felt the charm of this disposition, so different from her own, as she sat there at her window and watched the steady rain gladdening the green lawn and washing the laurel leaves into vivid beauty ; she pictured Brough striding along the wet road, leaving his deep footprint upon the red soil, his wet dogs at his heels. Why did she shrink, as with horror, at the thought of going out in that rain herself, yet feel a certain pleasure at the idea of her broad-shouldered,

brown-bearded admirer coming to her through the downpour?

There he was, at last, striding up between the laurel hedges, all wet, with little drops falling from his hat and the tip of his nose, but looking as happy as if he had arrived in a brougham. With a faint little shriek of delight, Lady Lynne started up and ran out into the hall to meet him.

“Oh, you are too wet, positively too wet, to come in,” she cried, while her eyes sparkled and flung fire into his. “You must stay here and dry with the dogs.”

In bad weather, there was always a fire in Lady Lynne’s hall, and, like an obedient large dog, Brough stood in front of it. He looked into Lady Lynne’s eyes and saw something there which made him forget he was wet—made him forget everything save that his whole nature was being kindled by the fire of a woman’s eyes. There was meaning in every movement, as she stood there; she was speech all over, to her very finger tips which rested for such a delicate instant on his sleeve.

Brough could make love royally when he indulged in this joyous, time-old folly. He made love in the right fashion, self-forgetfully. The young men of the new know-all and despise-all generation are so crammed full of consciousness that they repel the woman whom they admire. A woman’s sensibilities are quick enough to tell her whether a man is thinking

of himself or of her. Brough thought of the woman whom he looked at, not of his own appearance and expression. Lady Lynne revelled in the sense that she had roused a real man, when his eyes burnt into hers and his strong grasp caught her wrist. Had she done well, she wondered, half shrinking away from the fire she herself was kindling, to take so sturdy a slave as this? Might he not after all prove master instead of servant?

Brough stayed a long time this afternoon, and when at last he went home through the dim, wet gloaming it was with a new future in his mind. Lady Lynne was to be his wife. Lady Lynne was to bring all her prettiness and delicacy with which to make gay the daily path of his stalwart career.

Lil would never have liked it, he knew; he rather doubted whether, even now, Lil would like it. "By Jove, though," he said to himself, as he strode along the moist road; "if the child objects I'll tell her she shouldn't have run off with that fellow Charlie. If young women get married, what can their fathers do but imitate 'em?"

With which queer bit of reasoning he satisfied himself. It seems odd that he should have thought of Lil's "objecting," but the phrase was a mere result of habit. He had become accustomed to defer to Lil's judgment in many things, and he often sorely missed her advice.

He walked home through the steady rain towards his cottage and his solitary dinner, with a queer mixed feeling within him. He had a strong boyish element in his character ; he was still so young in nature that a change so charming as this seemed to him certain to be all delightful. Yet he was so far taught of experience as to know well that " nothing is certain but the unforeseen." Men learn as they grow older to make the most out of the charms of anticipation. Brough let himself dream very pleasantly as he walked on between the damp green hedges, with the dogs close at his heels. Dogs never like getting thoroughly wet ; they hang their tails and wear a dejected, sorrowful aspect. But Brough enjoyed it ; the soft rain in his face gave him pleasure. And then, too, the whole country seemed to be his own. Only an occasional cart was to be met in the road, and the carters all bade him a friendly good day, whether they knew him or not, after the good old country fashion. There were none of the local middle-class, the stolid respectable people, out on such a day as this. The long road lay before him with nothing live upon it but a bird, or the slow cart and horses which seemed as much a part of the landscape as the hedges at either side. This solitude had a great charm for Brough. He was gregarious enough after a fashion of his own : but his society must be of his own choosing. He liked to go and

talk to the farmers in their dark little kitchens ; or lean upon their garden fences and look at their hollyhocks and sympathise with them about the " turmuts " and " taters ; " he liked Lady Lynne and her delicate bright gossip, as refreshing as a cup of fragrant tea ; but he could not endure the weary monotony of middle-class life in the country, unenlivened by character, culture, or individuality. These people consequently regarded him as something extraordinary and probably dangerous ; they would peep through their muslin curtains and say, " There goes mad Mr. Warrington, out in the wet again. " It is a doubtful question whether it is worth while outraging the opinion of the majority even in a trifling, unimportant matter. But Brough loved freedom ; would have his own way and live according to his own convictions. This disposition he had very decidedly imparted to Lil ; whether for good or ill, time alone could show.



## CHAPTER IX.

**B**ROUGH meant to write to Lil that same evening, and tell her the news. But his courage forsook him when it came to pen and paper. He wondered whether he would not like better to run up to town and see her?

When a thing was at all disagreeable to do, Brough had a well-developed capacity for leaving it undone.

He had never really allowed to himself that this would be disagreeable until the note paper actually lay before him, and then he became suddenly and vividly aware that Lady Lynne and Lil were not passionately attached to each other.

So he put the note paper away and went on with the article which he was writing.

This bit of procrastination, so very natural to Brough, produced a result which he would never have dreamed of.

Lady Lynne was writing to Dr. Swift that same night—she told him the news, in her pretty phraseology and, of course, in a post-script.

Dr. Swift laughed when he read the scented

note in the morning ; wondered how the experiment would answer ; and then wondered how Lil would like it.

That afternoon Lil was busy—very busy. She was always busy now. Charlie had no kind-hearted mother to investigate the great sock and shirt questions, and so stave off some domestic troubles from the young wife. Sheer necessity had already taught Lil how to darn ; and to-day she had an attack of what her father would have called that “intolerable feminine disease of sewing.”

Brough would have groaned indeed could he have seen her, sitting there with her mending-basket and a frown on her pretty forehead. Yet she made a pleasant picture. She did not look as most women do when they are darning. It was evidently a foreign occupation to her, and not a very pleasant one. She applied herself to it with the determination which was one of her characteristics. She was too absorbed to notice anything, and did not know that a visitor was at the door until he was shown in to the room. And then she rose suddenly, with heightened colour and angry eyes.

“Dr. Swift !”

“You would not say good-bye the other day, you know,” he said, with perfect good humour ; “you ran off with somebody else. So I have come to pay my respects and say good-bye properly. I positively sail to-morrow.”

His manner was so natural and gentle, that Lil felt she must be as polite as she could. They sat down, one on each side of the little table, where, instead of bric-à-brac, stood Lil's mending-basket. She put her work back into it, and shut it down; Dr. Swift's eyes followed her hand, with a twinkle of amusement in them.

"I should never have expected to see you sewing," he said; "how marriage alters a woman!"

"Necessity alters us all, I suppose," said Lil, coldly.

"Are you growing aphoristic, Mrs. Lil," he said, "as well as dignified? No, I think not. All these pretty mannerisms are put on, to keep me at a distance. Well, we'll say no more about it. I shall soon be far enough off to please even you. And, in the meantime, just tell me, how should you like having a stepmother?"

"A—what?" cried Lil, half starting from her chair and leaning towards him. Her warm breath came upon his cheek. He said nothing for a second but kept his eyes upon her face.

"You pretty girl," he said; "how charming you are when you are excited! If I had you I should be always provoking you to have you look like this!"

Lil sank back in her chair, a hot flush of anger arising in her cheeks. She bit her lip and tried to keep silent, but could not.

“Do you mean it?” she said; “how do you know? I have heard nothing! Oh, do tell me, Dr. Swift, if you have really heard anything.”

“I had a letter from Lady Lynne this morning,” said Dr. Swift. “Ah, I see you don’t like it. Well, it won’t make much difference to you now, will it?”

“I suppose not,” said Lil, wearily; a heavy sense had settled on her heart as if somebody she loved was dead and buried.

“Ah! how foolish I am,” she added, after a moment, and rising from her chair, turned away and walked to the window. She wanted to hide two great tears which had started in her eyes. But they could not be checked or hidden; the thing had come so suddenly, in so unpleasant a fashion. If she had heard it from her father—but like this, and from Dr. Swift!—it seemed to remove her right away from the old life which she still loved so dearly. A little sob forced itself out. In another second she felt her hand caught and grasped by another, strong, warm, and resolute.

“You poor little woman, do you mind it so much as this? Why, what a sensitive little thing it is, in spite of that devil so ready to leap up in your eye. I am so sorry I should have brought you any news which distresses you like this; let me make up for it somehow, dear little Lil ——”

Lil’s tears were dry in an instant, and her eyes aflame.

“Why cannot you leave me in peace,” she exclaimed. “I don’t want you here. Surely I have been scolded enough about you already!”

“Oh, you have?” said Dr. Swift, with a half-pleased, half-amused smile. “Well, be it so, I will go away and you shall be scolded no more about me for the present. Has the milksop turned into a tyrant so soon?”

“What do you mean?” cried Lil, wishing heartily she had a footman for whom she could ring to show out this unwelcome visitor.

“You can’t expect me to speak over civilly of your husband really,” said Dr. Swift. “I wanted you, and he got you. Never mind, some day you and I may be on good terms again, when a little more experience of the world has taught you that a faithful old lover is not to be utterly despised.”

“I do not want to despise you,” said Lil, who was thinking much more of her father and his marriage than of Dr. Swift, “only I can’t see why you persist in coming here!”

“Inhospitable!” said Dr. Swift. “I came here because we once were good friends, and I feel sure we shall be again. You have married a quiet sort of fellow who writes verses; I tell you, you are twice too good for him, and I shan’t let you be wasted on him altogether if I can help it. He doesn’t know how to rouse you. How should he? He thinks you a pretty girl, and a good girl who

mends socks and keeps house for him ; I know there is a panther in you, a wild, courageous, unbroken spirit, which makes you a woman a man can't forget when once he has loved you. Well, I am that man ; I shall never forget you, though I love a dozen women between now and our next meeting."

"I don't want to hear all this," said Lil, who seeing that she could not very easily turn this large and resolute young man out of her room, had taken refuge in the society of her mending-basket, and was now running a needle through the stitches of a sock, with a great appearance of pre-occupation.

"Perhaps not, but I want to say it," said Dr. Swift, coming near to her and looking down upon the graceful head bending so low over the darning. "And I am satisfied if you only listen. I am not a very expectant admirer, am I—contented only to look at you."

Lil looked quickly up and caught a twinkle in his eyes.

"What do you mean?" she said, letting her hands fall in her lap, while she regarded him gravely. "I never did understand you, and I do not now. You always seem to be suggesting things which I do not understand."

"I cannot help that," said he, coolly ; "you are such a remarkably innocent young woman, notwithstanding your Bohemian education. It is a pretty, piquant mixture. Well, I don't want to bother you with any enigmas ; but

remember this, I shall never forget you ; and if ever you want a man—not a milksop—to help you out of a difficulty, to carry your fan or beat your poodle, send for me, and I'll come home to do it. I admire you tremendously," he went on, with a sudden savage earnestness in his face, "and I will be your slave whenever you want one. Don't look incredulous ; I mean it."

"No slave, but a tyrant," said Lil to herself—she said nothing aloud ; but she looked up in his face and saw something there which made her feel there was truth, of a sort, in his words.

"Thank you —" came to her lips, almost without her knowledge ; but so cold was her tone, that the words expressed her feeling rather than their own meaning. It was just as though she had put out her hand and pushed the man away from her.

"You are an icicle now," he said, almost angrily. "What right have you to freeze whenever I come near you ? Have you no friend to tell you it is folly to offend an old lover ?"

"You cannot call yourself that !" said Lil, in a low voice. She always grew white, and quiet and determined when she was really roused.

"If you don't let me call myself so, you can't undo the past," said Dr. Swift ; "before Mr. Newman had any rights over you I loved

you. Ah, that *was* an evening when we played chess in the little inn—don't you remember—what a dear little witch you were! but come, I don't want to vex you indeed. Don't fly into a passion with me, it is not worth while. You can always do as you like with me, without that."

Lil stood, still and white, like a statue. She would not speak. If she must endure his presence, she could at least keep silence. But, oh, how she wished Charlie would come home! He might come very soon, she thought, as she covertly glanced at the clock on the mantel shelf. Her ordeal could not be a very long one now. Dr. Swift, watching her closely, seemed to catch her thought in her face, though he did not, or would not, read it aright.

"I am going now," he said, "I don't want to get you into trouble again. One—just one kiss—for I shall be away a long time! Good heavens, don't scorch me!"

For Lil's look of indignation was like a flash of fire.

In another moment he was gone, and Lil was free to sink back into her chair and press her hands to her chest and throat where there seemed to her to be some intolerable oppression.

At the station, on the stairway, three men met and came so close together that they stared into each other's faces under the glaring gas-

light. Alfred Davies was one of them, and he obeyed a sudden impulse of curiosity.

"Dr. Swift?" he said.

"Yes," said Dr. Swift, pausing; "but I think you have the advantage of me.

"We have met somewhere—at some evening 'at home,' I think," said Alfred, who was never at a loss and seldom troubled his head as to whether he told the truth or no. "My name is Davies; I don't pretend to have a very easily remembered face. I have met you here once or twice. Are you living down here?"

"Oh, no," said Dr. Swift, looking coolly across at Charlie Newman, who was waiting, a step higher up, for Davies. "I live nowhere. I sail to-morrow for China. Good-bye."

Lifting his hat with a politeness natural to him, he turned and went quickly down the stairs.

Davies joined Charlie Newman, and the two walked on in silence. Each was occupied with his own thoughts. Charlie was recalling what Lil had told him about Dr. Swift. It was a curious thing for him to meet the man accidentally, to look in his face, and then remember these things which he had heard from Lil. So this was Lil's old admirer, the man who had got her into trouble with her grandmother, the man who had wanted to marry her! This was the man who had been

the first to congratulate Lil as she came, a bride, out of the church door. Lil had confided then to her new-made husband, that she hated this other man. If she really did, Charlie said to himself, women are not so easily won by good looks as men suppose. For there was no doubt about it, Dr. Swift was an extremely fine looking man.

Charlie had his latchkey, and the two walked straight in. Lil was still sitting in her chair. The pressure had gone from her chest, and now the tears were rushing from her eyes. At the sight of Alfred Davies she started up and ran from the room. Charlie, after a moment of consternation, followed her.

Davies shook his head with that peculiar air of sorrowful wisdom which some worldly men affect. "Not cured of that old folly, it's clear," he said to himself; "if she cries like this at his going abroad, I'm glad she's not my wife." And he reflected with inward satisfaction upon the eminent virtue and propriety of the lady he was about to marry.

Charlie found Lil clinging to a chair, rather than sitting in it, sobbing and trembling.

"What is it?" he exclaimed; "you frighten me. Has Swift been annoying you?" But he could get nothing from her for a long time.

He behaved like an idiot, of course. He petted her like a spoiled child, he caressed her as if she were some wounded, terrified bird

that had fluttered into his hand. But, remember, his love was still young, still green as the spring leafage. No dust of long hot summer days had soiled it, no indifference born of familiarity had blunted it. It was agony to him to see her in pain, it cut him to the heart to hear her sob, it thrilled him with acute and keen delight to feel how she nestled and clung to him and found her comfort in his mere presence. This tender love, frail as all young things are, is beautiful as youth itself. Because the mere passage of the heavy years inevitably kills or alters it, there is no need to look upon it as a folly. It is a reality as vivid and glorious as all other bright emotions of the soul; but men and women will always suffer and have cause to complain while they expect love to keep its youth although they cannot keep their own.

Here, as ever, where youth is untouched and powerful, pain and pleasure mingled almost indistinguishably. There is pleasure in feeling a magic power in one's own touch, and Charlie could not quite have told whether it was most painful to feel Lil trembling with excitement, or pleasant to see that by his mere presence and contact he could calm her. As for Lil herself, the delight of clinging to someone who loved her as she understood love, not with the fierce admiration of Dr. Swift, was so delicious that she could only yield herself to the double sensations and

wonder dumbly whether it was not worth while to feel a cruel love, if it were to be thus contrasted with an exquisite and tender devotion.

They both forgot Davies altogether ; and, after waiting alone in the sitting-room for a long time, that gentleman began to feel offended. It was not difficult to offend him ; his dignity was of that slight sort which has to be frequently on exhibition or its existence would not be noticed.

When he began to realise that he really was forgotten, and that Charlie had no immediate intention of coming to explain or apologise to him, he grew righteously indignant. In the end he departed wrathfully ; and Charlie was much amazed when, later on, remembering that he had brought Davies home with him, he discovered that he had gone. Davies thought fit to nurse a sense of injury for a considerable time, and he paid no more visits to the cottage until events drew him there.

Charlie did not grieve over his immediate absence. Lil's excitement gave him an excuse for regarding her in the light of a tender and fragile creature to be treated with great care throughout the evening ; and he was delighted to be able to make the most of the opportunity. But there was something which disturbed him a little, and when Lil appeared to be quite quiet again he asked her about it.

How it would have amused either Dr. Swift or Alfred Davies to hear what it was that distressed Charlie!

“Are you still so jealous of your father that it should hurt you like this for him to marry again?” he asked. He had never said a word about Dr. Swift, except to say it was well he was going away and could no longer annoy her. What Davis had immediately accepted as a fact that her tears were for the departure of this old admirer, would never have occurred to Charlie. He knew her too well for such a suspicion even to suggest itself. But he had never been quite satisfied that she did not love her father better than anyone else. And a young lover is capable of intense jealousy even of father or sister—such jealousy as in later years he cannot feel of a real rival.

“Oh, no, no!” said Lil, “I cannot be so foolish! I don’t know why I feel it so much, except that I don’t like Lady Lynne as well as I ought. She is not half good enough for him. Why, there is no one in the world like my father, but there are plenty of Lady Lynnes. Why couldn’t he look for someone as good as himself?”

“Perhaps you would have been more jealous of her,” suggested Charlie, “and with more reason.”

“I know I have no reason; I am ashamed of myself,” said Lil honestly, “but the truth

of the whole thing is this: I know, whatever my feelings are, that Lady Lynne does not like me; and that makes me feel as if I was going to lose papa altogether. I shall, I know; he and I will never understand each other again as we used to, now Lady Lynne is to be always between us. We kept her outside before."

"You are a foolish child," said Charlie, in a low voice, which told Lil in a moment the state he was in.

"I know I am," she cried, "but it is over now; you know, Charlie, it is always hard to lose people. But it is done; I have accepted it, and now I have no one in the whole world but you. Oh, Charlie, I like that feeling after all; it seems as though we had a sweet little bit of the universe in which we two lived alone. Other people are very nice; but, oh, how completely they are outside our life—our own dear little world, which just holds our two selves!"

Lil had never said so much as this before, and Charlie in his heart blessed Lady Lynne. He took Lil's hand and held it as though it were made of some rare and fragile stuff.

"What a jolly little hand it is," he said to himself, "and to think it is really mine." All he said aloud was "dear old girl;" the words look very unromantic written on paper, but they sounded strangely sweet with the vivid and tender meaning that his voice put into them.

## CHAPTER X.

**B**ROUGH'S marriage was celebrated with very little noise; and, almost before Lil was able to realise the fact, she found herself in full possession of a stepmother.

Brough's mode of life was quietly, but firmly, altered from the moment Lady Lynne became Lady Warrington. She was determined to make the utmost of her clever husband, and she set about her task quickly and decisively. To Lady Lynne all persons about her were mere satellites to herself. Brough Warrington had now become her chief satellite, and she was bent upon his being as brilliant a one as possible. One of her first steps was to let her own house in the country, and take one in town. Here they passed about half their time, and, while Brough worked in his study, his wife devoted herself to society, and thought herself the more industrious and important of the two.

Lil observed all this with silent wonder. She marvelled how her father could endure to be shut up in a London street, away from his birds and his river. She began dimly to understand how much a man will submit to

in order to please the woman he is in love with. She went to the house sometimes, but not often. Her father was not quite the same, though he still loved to feel her clinging arms about his broad shoulders. Few women can marry a man who has a favourite daughter without grudging her the love she gets. Human nature has not yet learned to love without jealousy, and only a saint can see her husband devotedly fond of the child of another marriage without feeling some bitterness towards the unknown dead wife and her living memory. It is not always unreasonable cruelty which makes stepmothers unfriendly or unkind, it is simple human nature, which will rise to the surface in spite of all repression. Lady Lynne was no saint, and had no ambition to be one; therefore she made no great effort to be affectionate to Lil. Apart from her own feeling of natural indifference to her, to call it by no stronger name, she was not very desirous to exhibit a stepdaughter so old as Lil in the society in which she herself made a fairly youthful appearance. When a man has not long been married, he is easily influenced by his wife, and thus Brough unconsciously imbibed the idea that Lady Lynne did not care to have Lil too often in her drawing-room. Lil, proud to a fault, quickly felt this, and kept away almost entirely. She lived in a different world now from her father, and she herself thought it was perhaps

the easiest plan for them to remain, as far as possible, in those separate worlds. She could not dress well enough to please Lady Lynne; the dresses which she made herself would have delighted an artist, when upon her slender graceful figure, but to Lady Lynne and her friends they simply appeared unfashionable. For Lil did not study the fashions, but only what suited herself. These various reasons combined to keep Lil away from her father, and she found it no hardship now, for she was absolutely content with Charlie for the centre and the sun of her world. Charlie worked very hard to make a small income; Lil worked very hard to spend it wisely. There seemed little time left for anything else. But Lil did not surrender her literary habits, even in the midst of her many tasks. To read omnivorously was a part of her nature, and she even preserved a habit of writing regularly; for her father, spite of all little difficulties, would have her help him in his new book. This work was a great delight to her, although it was impossible for her to give much time to it. She loved to go to Brough's study now and then, and feel that she still had an interest in common with him, which his wife had not. For that lady never dreamed of troubling herself as to what a man did in his study so long as he accomplished something there which would produce money, and which society would agree to admire.

A narrow income was positively Lil's only trouble at this time, and when people are so young, so happy, so much in love as Lil and her husband, the many makeshifts which poverty necessitates, are rather a pleasure than a trial. Lil's dinners, Lil's home-made dresses and jam, Lil's unexpected capacity for making guineas elastic, and a cottage artistic, and a suburban home rather like a joyous bit of fairyland than anything else—all these things were an incessant source of delight to Charlie, of pride to Lil. And Charlie, whenever he was at home, exerted his own powers and produced works of genius; packing-cases resolved themselves by degrees into bookshelves, a piece of wire, some old wood and a little green paint resulted in a magnificent dove-house; all sorts of devices were hit upon to make the cottage into a delicious little nook.

It was all so fresh and interesting to these two happy young creatures; to have a home of their own was so wonderful that they could not but think it perfection, however tiny it might be, or however small their power of making it beautiful. The desire to fill it with beauty worked wonders; and no "bijou residence," fitted by Morris and Company, was ever more admired than the interior of this quaint little house.

Lil was quite happy, perfectly content, and full of that sweet sedateness which comes from

the conviction that one's life is shaped and settled. She fancied herself dwelling in this little cottage half her life; then, perhaps, having one a trifle larger, and a few more pounds a year to spend. The future appeared to her one long dream of bright content; monotony or sameness were words not to be found in her vocabulary at this time of her life. If the day was pleasant, because busy and full of hope, and the evening perfect because made joyous by the most charming of all society, what could be imagined more delightful than to repeat this same day throughout time or even eternity? There was only one thought which sometimes made her shiver; one of the two must, in all probability, die before the other; the hideous loneliness, which would then make dark the earth and sky, was terrible to contemplate. But this terror stood a long way off, ghastly in the distance as seems the avenging angel to happy sinners. Lil was young enough to realise the very vigour and joy of youth; a whole lifetime lay before her, and she rejoiced in it. It is strange how the sweetness of love quiets the fever of ambition. Lil's was naturally an ambitious temperament, but all thought of success outside her home had died entirely out of her mind. She was too absolutely content to seek to strive after anything beyond the pale of her own immediate joyous life. It seems as though some string of evil fortune is

needed to spur men and women into embarking upon perilous enterprise. In the garden of love where the lips are ever sweet as with honey, the eyes ever glad yet never satiate with gazing, where all the senses of the soul are enriched and made passionate by delight, where the whole being rests and reposes as upon the very bosom of joy, there is no sting to make men stir, they linger content among the flowers. Lil was perfectly content in her garden; she had no ambition now but to make the utmost of her little opportunities.

She wished for nothing except sometimes that Charlie were not bound to go to his office every day as if he were a machine. After the apparent ease of her father's life at home this regular slavery had seemed to her very terrible; she still disliked it, though she had grown accustomed to the inevitable routine. And Charlie himself was resigned to it as men are to that which they cannot avoid. But it was the hardship in his life, this absolutely necessary office work. He hated it, and, but for Lil, could scarcely have faced the idea of working on like this through all his youth and middle age. Her companionship made all the difference, it was something to work for, but still the routine irked him terribly. The verses which were his pleasure were as valueless in the market as so much waste paper; and sometimes it seemed to him unbearable that he must go on through all his life

working the mere mechanical part of his brain, and working it sometimes so hard that his artistic sense was blunt and heavy, and the poetic instinct died away within him.

The consciousness that this was drudgery grew upon him more plainly as the time passed on, and it became a little cloud in Lil's clear sky to see this. But it made the life at home even more precious and delightful to them, for Lil gave herself up more absolutely than ever to creating a bright atmosphere, and Charlie clung to her as the sunshine of his world. They were more to each other with every hour of union, for they had no hopes or ambitions outside their own home. Charlie gave his strength to supporting it; Lil to making it bright. Only sometimes Lil whispered something about a cherished dream of hers—a volume of Charlie's verses. But his answer was always gloomy to this, and as the time passed on grew more and more gloomy till Lil was half afraid of the subject.

“Oh, it is no use,” he would say; “no publisher would touch them, and I cannot save the money to bring them out.”

This always made Lil sad, and she would wonder if there was no way in which she could save, or whether she could not earn anything herself. But this she seldom thought of seriously; she had so completely taken up the idea that her duties lay all at home. And indeed there were enough of

them there to fill all her time. She often wondered what Gran would have said if she saw the diligence of her granddaughter! But Gran was too entirely offended to make any sign of forgiveness, and Lil too proud to ask for any. So Lil had no feminine critics now, she made no new friends, for she was too poor to mix with the sort of people who would have understood or liked her. Alfred Davies brought his wife, both before and after their marriage, to make formal calls; but she and Lil were as far removed as though the Atlantic lay between them. A little discussion of the weather and of their servants, exhausted the sympathy of which they were capable. Thus Lil grew in her own growth, sweet and strong, unperturbed by social conventionalities, unbiassed by the opinions of people about her. She read, and thought, and quietly developed into womanhood, while Charlie watched her as though she were some rare and precious lily unfolding by his side. She was a constant wonder and interest to him; he found in her eyes "the right Promethean fire;" he learned from her lips how pure a woman's soul may be. The time passed on, almost unheeded, and the months lengthened into years, and still these two were blindly happy in each other!

No children came, and they were not missed. It seemed almost as if there would have been no room for them.

## CHAPTER XI.

**T**HERE is something in the very nature of happiness which takes us "out of space, out of time;" we are living, when we are quite happy, in that part of us which shall be eternal, and we taste for the moment some of the supreme satisfaction of the life which has no relation to hours or days. "To-morrow, or next year, perhaps luck will turn,"—these are the words of the unfortunate. To the fortunate there is no to-morrow, or next year. A delicate haze of beauty, like that which makes Rome glorious in the sunset, blends the days into one delicious whole, the years into one long harmony.

The years passed over Lil's head and she scarcely noticed them. Five whole years had flown out of her life and she had never paused to count them. For five sweet years, rich in happiness, she had been Lil Newman; it seemed a dream, a dead and long-forgotten dream, that she had even been anything else. It was a pleasant memory, that of the old girl-life on the island with her father; but it seemed like a pleasant memory out of some

former existence. She had so given herself into Charlie's life that it was difficult to imagine any previous mode of living. And yet, though it seemed as if she had never lived except with Charlie, these years had been so sweet that, like all tender things, they fell softly and had passed unmarked.

But one day the fact flashed vividly into Lil's mind in this shape.

"Five years—it is a long time—and a week's holiday in each year—surely that is enough to make a man tired!"

She was standing out in the spring sunshine, in her little garden. The light upon her hair brought out the sun-colour in it; like an aureole it fell about her face. But that face was not quite in harmony with a glad spring morning. It was pale and a little drawn, as if in pain.

The trouble which had been but a little cloud in the sky was growing larger, and made a dimness before Lil's eyes.

Charlie was growing tired. Not as a man grows tired who wants a brief holiday; but with the weariness of wanting a new interest, a mental change.

Some men can sit on a clerk's stool year after year, knowing no regret, hungering after no forbidden pastures, desiring no freedom of fresh life. Charlie was not one of these. His temperament was essentially artistic. The adding-up of innumerable figures was an easy

enough task to him now, by force of habit ; but it was an even heavier soul-weariness than when he first began to do it. It was intolerable to a man of his sort to go on, day after day, month after month, doing such work as this, and obtaining thereby the barest living, with a possible ten pounds rise of salary in the year ! Sometimes it seemed a hideous fate to him ; for all power of other work was fading away. At first he had been able to write, and to study, in the evenings ; but for the last year a weariness of mind had fallen upon him and he had to let the evenings go in mere idleness. When this became a habit, he grew dejected and dispirited. And then Lil found, for the first time, that she had not the power to cheer him. Probably her sympathy was too real. Her individuality was all but merged in his, and, when he came home depressed, her smile was too evidently an effort. She could not resist his mood when it became persistent ; and indeed his life was so entirely hers, his interests and purposes hers, that when he surrendered them, she, too, felt helpless and forlorn. When he rose in the morning as pale and tired as though he had not slept, the sense of this weighed down her spirits and she looked as weary as himself.

The bull-dog element appears to have departed out of us in this generation. Men want change and rest and recreation ; they cannot cling persistently to one small avocation

and pursue it in patience as their grandfather's could. Education must be to blame for this, surely; men learn, and with knowledge the imagination develops and the mind grows hungry. Charlie was of an essentially modern temperament. He wanted life, not mere existence; he desired to see and hear, and gain experience, not merely to earn his dinner and eat it. He had known, well enough, when he married, that this earning of bread and eating it was all he had to look forward to. But Lil was something so new to him—there was such a glow in the dream of a home with her—that he had never realized what the monotony of his daily work would be. And for the first two or three years that monotony had not made itself felt; he adored his wife, he loved his home, he could find interest in his writing. When his brain grew too tired for him to find that interest, then first came the taste of the ashes of life in his mouth.

Lil saw this only too plainly. She thrilled with every feeling which he experienced, she went with him through every state he suffered.

After a time she began dimly to apprehend that this was not good. The intense sympathy which doubles pleasure, doubles pain also. Lil began to find she had not the power to change his mood; she could but intensify it. When both were content, this added infinitely to the pleasures of life; they seemed to strike fire in contact and create delight. But when

the one grew dull or weary, it seemed impossible to avoid following the same law ; the other grew dull and weary also. The two temperaments were the same, and this similarity was made stronger by so keen a sympathy. The same incidents depressed or exhausted them both.

Only dimly this fact was making itself visible to Lil. But she was very vividly conscious that Charlie came home dispirited now instead of cheerful ; that, instead of reading, or watching her with the old pleasure in the mere sight of her, he would sit for hours with his eyes shut and apparently desire nothing but peace. Lil could not rouse him to an interest in anything. It seemed only to harass him if she talked to him ; yet he desired no other society ; Lil was all the world to him. Only he had lost his own quick vitality ; the world, even with Lil in it, seemed to have grown pale before his eyes. The colour had flown from the sky, the scent from the flowers ; the garden of love was no longer aglow ; but he came there to rest and to find the quiet which was all he desired.

At first Lil had thought this a mere temporary phase of weariness ; but as time passed on she saw it was more than that. It was a growing thing. And she could not arrest its growth ! Their love was as strong as ever ; no faintest cloud had ever arisen between them ; they clung together and leaned each

upon each as in the first days of their union. But habit had dulled the magic a little ; Lil's mere presence, her tenderness, her brightness, were no longer things to wonder at, sun rays to gladden existence. Charlie desired nothing but to come home to his cottage and sit by Lil's side ; but her smile could not now bring one into his face, her love could not exhilarate him as once it did. Lil saw this, and the consciousness that her power had so far lessened put the first keen stab of pain into her poor little heart.

What was to be done ?

He had gone away, just now, from the gate ; with the mere ghost of a smile on his face, instead of the boyish laugh which used to linger in her ears all day. This little ghost of a smile got into her heart and haunted her like the wraith of a dead hope.

Was he really so tired, so tired !

“ Well, it is five years,” said Lil to herself, “ five years of very weary work—work he hates, I know. And only me, all the time—he has had nothing else. After all, it must be dreary work for a man to go on like this, with so few interests or pleasures, and so much hard work ! I never thought of it so before ! ”

Indeed, she had not ; it was a new idea to her. Her life had so fully satisfied herself that she never dreamed of its being unsatisfactory to Charlie. But she told herself that men are

different from women ; they need many things which women do not need. She said this to herself as she stood in the sunshine, her hand on the garden gate, her eyes on the turn in the road where Charlie's figure had vanished. He needed something. What was it? Could she not find out? Could she not give it to him? Until now she had always been able to anticipate his wishes. Could she not puzzle this out, and find what it was he needed in his life?

So she went back into the house and sat down to think, her chin in her hand, her eyes fixed on the floor.

She had never been so puzzled in all her life before. Her own power had faded. She knew that do what she might, she could not interest Charlie when he came home tired. She could only be sorry for him, and she doubted whether that was not, after all, a mistake. He wanted a touch which would rouse him, instead of one which could only express sympathy. After a few moments, in which she realised this, and writhed a little under the stab which the realisation of it cost her, she put herself out of the question, and wondered where she could find external help.

She had never understood until now how poor they were! Charlie had found it out a good while ago ; had chafed against his narrow means and absence of future scope. He

had submitted in silence, and said nothing to Lil, for he fancied she felt it as fully as himself. He had found their sympathy so keen as to make the thoughts of one perpetually echo the thoughts of the other, and he did not suppose he had to tell her anything. But Lil had been so absolutely content in his love, in his society, that not until now did she see how little breathing space they had, how shut in they were by sheer want of means, to their own life together. The discovery, that faithful as their love was, her society was evidently not enough for Charlie, opened her eyes to the fact that they were too poor to have any society save their own.

A dim sense of failure, a sudden feeling of apprehension, seized upon Lil's heart and made her tremble as she sat. After all this joy which they had tasted together, was it possible that the mournful dulness of ordinary married life could settle upon them?

This was impossible, she knew, as far as she was concerned. Charlie was all the world to her, and, without him in it, the world to her would have no existence. She was bound up in him and could not even fancy loosing her anchorage. But she could just catch, dimly, and with trembling heart, at the barrenness which would descend upon her if he should grow sick of the narrow life he led with her.

What was to be done! Was she to sit idle,

making no effort? This was unlike Lil, who never understood how to sit silent or idle under any trial. Patience was never one of her strong points; she could suffer but she did not know how to submit. Her temperament was intensely active, and essentially cheerful. With a cloud over her head she had naturally but one thought—how to remove it.

“If I could only think of anything new to interest him,” she said to herself. “If he would only try to get his poems published!—I shall go and ask papa about it.”

She went and got ready to go out, with a feeling of intense relief. She was not clever at carrying her burdens alone. This one she could not take to Charlie as she took every other. How delightful it would be to recall her girlhood, and go to Brough for the advice she needed!

An hour later and she was knocking at the door of Brough’s study.

Brough never demanded absolute solitude like some less hard-working authors. He never locked his door, and he always said come in, in answer to an inquiring tap, like Lil’s.

He looked up with the old familiar frown of abstraction on his forehead. It died away as he saw Lil standing doubtfully at the door. He put down his pen and flung himself back in his chair.

“So it is you, little woman?” he said, in

his big, breezy voice. "You are in town early to-day. Her ladyship is not dressed yet."

"I wanted just ten minutes alone with you, papa," said Lil. Her serious face, and some dark lines under her eyes suddenly arrested his attention.

"What's up, baby? You look as if you had buried your best friend."

"I haven't done that, yet; but I want to know what to do for him."

"For the best friend? Oh, you mean Charlie. Sit down, old chap, and tell us all about it."

With which Brough settled himself to listen, half-an-eye, meantime, on the unwritten page before him. Lil observed this, and knew it meant he was behindhand with his work. So she made haste and tried to think how to put her tale in few words.

"What I really want to know is whether there is no chance of getting Charlie's verses published for him."

"Humph—drug in the market," interrupted Brough.

"I know people say that, papa; but do think if there is no way through the difficulty. I am anxious about it for this reason. Charlie is over tired, I suppose; but it's more than physical weariness. It has lasted quite a year now, and it gets worse and worse. It makes me wretched. What am I to do? He cares for nothing; he seems tired of life. I can find

nothing that will interest him. He has given up writing because he says he is too tired to make more manuscript just to put away in a drawer. If I could get some of his work published, it might rouse him."

Brough's frown had grown deep again during this brief tale of woe.

"It's all the cursed morbidness of this gelatinous generation," he exclaimed, angrily; he always got angry over this subject. "What right has a man to get tired of life while he has a soul in his body and God's sky overhead? While there's work to do, and fresh air to breathe, and a glass of good wine to be had, I can't see what a man's made of who loses interest in his life. At all events, he must be decidedly wanting in inner resources."

"Papa," said Lil, reproachfully, "if you want to abuse Charlie, do it to his face."

"I apologise, baby; and my abuse doesn't amount to much, for I always thought Charlie an uncommonly good fellow, only with a touch of the modern jelly-fish about him. I abominate these young fellows who criticise everything and do nothing; incapable either of enthusiasm or honest cheerfulness; they are a burden to themselves and everybody else, and so create the boredom they complain of. How to cure the complaint, heaven only knows—I don't. If Charlie's poems were published now, he would probably have discovered by this time that it was not worth while to write

while reviewers are so uneducated or indifferent or spiteful, and that the public has no true taste for caviar but greatly prefers lollipops. Or worse still, he would have concluded, on seeing himself in print, that he was a mere poetaster of the lollipop order, and then he would sink into a forlorn melancholy over his own incapacity. I tell you, baby, you can't cure a man easily who has sickened of this abominable disease; you must get at the very springs of his nature to do him any good."

Lil leaned back in her chair and a big hot tear fell slowly down each cheek. She turned away her head that Brough might not see them.

"I am afraid I can't do that now," she said, softly; and then added, in a hurry, as if afraid she had suggested too much, "At least tell me whether you think I might try my luck with these poems; I have them here. I can't go home without making an effort. Give me an introduction to one of your publishers."

"Very well, baby," said Brough, submissively. He had not lost the habit of doing what Lil told him when she was in earnest. "Mr. Crosbie Hall will do, I should think. He is a gentleman, at all events, which small circumstance makes 'interviewing' a shade more agreeable."

He wrote a brief note in his delicate handwriting, so small and beautiful to be writ by so large a hand, and gave it to Lil. With this slight comfort, she started forth again. Her

father had not sympathised with her as much as she would have liked ; but then she could not draw more sympathy from him without hinting too much. She had a strong sense of the sacredness which should pervade the relations of two persons who had chosen to live for one another. She could not bring herself to speak to any outsider of any doubts or difficulties which belonged to her life with Charlie.

She went straight to Mr. Hall's office, and having sent in her card, with "Brough Warrington's daughter" written beneath the modest "Mrs. Newman," she was very speedily shown into an inner sanctum where Mr. Hall himself awaited her.

He was large, bland and smiling ; if he had to give unhappy authors bitter cups to drink, he did it in a delightful fashion. He was a publisher of the new school ; his manners were wonderfully sweet and his sanctum was furnished with a certain magnificence.

It was all very grand ; and Lil felt decidedly small and insignificant in the presence of this great creature. However, she had the courage of her convictions ; and she believed in Charlie's poems. So she stated her case and brought out her manuscript. Mr. Hall smiled on it with a supremely gentle expression which would have told Lil enough if she had had a little more experience.

"I will have them read, with pleasure,"

he said, "but of course you are aware that poetry cannot be made to pay in the present day. Even the most noted names are a loss to their publisher. If these poems are fairly good, I shall be very glad to bring them out if you or your husband will put down about sixty pounds towards the cost of production."

Lil just succeeded in repressing a little shriek of horror.

"Oh, thank you," she said, "for telling me now. I need not leave the poems at all. Why six pounds would be quite an impossibility to us."

"I am really very sorry," said Mr. Hall, handing back the manuscript with gentle reluctance, "but it is really out of the question for a publisher to undertake the whole cost of such a book. We could not live if we were to bring out volumes of poetry at our own expense."

Lil, who was always absurdly proud, had a queer feeling as if she were a crossing-sweeper who had asked for a penny and been courteously refused. She made all haste about her departure, and scarcely breathed freely till she was in the street again.

"I'll put them back in the drawer!" she said to herself, "and tell Charlie nothing about it. How glad I am he did not try himself! It would make him more disappointed than ever."

And so her poor little effort ended in failure,

and she went home feeling as weary as Charlie himself. What was she to do? The magazines Charlie had already tried; and had seriously concluded that to be continually knocking at their doors for admission was a great mistake. The amount of discouragement which falls to the lot of a young author who makes this attempt produces, as a certain great writer said in a private letter on this subject, "an unnatural discontent with one's own offspring."

So there was nothing for it but to take home the poor little papers and put them gently away in their drawer. Lil felt when she closed it as if she had shut a coffin lid. People who have money, and opportunities, cannot even guess at the sense of weariness and depression which follows such a failure as this. Lil stood silently looking out into the quickly gathering gloom, for she had passed nearly the whole day in making this fruitless experiment. She knew not how to break the spell of dulness which lay upon the poor little pretty cottage. She could not suggest the theatre, or asking people to dinner, or any other gentle form of dissipation; they were much too poor. There was nothing for it but to go and see that their own modest dinner was not being spoiled, and then to get the mending-basket, which to-day she had neglected. She felt too dispirited to go to her own writing-table and go on with the work she was doing

for her father. Literature seemed one huge disappointment to her at the moment. What was the use of making more books when good verse was a drug in the market? No; she would not write; a little wholesome darning would be better for her; no one could dispute the usefulness of that.

As she turned to go and look after her various tasks, she glanced round the room, full of home-made devices and decorated by their own hands. "It is a dear room," she said half-aloud. "I could always, always be happy here. Why can't Charlie? Men need more life than we women, I suppose. Perhaps I could grow tired in time; would it be possible? No; I think not, yet this room looks to me as if its colours were fading; as if the life of happiness we have enjoyed in it was over. Oh, what am I saying? It is impossible! There he is at the gate. How can I think such silly thoughts? I will go and make my face red at the kitchen fire!"

Charlie came in, slowly, and sat down in the first easy chair he reached. He did not go in search of her now, through all the cottage, as he used. He was too tired. Lil came presently from the kitchen, with flushed cheeks and troubled eyes.

"Are you very tired?" she asked.

"Oh, I am all right," he answered, in a slightly vexed tone that had become natural of late. Everything worried him more or

less, even to be asked how he was. But he forced a smile and touched her hand gently as it lay on the arm of his chair. With this Lil had to be satisfied. How different it was from the old days when coming home made of every evening a festival! But no one erred, or had failed; both loved still; both were true as pure hearts could be. What was amiss? Why was the evening a gray dream now instead of a time of pleasure?

These questions had no answers.



## CHAPTER XII.

**T**HIS phase, or state of things, which at first Lil refused to accept as a fact, became so definite a fact as to be like a new presence in the house. It seemed to Lil as if there was some one else who sat down at table with them, who followed them into their sitting room, and remained there, unseen, but not unfelt. She knew of no way to banish this hateful presence; she felt powerless and baffled before it; never had she yielded like this to any sense of straightened means, any difficulty of debt, any sternness of economy. Indeed, all these things which sound so hard, had been pleasant, joyous, bright experiences, compared to that through which she was now passing. Anything which necessitates activity is less painful than a difficulty which has to be borne with folded hands; and Lil's present difficulty was one which seemed to enforce submission. Into that house, where once every hour had had its separate charm, had crept the intolerable presence, the hateful thing, for which we have no proper name in our own language, and this thing, this *ennui*,

now made the hours go heavily. Time seemed to stand still, as with Rosalind's lawyers, but they at least awoke at the end of vacation; whereas it seemed to Lil that this vacation of hers was an endless one; she could see no break in the long path that lay before her. And yet all this arose from nothing in herself. She had inherited too keen and wholesome a temperament to suffer from the fatal modern weariness, even if she were cramped in a narrow life; but as yet she felt no cramp, she could imagine feeling none, for she had the object of her devotion with her; and her devotion was as absolute as it had been at any time. But she reflected every phase through which Charlie passed; she lived so strongly in his life that this would have been unavoidable even if their natural sympathy had not been so extraordinary.

Extraordinary it was, and so Brough said, when a few days after Lil's fruitless excursion to town, he came to see her.

"Because that confounded young fellow has got himself into an ill-humour with life, why should you go and fret about it? Babies all have puling fits, I suppose; he's got one, and he'll grow out of it."

"That sounds very cheerful, papa," said Lil. "But I am only a baby, too, and I can't look at things as you do. This 'puling' fit, as you call it, seems to be interminable."

"Why don't you go away and forget all

about it?" suggested Brough, with his usual practical wisdom.

"I would, papa," said Lil, "only I don't know where to go, and I haven't any money to go with, and I don't see who would keep the house whilst I was away."

"Oh, bother it," said Brough, "ever since you got married you've done nothing but mend stockings and cook dinners; why in the world don't you use your brains, and then you wouldn't worry about these trifles."

"It's all very well, papa," said Lil, "but you know I am doing the right thing; you didn't believe I should turn out a success if I took up what you call domesticity, as a profession, but, you see, I have."

"A success, indeed," said Brough; "why, you ridiculous infant, if you had done something worth doing, instead of letting yourself get absorbed into this absurd business of keeping house, Charlie would never have had the chance of getting bored as he is now. He has had to sit on his clerk's stool too long, that's the long and short of it. Your atmosphere here is always the same when he comes home, I suppose. You have not a large circle of acquaintances, I believe."

"Don't try to be sarcastic, papa," said Lil, with a touch of her old manner, "you never can do it properly; of course we have not many friends; we can't afford it."

"Can't afford it," growled Brough; "what

ridiculous nonsense! You fellows haven't any enterprise. Poor old Charlie! the disease he's suffering from is clear enough, I take it. Your society is charming, of course; I like it; but whether I should like it, and none other, for five or six years consecutively I don't know; and then you two are so outrageously alike, that I don't see how it can be called 'society' for you to be together; one of the great charms of human association is the contrast between people who are in totally different moods. I don't see what people get by being together if they are always in the same mood."

"It strikes me, papa," said Lil, "that you are being rather severe, considering I can't do anything."

"Perhaps I am," said Brough, "but I have seen a good deal of life, and I know I am talking sense. Unless you can emancipate yourself, somehow or other, from this domestic routine, you won't get any happier."

"Well," said Lil, "I'll see if I can evolve an idea, but I don't believe I can; I don't see any way of escape."

"Nonsense!" said Brough, in his big, cheerful way; "something will turn up."

Brough had a childlike faith in the future, and "something will turn up" was one of his favourite forms of expression. When things were uncomfortable, as they now and then are with everybody, he would say this with a breezy infectious cheerfulness, and go on living

from day to day in the firm faith that the gods had good things in store for him.

Things were not over charming in Brough's own home. Lady Warrington was taking the upper hand very decidedly just now, and Brough was being put into his proper place as a big boy who had to work very hard and do what he was told. He would like to have taken Lil home with him ; to have kept her for awhile, and sent her back fresh into her own life. He had an instinctive feeling that her difficulty at home was greater than she knew it to be ; or would be greater. He imagined that she and Charlie were simply wearing out their affection by taxing it too severely ; true, he thought theirs an affection very easily overtaxed. He had never felt sure that people so much alike should yield themselves to the pleasure of sympathy. He had rather an idea that Byron's theory contained an element of truth, and that love between man and woman should have something of enmity in it—should, at all events, contain that peculiar quality which, when the wind changes, may turn it into hatred.

There was nothing of this in the love between Charlie and Lil ; a strong and deep friendship lay beneath all other feeling.

He would like to have taken Lil home with him ; he fancied there was nothing needed but a change—a break in the relations between these two—but he knew too well how Lady

Warrington would arch her eyebrows at the bare suggestion of such a thing. There was never any room in her house for any one but herself and her satellites; and Brough had gradually learnt to accept this fact as a phenomenon of natural history.

But still, something might be done; he could not go away and leave Lil like this, with those big eyes of hers looking as if they had tears hidden behind them. Brough lived in the present moment, he enjoyed the present pleasure without thought of the future and its troubles, and he sympathised very thoroughly with the pain of any one who was actually with him. Away from Lil, he would have decided that she must find her way out of the wood by herself; but with her face, and those new marks of pain upon it, actually before him, he felt as if he must do something, however slight.

“Suppose you come up to town with me, baby,” he said; “we will go and dine at the ‘Criterion’ together, and then we’ll go and see Laurence’s new play; he’s been worrying me half the week to go and tell him what I think of it; if you’ll come with me, we’ll go and see it.”

“Do you mean it’s the first night?” said Lil, her face suddenly lighting up.

“Yes,” said Brough. “Would you like to go?”

“First night of a new play?” said Lil;

“ why, I have never seen such a thing! As to liking to go, I should like to go to the theatre every night.”

“ Then why the devil don't you? ” said Brough.

“ You always were unreasonable, papa, ” said Lil, with dignity, “ and always will be, I suppose. ”

“ Ah! ” said Brough, “ that sounds just like the majestic small mite, who used to lecture me when she was about ten years old. Do you remember when you were about three, you coolly observed to me, ‘ You think your way, papa, I think mine. ’ ”

“ Yes, ” said Lil ; “ but I always have found that, unreasonable as they might appear, there is some amount of sense in your remarks. It is plainly impossible for me to go to the theatre every night, because I have not got the money, and nobody would give me tickets ; but, oh ! I should like to go to-night. ”

“ Then you shall! ” said Brough, with an emphasis that would lead one to suppose that he had settled some mighty matter. “ Get ready, and we'll be off. ”

Lil rushed into the kitchen and interviewed her little maid, ran to her table and wrote a note to Charlie, and then hurried away to dress. She had a talent in this matter of dressing, with regard to which most women are so tremendously helpless ; she needed neither maid nor dressmaker to help her give

shape to a thing. She could make herself up with her quick fingers and rapid insight into effect just as some people can make up a bouquet or set a table. In a few minutes she had exhausted all her simple resources, and made the utmost of herself; for she was as proud of going out with Brough as if he had been a new lover.

"I have never done such a thing before, papa," said she, as they went off together like two children let out of school; "I have never been out without Charlie before, in all these years."

"More fool you!" was Brough's somewhat gruff answer. "I say, old chap, what shall we have for dinner?"

"As if I cared!" said Lil.

"Well, you are a little idiot!" said Brough, in a discontented tone. "I thought you would have outgrown the folly of not caring what you had for dinner, by this time."

"Perhaps I shall outgrow it yet, papa," said Lil, who could not help taking a cheerful view of things. Her spirits had risen under the novel circumstances, and she felt very much inclined to dance. She said so, presently.

"Dance, then," said Brough. "I don't care what the people think. You shall dance into a hansom, as soon as we see one. I declare, you looked a hundred years old, moping over your little grievances indoors; you don't look twenty now!"

“But I am, papa,” said Lil, with sudden gravity. “Twenty-two! and I shall have been married six years in the autumn—why, I ought to be dead and buried soon.”

Brough gave vent to an extraordinary sound which he generally used to indicate a contempt beyond words.

“You ridiculous infant!” he said, “why, you’re not grown up yet—you’ve got a lifetime before you.”

“A lifetime, papa?” said Lil, with a strange sound in her voice. She imagined that lifetime passed, as the last year had been passed, and she felt that it might not be easy to live cheerfully through many such years.

What an evening those two had! It seemed to Lil as if she had gone back to the days of her girlhood, only with added powers of enjoyment. To drive about in a hansom again with Brough, without having to think how much that hansom was going to cost! She threw off all her small responsibilities, and caught the infection of Brough’s jollity. It seemed to her, that to go about with him like this, with no particular business on hand except their own enjoyment, was something most delightful. It was years since she had dined at a restaurant; it seemed to her quite wonderful not to have the dinner on her mind, and not to have a certain sense of anxiety as each dish appeared. How delicious the things

seemed to her—the dainty little courses which succeeded one another.

Brough ordered a dinner after his own heart. Lil did not like it all, but she admired it with the humble feeling that she was still a very amateur in that art which the *chef* of the “Criterion” had evidently conquered. She was not very hungry, and a very little champagne made her feel languidly happy; but she did not mind how long the dinner lasted, for it was charming to see Brough enjoy it. It was, above all, most charming to hear him talk with the old witty geniality and happy discursiveness which he always kept for the dinner-table. Lil firmly believed that no man ever had talked, or ever could talk like her father, and it was quite as enjoyable to her as going to a new play, to sit and listen to him.

The dinner-hour appeared to Brough to be the crowning moment of the day—the foam and sparkle of the whole twenty-four hours. Then he was at his ease, with nothing to do but exercise his faculties of enjoyment. He would lean back in his chair between the courses, and think or talk about any subject that occurred to him, with a glorious sense that now he was at liberty to be as irrelevant as he might choose to be.

A man of genius most often speaks to the point when he is irrelevant; he has broken then the trivial chains of time and circum-

stance; he is thinking for himself, and probably will think of some matter concerning the real life of human beings.

Brough's presence in a room was not unlike that of a large dog—people always noticed him after a while, and seemed rather inclined to pat him. He was so big and boisterous, so like a large schoolboy, that sometimes people were surprised to find that there was sense and humour in all he said. Lil began to feel again an old familiar sensation of being with some one who had a very peculiar power of his own. Some people who knew him well—for instance, his mother—never understood, and, in consequence, never thoroughly liked Brough; yet, put him among a room full of strangers, and he seemed to draw a certain proportion of them to him by sheer force of his personality.

Before the dinner was half over, he had scattered, to some extent, the icy reserve of London etiquette; he was engaged in a hot discussion with a gentleman at the next table, and another gentleman came half way down the room to put a question to him. Brough met all this with delight; it was a common experience of his to pick up friends at all the odd corners of life; he was intended for an easier and freer-hearted sphere than that of London society.

All this amused Lil very much. It was like going back to a bright and Bohemian phase of existence which she had left in the past.

Her surroundings through all her married life had shut her away from this kind of easy atmosphere. This was not altogether a matter of character ; it was, perhaps, more a matter of circumstances. But still, there was something of character in it. Charlie had been trained in a strict, perhaps slightly priggish, school ; he rebelled against the limitations of very ordinary society, but his tendency was rather towards a delicate artistic development. than any rebellion which should savour of Bohemianism.

The dinner was over, and all the bright talk ; and as Lil rose to go, she wondered how Charlie had enjoyed his solitary meal at home ; but she had no time to think much of this, for Brough, now that he had made up his mind to go and see his friend's play, was as interested as if he had never been to a play before. He hurried Lil downstairs, and they drove off to the theatre.

Brough deposited her on a red velvet divan while he started off to find Laurence, who was somewhere "behind." He came back very soon, having followed Laurence into the green-room, and there caught some of the infectious excitement of a first night. They went into the stalls, and Brough began to show Lil the various people of distinction who were scattered here and there in the house. Some one came into a box quickly, looked round, and went away again.

“That was Laurence,” said Brough. “Did you notice him? Such a capital fellow! You would like him; and he—by Jove!” as he looked for a moment into Lil’s upturned face, full of brightness and interest, “you are just the style of girl he would admire.”

“Style of girl, papa!” exclaimed Lil; “why, I am a middle-aged matron!”

“Yes; you might have five urchins at home, only you haven’t; and a good thing too. Fancy a baby like you taking care of other babies!”

“Well, I do feel a baby to-night, papa; it is such fun coming out with you again!”

She nestled a shade nearer to him as she spoke. There was a singular charm to her in her relations with her father, and it was very delicious to resume them.

She entered into the various excitements of a first performance with breathless interest. The play was an adaptation from the French, thrilling, and sometimes dramatic, but not at all grand. The audience was very uncertain in its opinion, and did not always laugh at the funny points; whereas the whole house buzzed with amusement when an obstinate doorstep, which had refused to descend to its proper place at the right time, fell suddenly with a loud noise, in the midst of a pathetic soliloquy of the hero’s, startling the actor so much that he turned to look at it. The gallery was charmed, too, when some of the walking ladies

and gentlemen who came on under umbrellas to give realism to a snow-storm scene, rashly tried a fresh promenade, and stuck between a lamp-post and a wall.

“How humiliating!” said Lil, as the laughter rose in the gallery at this absurd incident.

“What?” asked her father.

“To have such an audience. Oh, if I were Mr. Laurence I should feel it dreadfully.”

“Oh, he’s hardened by this time,” said Brough. “Any one who works for the public must be prepared for this sort of thing. But, when all’s said and done, there are no better critics than our friends in the gallery. See, they have come over to Laurence, after all.”

So they had. The heroine had caught their attention and won their interest by her pathos at the end of the snow-storm scene; and when the curtain fell there were loud cries for her, and then for the author. Laurence came forward to the front of the box he occupied and bowed to the house. Lil had unconsciously clasped her hands with excitement and her eyes were eager and glittering.

“Papa,” she said, as he put on her cloak, “this is rather poor stuff, though your friend, Mr. Laurence, wrote it, and the actors—oh, they are poor, indeed!—but I love the stage! How I wish I could work for it in some way. It thrills me with a sense of power. Just see what an influence it has on all these people!”

“Well, go on it, baby,” said her father. “The stage has become quite a sufficiently respectable institution for a little Bohemian like yourself; and I think you’d look uncommon well there.”

“Oh, what a glorious idea!” cried Lil, her face aflame with sudden enthusiasm; but, no, that would never do—Charlie wouldn’t like it!”

They had both forgotten Charlie for the moment, and had dropped back into the old time when Lil’s future was free in her hands. Now she recalled him with a pang of mingled love and sadness. Dear old Charlie! how was it possible that she could have forgotten him for an instant, or dream of doing anything which he would not like? And she knew very well that he believed a woman’s sphere to be in her home. Lil was not an individual now; she had become part of his life, and must shape herself accordingly. Fortunately for her, it was a greater pleasure to do this than to follow out any dream of her own, so she quickly put her new enthusiasms aside.

Brough saw her into a cab. He could not take her home, though Lil suggested an extempore supper after their old delightful fashion, and told him she had a bed ready if he felt lazy afterwards. “No,” he said, somewhat shamefacedly, with an odd look in his eyes, which came there when he knew he was not appearing to advantage. “No; he had not told her ladyship that he would be late;

so he must go home, or she would be alarmed." It was funny to see how admirably the little woman of the world had got this big Bohemian into order in all the minor details of life.

Lil thought of this as she drove home alone. It seemed very strange to her to see this man, who dominated others of his own quality, governed by a woman who, though she was wonderfully clever, had no intellect at all. Lil could not help disliking her stepmother, try how she might to prevent the feeling; when she saw how her father submitted to be kept within bounds like a boy who has not yet earned his liberty, she hated her. The very fact that Brough always yielded so gently in the smaller matters of life, should make a domestic tyrant generous towards him. So Lil thought. But she was not a domestic tyrant. Women with brains (spelt with a capital) seldom are. The true domestic tyrant has no generosity. Poor little Lil thought to herself how comfortable she could make her father, with the experience which she had now earned; how his household should follow his whims or customs, as a good accompanist obeys the individualities of a singer. She did not know yet that men love to be domineered over; that they kiss the feet of their tyrants.

Lil found Charlie sitting over the fire, smoking, a paper and pencil in his hand. He seemed absent, and to rouse himself with a little difficulty; but when he did awake

to her presence, he was more cheerful than usual. She looked covertly at the paper and saw the truth in a second. He had been writing verse—the first time for a long while. Once her presence inspired him ; he caught fire from her eyes. That was over. In her absence he had found an inspiration. Lil was bitterly wounded. She resolutely hid the sharp sensation of pain which penetrated to her heart ; if it was so, it was, and she well knew it was unreasonable for her to complain. How generous of him that he should never have hinted at this, never have shut himself away from her !

He was interested in her account of her evening, which she forced herself to give as brightly as she could. He said no word of having missed her. Why should he ? Lil thought with another pang how she would have missed him had he been away a whole evening. There was something wrong here, she said to herself, while her lips talked of quite other matters.

“ Oh, I was very interested in it all—excited, I suppose. Papa said I ought to go on the stage ; I almost wish I had the courage,” she said, gloomily.

“ It would be a new life for you, indeed,” said Charlie. “ But I should not like to see you there.” And then his attention fell back upon the paper he held in his hand.

Lil went away silently, with a burning heart, wondering blankly what she was to do !

## CHAPTER XIII.

“**I** WISH I had some one I could ask advice of,” cried Lil, to herself, the next morning, as she walked restlessly backwards and forwards in her little sitting-room. Her dog—a puppy when she was first married—had now grown middle-aged and decorous in his conduct. He sat up by the hearth, and watched her with eyes full of a dumb perplexity. If she was so very anxious for exercise, why did she not go out and give him the chance of a walk? But no, she did not do anything so sensible. She was harassed by the future as the dim dog mind can never be. She was haunted by the grim demon, responsibility. She had one quality which her father in his half-humorous fashion had often told her was entirely unnecessary. That was conscientiousness. She was unhappy about Charlie and what she should do about him. She felt convinced she could not be doing her utmost, else surely daily life would not be the failure it seemed to be just now? She had been able to colour it in the happy past. Her magic had flown. She could deny this to herself no longer.

Perhaps they had been too fond of each other; lived too much together, sympathised too deeply, been too entirely devoted. Perhaps such love could not last; perhaps human nature was incapable of sustaining such a passion. Perhaps what cynics said was true, and married people always grew tired of each other after a certain time. But she was not tired! No, she was more full of tender devotion than ever, as she asked herself over and over again these heartrending questions. She had no answers for them; the fact was before her, the stern, immovable fact. She could not turn back the heavy wheel of time, and find again the easy, joyous years of young love. No, the present must be faced, and faced bravely.

“Had I but anyone a little wiser than myself to talk to!” thought Lil, when she realised how helpless, how ignorant she was before this new phase of life.

She would not worry Brough. She fancied his own life was quite full enough of small annoyances without her adding any more. And he had so much work to do now, for his expenses appeared to grow larger daily. Lady Warrington regarded his brain as a bank upon which she might draw without limit. Lil saw this, and knew how busy her father was. She could not bear to harass him any further.

Oh, if she had but a mother! When a

woman is in trouble this yearning for mother love rises passionately within her. A mother! What had she in a mother's place? Lady Lynne. She might as well ask guidance, in such a matter as this, of a handbook on etiquette. She could almost tell herself what Lady Warrington would say to her. Excellent advice it would be from the point of view of a woman of fashion, a butterfly without a heart, like the little lady herself. Absolutely useless to Lil, who had mind enough to go all round Lady Warrington's character, and recognise the motives which prompted her words. Her grandmother! Surely she might stand in a mother's place? Lil almost laughed at the thought, though it would have seemed impossible for her to laugh at anything. Go to Granny with such a problem as this! Why, old Mrs. Warrington would have supposed the world was coming to an end if a respectable young married woman had told her that her husband was getting tired of her. True, Granny had had a great deal of experience; she had seen three generations of men and women, and sometimes when real life interested her very much, she showed a great deal of good common sense, which was generally buried beneath a whole heap of dogmas and religious formulas. When it was possible to reach her natural, sensible mind, Gran was found to be shrewd enough.

Lil thought of this, and hesitated for a second, after her first sense of the absurdity of going to Gran with so romantic a difficulty. But her hesitation was soon gone. Since that unfortunate day when she had so direly offended Granny, she had never really been taken into favour again. Once in every few months Lil went on a dutiful pilgrimage to see the old lady, but though she was received, after the first time, with the old voluminous and suffocating embrace, and regaled on tea and toast and home-made jam, which was an embodied reproach because Lil's jam did not keep properly, she knew only too well that she was regarded as an utter outcast and a deliberate disciple of the evil one himself. Moreover, with the consciousness that she had just been to the theatre, and hoped sincerely to go again, she could not honestly claim the stern old lady's affection.

No, she was motherless. There was no doubt of that, and she did not know a woman among her limited acquaintance whose opinion she had the least respect for. Not one would have understood her; not one would have had an idea to offer. Fancy Alfred Davies's wife amid her noisy boys and her bustling commonplace daily life, listening to a tale like Lil's! Mrs. Davies, whose "expectations" had melted into thin air, having at no time been more than a plausible fiction; and who had quite grown accustomed to an embittered

and disappointed husband. She would have thought it a mere moonshine madness. Was it only that, after all? No! It was fact, hard as granite. It was clear that there was no counsellor for Lil. Brough had been her one friend in her girlhood, Charlie the one friend of her married life. Now that she had a problem before her which neither of these two could help her to solve, she stood alone.

“And I must act alone!” said Lil, aloud, in her excitement. Wild thoughts were in her mind of attempting the stage—of forming a new life for herself. Oh, if she had but the power to! But what would be the first step? Something certainly which would cost money. She did not know how to speak; she knew nothing of the stage save its literature. She would have to get some lessons. These would cost money. She had none. What should she do—what could she do; powerless, helpless, at a dead lock for want of money! What, if she limited her ambition to her own home, was in her power? She could not get a holiday for Charlie; she could not prevent the necessity of his going off every morning, in all weathers, in good or in bad spirits, in good or bad health, to his office; she could not give him change of air, scene, or society.

“What wealth twenty pounds would be to me just now!” she thought as she stood aimlessly looking from the window at the

outer sunshine. "A mere nothing to a rich man—twenty pounds, not wanted for a bill, would work wonders for me. I am afraid I can't earn it—I have almost forgotten how to write, with all the little things I have had to do."

She looked disconsolately at her writing-table, which wore, indeed, a deserted and disconsolate air. In the capacity of a writing-table it scarcely could be regarded as having existence; the papers had been pushed into a drawer, and the books heaped into one corner, for Lil was in sore need of a new dress, and had set about making it; in no other way could she obtain it; while a set of Charlie's shirts, all cut out and ready, were wanted the very moment fingers could stitch them. Lil disliked this sort of work as much as ever, though she had learned to do it tolerably well by dint of sheer determination. She looked at it now, and tried to believe what she had so often told herself, that saving money was as good as making it. This may be absolutely true, but it is very difficult for active minded people to understand it. Lil knew very well that she had a day's hard stitching before her. A leaden sense of weariness and heart-sickness oppressed her as she eyed the heap of sewing which lay ready for her. It was easy to conquer a repugnance to certain sorts of work when someone was pleased that the work was done, and

praised the doer ; it was easy to work hard all day and resist the temptation of the sunshine and the solicitations of one's dog to go out, if someone admired the industry, and was delighted with the results. But, if no one cared much about it, how different it seemed ! —if by all her hard work she just enabled Charlie, on his narrow income, to keep her, though he was half weary of her—why, how empty and foolish this slavery was ! But these thoughts, she suddenly told herself, were madness. Charlie had only herself to help him, to cheer his life, to make his income cover his needs ; they were bound together, and their interests were one. It was no use thinking wildly of leaving him, even for a short time ; it would be but a cruel kindness to desert her post, and so she resolved to work off her irritation upon the shirts ; as a rule a dress interested her most, because there was some scope for an artistic sense to find exercise in its construction, but she felt in her present frame of mind that it would be much pleasanter to work for Charlie than for herself ; so she turned from the window to go to her work, humbled and resolute. She cast one parting glance at the sunny road, and, in so doing, caught sight of Alfred Davies coming hurriedly along it. He looked disturbed and excited, she thought, in her momentary glance ; but she did not look again. She sat down to her work-table, and, taking up a shirt, began

to stitch. She disliked Alfred Davies, as cordially as she could dislike anyone. She did not want to see him; but he was Charlie's cousin, of course he must come if he chose; at all events, if he saw how busy she was, he would not disturb her for long, so she stitched away with bent head, and when he came into the room, rose to greet him, without putting down her work.

“Have you heard—has Charlie gone?—didn't he see the paper?—wasn't he telegraphed to?—I thought I should, perhaps, catch him!”

All this Alfred Davies said in a breath, shaking Lil's hand the while. She was amazed, bewildered.

“What do you mean?” she said.

“Don't you know?” said Davies; “then they have not sent to him—but do you mean you don't see a paper?”

“Charlie says he can't afford one every day,” answered Lil, endeavouring to disengage the hand which Davies seemed inclined to keep altogether. He let it go reluctantly.

“Well, Charlie will have heard by now, and I have the pleasure of telling you——”

“What?” asked Lil, rather languidly. Her imagination could suggest nothing which would interest her very much.

“You'll wake up when you hear it,” said Davies, with the rather vulgar manner into which he easily relapsed when excited.

“Uncle Sam and his son have both been killed by a carriage accident, travelling in Switzerland. By Jove, I should never have thought such a splendid thing could happen ; but, of course, people do get killed every day. I congratulate Charlie with all my heart, though I’ll not deny, being an honest man, that I wish I was the heir.”

“The heir,” faltered Lil, through lips that trembled as she spoke.

“You don’t realise what it means, Mrs. Newman. Charlie has got five thousand a year, that’s all.”

Lil stood a moment, hesitating to believe what she heard ; but there was truth in Davies’s face, and in the tone of his coarse congratulations.

She faltered, stepped back, and sat down in her chair. She forgot Davies was there—forgot everything but what he had told her, and what it meant to her.

“Oh, I’m so glad, so glad, so glad !” she said. Then after a moment, “thank God—oh, heaven is kind, after all. I am so glad, so glad, so grateful ! Oh ! it is too good to believe—too good !”

She went on saying this at intervals, faintly, yet with an emphasis which showed how much she was feeling. Davies stared at her in surprise.

“I didn’t suppose she’d care as much as all this,” he said to himself. “They must be in

debt; no, that's not like Charlie; she's got some debts of her own, I expect, and she think's she'll get them paid now without a fuss."

So men judge continually, who will not take Charles Reade's advice and put themselves in others' places. Davies had the common failing of supposing everybody to be like himself. He felt sure Lil had some secret which made her so strangely glad over this great good fortune.

"Well, I must be off," he said, presently; "I am glad to have had the pleasure of bringing this good news. I will call in to-day on Charlie, just to congratulate him."

He really was in a hurry, so he took Lil's unconscious hand and shook it with a great show of politeness and affection, and then went his way.

"Queer girl that," he thought, as he walked quickly away; "I never can make her out. She's got luck, though. If I'd been the heir, those two would never have gone to Switzerland at all. Everything is always against me, and then people wonder I owe a little money. What's an unlucky devil to do but use his wits?"

With these cheerful thoughts Alfred Davies went on his way to town. His circumstances were certainly not very flourishing. He was one of the not uncommon class who believe themselves ill-used in having to work for a

living. He did not attempt to forgive his wife for misleading him about her expectations, nor fate for having allowed her to do so. He considered it a positive wrong that his uncle and cousin's death brought him no immediate benefit. He had a fine hatred for work and poverty, and yet he had to pick up his living here and there in the unhappy fashion familiar to men in most professions during the early part of a career. Income did not increase in proportion to the necessity for it, and though, to do him justice, Davies worked hard when he had work to do; yet there were many horrid, unpaid debts hanging over his head.

He went to Charlie's office, eager to be early with his congratulations. "Uncle Sam was a wretched, old screw, but Charlie's a generous sort of fellow," he said to himself, as he hurried in search of the new man of fortune. But Charlie had had the news, had told his principal, had got leave of absence, and had rushed home to Lil. His first thought was for her, and when Lil saw him at the gate and guessed how immediately he must have come to her, her heart smote her for all she had been lately thinking; and, indeed, Charlie looked wide awake for the first time for many months; his eyes were full of light as he came straight to the sitting-room where Lil stood awaiting him.

"Ah, you have heard it," he said, the

moment he saw her face; "We have got a new life, before us, Lil! No more of this narrow old drudgery of which you have got so tired!"

"I!" exclaimed Lil, in utter amazement. But she said no more, for Charlie had made a rush upon her work-table, and flung the shirts away into a corner of the room. Lil rescued her half-made dress from his reckless treatment, but it made her laugh with pleasure to see him a boy again.

"By Jove," he said, after a minute, "I can't believe it yet. Never to go to that office again! We'll be off to Italy in a week. But I can't take it in yet; it isn't easy to drop one's skin all at once! How do you feel about it, old lady?"

"Glad," said Lil, "of course, glad; and it's such fun to see you like this again."

"Like this!" I don't know what I'm like yet. What figure shall I cut as a man of fortune? You will look charming; you always have the air of a small princess, even when you are making pudding. And now you need make no more puddings!"

Lil laughed to hear herself called a small princess again; it brought back the sweetness which she had thought lost. Charlie stayed a little talking excitedly about the future. Then he said he would go into town again to visit the family lawyers. It would make the affair feel more real to hear all the particulars.

“ Oh, take me with you,” said Lil ; “ I must go and tell papa.”

“ Won't the old boy say ‘ Hooray for you ! ’ ” said Charlie. “ Make haste and put on your hat ; I can't wait above two minutes.”

So they went off together down the little street where their home had been so many years. The old ladies who peeped through the blinds at them, the old gardener who touched his hat to Lil, the little girl who dropped her curtsey,—how strange, thought Lil, that they should see no change in these two. Yet how should they ; what should people living such changeless, colourless lives know of the probable expression of a man who has just come into five thousand a year ?

“ There's a house in town, I believe,” said Charlie, abruptly. “ I had almost forgotten it, but I am nearly sure there is. Of course, I remember going to see old Uncle Sam there, years ago. A dignified place in one of the squares.”

“ Shall you live there ? ” asked Lil, doubtfully.

“ Oh, I don't know ! It's too soon to form a plan. My one idea first of all is to go to Italy. I have been craving for some sunlight for months ; we'll go in search of it now. I believe I shall begin to feel young again—‘ young and delightful,’ as Postlethwaite, of *Punch*, would say.”

“You look a different creature, already,” said Lil, admiringly. She was content to look at this newly-brightened face. She adored Charlie after that faithful clinging fashion which seems to belong peculiarly to women. He thought of the future; she thought of him; he looked at the changed aspect of life; she at the changed aspect of his face. Is it all nature, or partly education and tradition, which produces this capacity for concentrated adoration in women? At all events, it does not always result in happiness either to the woman or the man she adores.

Lil found Brough in his study as usual. He was biting the feathers of his quill, and looking ferocious.

“Baby,” he said, the instant she had opened the door, “just take down Coleridge, and find me those lines about, ‘In humble trust, mine eyelids close’—you know what I mean, don’t you?”

“Yes, papa,” said Lil, and from force of habit she crossed the room and took the volume down. Then she turned round with a laughing face.

“I can’t look till I’ve told you, papa. It’s come!”

“What?—don’t be enigmatic, that’s a good baby!”

“Why, I felt the other day when I came to you here that I couldn’t bear life any longer

unless some change came. Well, it's come. I felt it coming, I suppose, as one feels change of weather. Charlie's uncle and cousin have both been killed by a carriage accident, and Charlie's come into the money."

Brough stared.

"Ye gods and little fishes," he exclaimed, at last. "How much is it?"

"Five thousand a year, I believe."

Brough combed his curly hair with his quill pen, and wrinkled his brows. "Mercy on us," he thought to himself, "and see how hard I work to make two!" But he didn't say this. He was not as a rule conspicuous for delicacy of this sort, but he knew Lil well. Such a remark would have sent all her smiles away.

"He's a lucky beggar," he said, aloud, "uncommon lucky. Don't you feel inclined to dance a jig, Lil? I'm awfully glad; you won't have to waste your time on sewing any longer. And you're looking pale; you can have a real holiday."

"Charlie wants to go to Italy, directly," said Lil; "he needs a holiday, indeed. Oh, how thankful I am he can have one. Now, I'll look for the quotation."

"Not a bit of it. Put Coleridge back in the shelf. He was an old fogey who didn't know the value of money. When may I congratulate Charlie? Tell him to ask me to an oyster supper, and let me order the wine I

like. He can afford to do that sort of thing now in proper style."

"And how he will enjoy it," said Lil, an old dimple coming into life again with the many smiles of her new happiness.

"Of course, he will. He's a capital fellow, Charlie, but he's never had any scope. Suppose we go up to the drawing-room and tell Lady Warrington?"

This was not a particularly agreeable proposal to Lil, but under the circumstances she saw no way out of adopting it. So they went upstairs to the drawing-room where Lady Warrington sat reading a novel. Her pet dog, a tiny imp with wicked eyes, was coiled up in her lap, so she could not rise—at all events not for Lil. She held out her hand, and saluted her prettily, but with a certain distance which she had preserved ever since her marriage. She had never liked Lil, and now she had married Brough, there was no need to conceal that fact. She made it quite plain, with all the politeness imaginable. One of the fictions which she was fond of was that Brough and Lil had many secrets in common from which she was excluded. She always arched her eyebrows with surprise when they came to her like this, and gave them to understand that if they preferred to be without her she did not exact their society. Her union with Brough was one of those strange, almost incredible things which we meet with

every day in that marvellous volume of romance, real life. They had not a taste in common or a sympathy between them, these two. Yet their attachment was very real, though of so queer a character. Brough worked like a mill-horse to please her ladyship; in addition, he was at her beck and call, and often waited on her like a most exemplary footman. She, in return, was exacting to a degree, thought nothing he did for her enough, and complained perpetually of her folly in marrying a literary man whose labours were so ill-paid, and whose time was so much occupied; but her hold over Brough was such that nothing she did appeared to weaken it. Probably he was too true a philosopher to rebel, having married her with his eyes open. At all events, his butterfly still pleased and amused him with her dainty ways, her capriciousness, her ever-shifting moods, the peculiar delicate frivolity which made the colour of her character. He was her slave, and seemingly a very willing one; while she groaned often at her hard task of tyrannizing. Possibly it seemed to her to be quite as easy to write a clever book, and smoke cigarettes the while, as read a foolish one and nurse a lap-dog.

“We’ve got something to tell you,” said Brough, solemnly. “Shut up that third volume of yours and listen. This is quite as good as any third volume ever written.

Chapter nineteenth and last, Charlie, our hero, comes into all his money, and is happy ever after."

Lady Warrington stifled a yawn successfully, and looked puzzled.

"Please explain, Brough," she said; "you know I'm not clever."

"Ah," said Brough, just a little drily. "It takes a clever woman to say that. But I have nothing to explain. I have said Charlie has come into his money, and is the happy possessor of five thousand a year."

The change of expression which took place upon Lady Warrington's face was a study worth observing. She had always regarded Charlie Newman as an insignificant young man with nothing to live on, and having the bad taste to admire her step-daughter. She looked down upon the whole Newman establishment with infinite contempt. If you have ever entered a room and happened to notice some particularly small, plain, and spectacled lady, and then been introduced to her as the great author of the day and the lioness of the evening, or looked with total lack of interest at a lean, bald man, with a bored expression and found him to be "the Duke" or "the Prince," and much too grand for you to be introduced to at all; if you have experienced one of these shocks which occur to us all at times, you will be able to guess something of what Lady Warrington

was going through. Before her very eyes, Charlie Newman, of the clerk's stool, whom nobody could possibly know, developed into Charlie Newman the owner of a nice little fortune—a man with a good house in town, who will drive good horses and give nice little dinners—in fact, my son-in-law, Mr. Newman!”

It was perfectly natural and unconscious, this mental change of attitude. For five years she had persisted in disregarding the fact that Charlie Newman was even a connection of hers. Now she saw him suddenly as a near relation.

It was but a second that she was silent—and Lil, watching her, saw how wonderfully her face changed—and then she rose, put down her dog, much to his disgust, and held out both her hands to Lil. “My dear child,” she said, “I am delighted. I always felt you might have married better, that with the good looks and cleverness you have inherited from your father, you ought to have filled a very different position. But now it has come to you. You must go into society. You are quite pretty enough to become a favourite. You really may be a success, for you are still young. I am delighted!” And she kissed Lil with that sort of kiss which reminds one of a canary bird pecking at his seed.

“She kisses five thousand a year, not me!” said Lil to herself, and thought of the old

Italian story of the money-bags, from which, it is said, Shakespeare took the outline of *King Lear*.

Some little time the three sat and talked over the event in the pretty, dim-lit drawing-room, and then Lil said she must go, or Charlie would be home first.

“And he will want someone to talk to!” she said, laughingly.

“Egad, yes,” said Brough, with one of those shouts of uproarious laughter which he now and then indulged in, and which made Lady Warrington put her fingers to her ears. “Come, I’ll take holiday for half-an-hour in honour of the occasion, and walk with you through the park.”

Brough whistled his dog, Lil said good-bye to Lady Warrington, and was pressed to come again soon and talk over her plans, and then the two went out, arm in arm. People turned to look at them in the street, for they were a handsome couple. “By Jove, they think we are sweethearts,” cried Brough, and enjoyed the joke enormously.



## CHAPTER XIV.

**T**HE next week seemed to pass so rapidly that a day—one of the dull days of stiching and silence—had often appeared longer than these seven. So many things there were to do, such plans to make! Charlie was restless to a degree; he seemed unable to stay at home. They went to see the house in London; it was in Portman Square; roomy and comfortable. Old uncle Sam despised fashion, and æsthetic taste was unknown to him, so that all his surroundings were of the simplest, though very substantial. It was just the house to please a new owner. Nothing was in bad taste, so that there was no need to move or disturb what was already there. The old oak chairs and chests were charming in their way; only the final touches were needed to make the house delightful. Silken hangings, some Persian carpets and Turkish embroideries, such pleasant furnishing as this was all that was wanted to convert the old bachelor's quiet house into a rich and bright interior.

“Let us leave it all till we come home,” said Charlie. He was passionately desirous of

change, of finding a bright sky and genial climate; everything at home oppressed and wearied him.

“I hate London, with its dark sky and dirty streets,” he said half-a-dozen times a day. Nothing held him long, or interested him thoroughly. He had but one idea—absolute change. To Lil this seemed reasonable enough; it was almost an artistic necessity to create a gap between the old life and the new. So she readily agreed to the idea of taking a long holiday, immediately, and leaving all making of plans or arrangements until the return home. But still they could not resist the temptation of buying anything particularly charming when they saw it, and sending it to the house. Although they had no idea of living there until their return from abroad, it was amusing to go in now and then, and arrange some of their new purchases in the grave old rooms. Charlie found it amusing, and to Lil it was like a new beginning of life, to fancy herself the mistress of this large house, full of its stately furniture. But nothing pleased Charlie for long; too soon there came the weary look which had become stamped upon his face, and he would say: “There, that will do.” Lil knew those words, and the look which accompanied them. When she was enjoying some detail of daily life as heartily and innocently as when she was first married, these words and the tone in

which they were spoken—a voice of suppressed irritation—would tell her that Charlie's interest had quite worn out, that she was worrying him, that what brought out in her the old childish pleasure, called forth no response in him. There was the same delight to her in the idea of arranging Charlie's house that she had found in furnishing and ordering the cottage; there was the same strong charm in the thought of association with him. But this had evidently passed away from Charlie altogether; the little circumstances of domestic life, which had pleased and amused him years ago, irritated him now, Lil saw that she must order her life, now that money had made change possible, on a new plan; she could, at least, prevent his learning to associate her, as men so often learn to associate their wives, with the annoyances of domestic affairs, by never letting him hear of them. She took this resolve and began to execute it at once. No longer did she stitch, or make puddings, or darn stockings. She was always ready to go wherever Charlie wanted to go. He lived in a fever, and seemed unable to tolerate existence at home now that he could escape from it. This pleased Lil vastly in one respect. They went very often to the theatre; and, in the brief time before they left England, Lil learned more about the actual stage than she had ever known before.

"I think I should like to write a play," she said, one day.

"Why don't you, then?" said Charlie, "you have plenty of time now."

"Papa says," remarked Lil, "that, to write a play, one should either be an actor, or else go to the theatre very often in order to understand the business of the stage."

"Well, we can go as often as you like, when we come home," said Charlie; "I'm quite ready to help you carry out that part of the affair. When I can't go, we'll hire some nice old lady to chaperone you."

"That will be jolly," said Lil, rather drily, "especially the old lady; I am not fond of old ladies. However, I should like to learn something about the stage. Whether I shall ever have ambition enough to write a play I don't know."

"It will amuse you to think about it", said Charlie, indifferently. He had become so accustomed to see Lil absorbed in her household matters that he never thought of her in any other vocation. Ambition had been almost killed in him by his own life of drudgery; the artistic desire had scarcely shown a sign that it was still within him, as yet. He wanted nothing but change, absolute change; his mind was too wearied to entertain any other ideas. Amusement was all he wanted, and he imagined Lil to be in the same state. She was content enough

to let him think this. Her greatest pleasure was to follow his mood and enter into his wishes. But she was disturbed by remembering what her father had suggested as her right plan, when she had gone to him with her troubles—to leave Charlie for a time. All her old obstacles to this plan were now removed. She had money, there was no house to keep, for Charlie was going abroad. One evening, when Charlie was saying where he wished to go, she suggested he should go alone.

“I don’t want to go,” she said, “and I really think it would be better I shouldn’t.” She did not dare to say more than this.

“Not want to go?” said Charlie, with an incredulous stare. “Why, you must want to see Rome—what ridiculous nonsense!”

“Another time,” suggested Lil, timidly.

“Another time!” said Charlie; “I shall never go there again; I hate going to a place twice. I don’t know what you are talking about, when you say you don’t want to go.”

“You might enjoy it more; you would be more independent without me.”

“I do wish,” said Charlie, angrily, “you would look after yourself and let me look after myself. You want a holiday quite as much as I do. I propose to take you for one. Why go making difficulties and all sorts of absurd suggestions, at the last moment?”

“I didn’t mean it in that way,” faltered Lil,

who, one of the most courageous girls imaginable, was abjectly afraid before Charlie's irritability.

"I don't think you know what you do mean," said he.

"Perhaps not," said Lil, humbly. In such a case explanation was worse than misunderstanding. So she did what many of us often have to do. She let ill alone, for fear of worse; and Charlie received the impression that she was changeable and unreasonable.

They had not too much time to themselves just now, few though their friends were. Lady Warrington was extremely kind in offering to help Lil in making her arrangements. She asked her to lunch and talked to her about dress, and society, and the importance of doing justice to one's position. Lil saw that she was considered a very ignorant and rather foolish person who must be made the best of now that the sun saw fit to shine upon her. And so she listened quietly, and made many discoveries, interesting to a student of character. And this Lil was, though she hardly knew it yet.

Then Alfred Davies and his wife were positively assiduous in their attention. Davies borrowed ten pounds before a week was out.

"I am glad we are going away," said Charlie. "Otherwise Davies would get all I have out of me. When I am used to being rich, I shan't be so soft. I have noticed that

the possession of money has a hardening effect on the heart."

Lil wrote to her grandmother and sent her some presents, the choice of which absorbed an extraordinary amount of time. She had not the courage to go and see her and be told that the new possessions and opportunities were mere snares of the devil.

"I will go and see her before we leave," said Lil, "unless, when she writes, she seems very gloomy about Satan and his traps."

But no; when old Mrs. Warrington wrote, Lil found, to her surprise, that Granny, like everyone else, seemed to think a great deal more of her than she had done before. Lil had always understood from Granny's talk that people who had riches, and who consequently could never go by the narrow path to heaven, were in the very worst possible position, and that to have money was to be on intimate terms with the evil one himself. But Lil began to think now that all this was because neither the old lady, nor her son, nor anyone very nearly connected with her, had any money worth speaking of.

So Lil, finding that the sin of becoming suddenly rich was not so great as she had feared, started off to see her Granny. She was very fond of the old lady, spite of their differences, for, in truth, Brough and his mother and Lil had certain fundamental similarities of character. They had developed

in totally different directions; but all alike had a strength and stability of purpose, a great power of faithfulness in affection, and a certain uprightness. Then, too, Lil had a great fund of filial love in her. Most of this was given to Brough, who had, indeed, played very admirably the double part of father and mother. But a large piece of it was yet ungratified, and this went to old Mrs. Warrington; who, however uncongenial spiritually, was that which, after all, we love better than any friend, a close relation. Lil came home again, the better for grandmotherly counsel; it was pleasant to find how the stern old dogmatist could soften when any real event called her out. And she realised, as only a sympathetic woman could, how vital an event this was likely to be to Lil; how it would change all her daily life, alter her future, make different her whole horizon.

“Take everything quietly, my dear,” said the old lady, “and remember that nothing which happens in this world is worth exciting yourself very much about. Keep your head steady under all circumstances, and you will find affairs, which at first sight seem very large, are in reality very small. If you would only give your thoughts a little more to the welfare of your soul, you would find the pomps and vanity of riches no snare to you.”

As of old, the advice of grandmother and of stepmother were so strangely opposed, so

difficult to combine, that Lil was left uncounselled!

At last the travelling rugs, the travelling cloaks, were all ready; the luggage was packed and filled up the entrance to the little cottage, which was now no longer Lil's cottage, for it belonged to a new tenant. The melancholy "four-wheeler," with which all people who have no carriage are doomed to become acquainted when they start on a journey, was the first dismal step towards future pleasure. The train was more cheerful; a first-class carriage, in a night train between London and Dover, is by no means a disagreeable place. The journey over that piece of English ground is in fact a deceptively pleasant introduction to the varied miseries of continental travelling.

Lil, as she sat down in a comfortable corner, to begin the first long journey of her hitherto quiet life, felt as if now, indeed, a new phase of existence had commenced for her. Anyone who has had a number of small cares and responsibilities must know the sense of rest which a long journey gives. A ship, where posts are impossible; a train, in which one has but to sit still and where one may think with folded hands for hours without reproach or stir of conscience; how charming these are sometimes! It seemed to Lil as if a time of peace and joy had dawned for her; a period of new pleasures, in which the old happiness would be restored. The sense of motion, of

change, exhilarated her, and she looked forward with rising anticipations to the future in store for her.

So with Romeo, who said on the morn of his misfortunes, "my bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne." Like him Lil went out to meet that stern fate which fills the days of men and women with sorrow ; like him she went gladly, looking for the crown of her satisfaction, to find instead the intolerable bitterness of a torn and wounded heart.



## CHAPTER XV.

“LET us go straight to Rome,” said Charlie, “the change will be so complete. There will be so much to see and do there, that one will have less chance of getting bored than anywhere else I can think of; that is, as long as we don’t come across Jack Poynings, one of the best fellows and greatest bores I ever met with.”

“An odd description,” said Lil.

“Well, he might not bore you, but he does me, for he believes in society, makes himself a sort of slave to it, knows everybody and everything, and expects one to do likewise. I never heard him talk anything but scandal and small beer, though I have met him a good many times. I believe he lives principally in Rome now; still, it is very unlikely we shall meet him. I think it might rouse one to go straight from London to a city so different.”

As Charlie’s getting bored was a greater terror to Lil than any distress of her own, she readily agreed to this arrangement. What pleased him would certainly please her. After Chambéry she passed into a condition of continual delight. It was all so absolutely new

to her, that it was like an entrance into another world. Probably, people who have travelled when mere children, lose some of the keenest sensations of pleasure. Lil was just at the age when everything new and beautiful is most intensely appreciated. A few years ago, and all this wonderful mountain scenery would have been merely beautiful, like a panorama. But now, the silence of the stately snow-touched summits seized her imagination. She caught from them something of the excitement and fascination of lofty solitude.

But the idea of Rome was the one which absorbed Lil, as it must everyone who goes there for the first time. The strange glimpses of the lovely Mediterranean lit by magical moonlight, the beauty of a quiet dawn over country which seemed to her quite familiar, for she had learned its effects from pictures; all the many excitements of the journey passed away when the train left Civita Vecchia, and Lil knew now there was but the Campagna to cross, that the next roofs which she would see would be those of Rome. Fortunately, for the lovers of art, the English and American tourists who turn the Spagna and the Pincio into reproductions of Regent Street and Hyde Park, cannot change the majesty of Rome itself. The city is as wonderful as ever, though fashionable people entertain and give parties, and regard the eternal beauties of the place as mere subjects for small talk. To Lil,

though her journey was done on the smooth, frequented rails, it was as exciting as to any art student in the days when Rome was really isolated, and the wild country was crossed in a carriage, and the city entered by one of the gates. This mode of entrance is, after all, a loss in some respects. The beauty of the first sight of Rome must have been much more impressive when, after the long drive over the silent, uncultivated country, one entered at the Porta del Popolo, and passed straight into the busy, picturesque Corso. It is impossible not to look anxiously for the first glimpse of the city. Now that one enters by train, it is equally difficult not to be disappointed. The view from the train, at all events, on the line from Civita Vecchia, is perhaps the least impressive of all the views of the eternal city. The great station and its Parisian looking surroundings, are another blow to a romantic soul like Lil's. But how soon this commonplace entrance is forgotten! how soon, before your very hotel door is reached, the picturesque details of the streets, the magic charm of the whole place interest you. The first week in Rome is a week not easily forgotten. It is bewildering, exhausting, yet most exciting. Lil was worn out with the journey; but the moment she was fairly awake in the morning, she was up and dressing, with her head full of something which she was determined to see. The idea that the Belvedere

Apollo was silently awaiting her audience, that the Sistine chapel was within her reach, that the expenditure of a franc would carry her to the Colosseo or the Pantheon, gave her unnatural strength. Even Charlie found enough to satisfy his restlessness. To see Rome is not unlike learning a language. There must be some steady, hard, elementary work done, before you reach the choice bits of enjoyment ; you must wear off the first fever of sight-seeing before you can begin to reach the real spirit of the place. Charlie and Lil did this with indefatigable enthusiasm. They lived in an hotel in the Via Bocca de Leone, a street which is tolerably clean and healthy, because more horses than Romans reside there. Morning and afternoon they were out, sometimes going straight to what they desired to see, sometimes stumbling by chance upon what they wanted. No way is so enjoyable of seeing such a place as Rome, as to go about unguided, unfriended, until you become to some extent familiar and at home with it. You have earned your familiarity then ; you have made the place your own ; and the odd sensation of recognising a street which you have never seen, yet which you have known all your life, of coming accidentally upon a strangely familiar building, and entering without premeditation some superb interior, whose every outline is recognised, the charm of all this is something which no guidance or saving of time can compensate for. You feel

that you have some relationship with this old-world art, that the familiar forms have a friendliness for you.

Charlie tired first. The excitement wore off with him very soon, and the weariness of mind began to return. A reaction set in. Here, in the midst of the greatest glories of the world, he felt as "bored" as though he were at home again, with his daily work to do.

"Off again!" he said, one morning, when Lil put on her hat, as usual, directly after breakfast. "I am sick of these sights, but I suppose they must be seen. Where are we to go?"

"What; sick of sights!" exclaimed Lil, her eyes round with wonder. "Why, we have not been to the Capitoline Museum, or to the Vatican picture gallery, or to the Palazzo Torlonia, or the Palazzo Barberini—fancy, not having seen poor Beatrice yet!"

"I am ready," said Charlie, with an air of resignation. Lil went out with a feeling that this wonderful holiday was beginning to be a failure. She was still off her feet, as it were, with enthusiasm, but she felt half afraid to show it. Charlie had begun to count how often she had said "lovely," how often "exquisite," and to look wearied, as if it were a trouble to turn his eyes, when she attracted his attention to anything. Silently they went down into the Via Condotti, and there got into one of the little carriages.

"Where to?" said Charlie,

"Wherever you like," said Lil.

"I don't care, go where you choose," he answered, with an indifference which fell on Lil's heart like a heavy weight. Oh, that she had her old power over him, to change his mood! But she knew she had not; she succumbed to his.

"The Palazzo Barberini is near," she said; "let us go there!"

It was very cold, driving through the streets. It was the first of December; Lil never forgot the date, or the feeling of that cold wind. A brilliant sun made the city beautiful. The sky was high and clear and lovely. In the Piazza di Spagna, brown-faced, black-eyed peasants sold great bunches of pink roses and narcissus; one boy ran up to the carriage with a basket of wild strawberries. It was all a sort of intoxication to Lil; but she was afraid to say "lovely" again, and she was too absorbed in gazing to think of anything better.

The gallery of the Palazzo Barberini has been called the gallery of disappointment. There could be no worse place to go to in a state of *ennui*. The expedition was a lamentable failure. Charlie declared the Fornarina absolutely disgusting; and the unfortunate so-called Beatrice Cenci, a positive swindle. Lil did not dare to say that though she did not admire the Fornarina herself, she thought the painting of her hands and bosom very wonder-

ful ; nor had she the courage to confess that she found some fascination in the face of the Beatrice. It is now so much the fashion to abuse that poor mis-named picture, and once it was so much the fashion to praise it, that it is really difficult to entertain an opinion of one's own. But Lil made the effort.

"I really think," she said, "if I had never heard of the picture ; if I had never read *Hawthorne's Transformation*, for instance, if I had not raised my anticipations so high, I should have been startled by the pathos of that face, by the wonderful hidden tears which lie behind those eyes. But, as it is, I can only feel that Hawthorne created the picture he wanted in his own imagination, instead of describing this. I can keep his Beatrice, if I discard this one. But, still—still there is a fascination here, after all."

"What, in that simpering, silly girl? Well, I am going. The sunshine is better than this."

Lil followed him, rather reluctantly, with a long, parting look at the two pictures. Charlie hurried on, and she overtook him at the entrance to the palace.

"Let us be out of doors this afternoon," he said ; "I am sick of pictures and statues."

"I should like that," said Lil. "Where shall we go?"

"It is the day for the Ludovisi Gardens ; they are said to be the loveliest in Rome. I have an order ; suppose we go there. Let us go

in to Morteo's and get some lunch ; we shall get to the Gardens then, as soon as the gates are open."

This programme was carried out ; they went down to the Corso in search of lunch. Lil thought to herself, as she drank her coffee silently, what a little festival such a lunching out together would have been two or three years ago. Why must that young romance inevitably pass away with the passage of time? she asked herself. It evidently had passed and it was useless to yearn after it.

It is but a short distance to the Villa Ludovisi, and the gates had not long been opened, when they reached them. As they drove up, a steep hill, a peacock flew upon the wall, right into the sunshine, and spread his gorgeous tail ; he was followed by another and another. Lil was so delighted by the splendid birds, that she stood at the gateway watching them, until Charlie took her arm and led her on. A spacious fairyland opened before her. Straight from the gateway stretched a long, long avenue of cypress. The wide walk of this avenue is smooth and gray, undisturbed by wandering feet, for a chain is drawn across it. The long lines of straight cypress trees stand like sentinels, in front of groves of ilex, which grow thickly up to the avenue ; stately groves, with the sense of seclusion about them, which is an essential attribute of the shadow of the ilex.

"There is a collection of ancient sculpture

in the Casino here," said Charlie, rather sadly ; "I suppose we had better just go in and look at it."

They went in accordingly ; the Casino was close to the gateway. "Fortunately, it is very small," said Charlie. They went through the two rooms, and Lil caught sight of the grand Ludovisi Juno, and longed to stay and look at it. But Charlie just sauntered round, and went out again into the sunshine.

"These statues are cold forms of beauty," he said, when she joined him. "I want something warm. Let us keep in the sunshine."

So they strolled on slowly past the kitchen garden, where enough vegetables grew to supply a small town. Amid this rich stretch of profitable growth is a quaint oasis of flower garden, which delighted Lil, for there were great heads of crimson coxcomb in it, and love-lies-bleeding. In this garden, too, was a huge aviary full of gay canaries. All this they looked at over a thick, straight-cut hedge ; and suddenly on this hedge Lil espied a green lizard, and another, and another. The hot sun which poured down upon this sheltered walk, called them out to enjoy themselves. Cold as the wind was in any exposed place, here, the air was like that of summer ; and as Lil loitered on between the high hedges, she felt as if a summer day of childhood had come back to her. Charlie came more slowly after her ; he seemed as though he did not care to

speak, and so Lil went silently on in the sweet sunshine. Suddenly, there was a heavy scent upon the air, as of myriad hawthorn blossoms. Lil found she had entered upon an avenue of Japanese medlars, full of flowers, and oh, so sweet! the exquisite perfume brought keen tears of delight to her eyes. Half-way through the avenue is a cool fount, its stone work all lichen-covered, and fringed with maidenhair; the water in the basin is so clear that the fallen leaves within it are as bright as those above. A worn, gray figure of Hermes stands over it; on his unconscious cheek rested a great coloured butterfly, in all the gorgeousness of summer dress. Sure this is some fairyland I have wandered into, thought Lil. Years after, she remembered the ecstasy of that sunny afternoon, amid the sweet scents and gorgeous foliage of the Ludovisi Gardens. It was impossible to linger long in one spot, where all was so beautiful. On beyond, she caught sight of magnolia trees; the flowers were gone, but the great cones were almost as beautiful.

Decay, the tender decay of young autumn, mingled with the richness of undefeated summer. Here and there lay the fallen leaves, which the gardeners had made into great heaps; the dew lay heavily upon the grass, in spite of the hot sun, which brought the little green lizards out upon the walls and hedges, so that the grass looked perfectly green, and speckled as it was, with dainty wild flowers,

was a fairyland of itself. Yet Lil was attracted away from the friendly and often familiar faces of these blossoms, to the stately severity of the great blue-green aloes, which were planted in thick lines about the villa and the casinos. The huge spiked leaves, so strong and firm in their growth, delighted her; and the strange unfamiliar odour had a fascination of its own for her eyes, which always found pleasure in the unfamiliar. She wandered on, rapt by delight, her hands full of tender wild flowers, her eyes intent upon the larger beauties which were on every side of her.

A casino stands at the end of this sweet avenue; it is worth entering, though its ceilings are lamentably daubed by Guercino, for, from its upper story there is a most wonderful view of Rome to be obtained. Lil, with one glance at the painted ceiling, ran quickly up the staircases and out on the balustraded roof. What air! a bath of sunshine and sweetness. The sky above, unclouded, perfectly blue, with that flame-like tremulousness which makes the atmospheric effects of Italy so lovely: Rome below, hemmed in by her historic hills. The sweet sunny air, with just the stimulant of coldness in it, was to Lil most exhilarating. She clapped her hands with delight. "Oh, Charlie, isn't it wonderful," said she, half wild with enjoyment, as he came slowly up the stairs.

"Tenth time of 'wonderful,' to-day," said

Charlie. "Suppose we have a new adjective?"

"I can't stay to think about words," said Lil, "my time is filled up with looking. Oh, I wish papa were here!"

They stood silent awhile, looking at the incomparable scene before them. But Charlie soon wearied of anything; he turned to go.

"There is an ilex grove down there," he said. "I should like to go into it. Its shadows fascinates me more than anything I have yet seen."

As they moved towards the stairway, there came floating on the air the faint sound of low-toned laughter.

"What was that?" exclaimed Charlie. "Where did it come from?"

"There are some other people in the casino, I think," said Lil, absently; her eyes were drinking in the shades of colour on the Sabine hills. "Probably, they are laughing at the Guercinos."

"It seemed to me to come out of the air," said Charlie. "It might have been the laugh of a spirit."

They went down the steep staircase, and out into the glorious sunlight.

"Oh, how happy I feel," said Lil, as she stood a moment, to take in the beauty about her, and to feel the kind sun upon her face, but Charlie had already crossed to where the

ilex trees grew thickly, and had entered the grove. Lil followed him.

The trees mingled their boughs overhead. As Lil passed under their shade, the sun seemed suddenly to fade out of the sky. In entering a grove of ilex, one appears to touch upon a world of mystery and magic. No cathedral can impart so strange a sense of awe as the weird shadows of these trees. Their foliage is so thick above, and of so dim and dusky a green. The boughs that uphold this mass of mysterious-looking foliage, are knotted and tortuous in shape as though in pain they had brought forth the unearthly beauty of their clustered heads. The gray green bloom, that lies upon the dark and rugged bark, gives an air of age and remoteness to the stern trees. Ilex trees have always these characteristics, but surely no ilex grove can surpass in strangeness that of the Ludovisi Gardens. These trees which cling so closely together, forming a deep shade that kills all growth from the ground beneath them, are torn and twisted, as though at some time they had passed through a mortal agony. The earth about their roots is gray, covered only with dead leaves from the boughs above.

“Oh, it chills me to come here out of the bright sun,” said Lil. “Let us go! Surely this would be a spot to celebrate cruel and superstitious rites; it is no place for pleasure!”

“Why cruel, if superstitious?” said Charlie. “I like this place; its very air has magic in it. Remember, we are not only happy in the sunshine, we are not butterflies. Men may love with pale lips in the shadow, and perhaps the kisses given under such a shade as this might have an intenser passion in them than kisses in the sunshine. See how these trees are rent and torn as though they had yielded up their very lives! Perhaps the nymphs have gone from the grove, and the trees were torn like this when they burst out from them! Are they gone for ever, I wonder? Surely the spirit cannot have departed altogether from such a spot as this! Perhaps one pale nymph lingers here alone, with love-whispers trembling on her pallid lips! How I should like to see the solitary spirit of this place!”

It seemed strange to them both that just as he spoke a figure should appear; the form of a woman, and one too with a certain spirit-like air. Lil almost uttered a cry of surprise, but instantly seeing that this new comer, spirit, or woman, or whatever she might be, was unconscious of their presence, she suppressed it.

“Adelaide,” cried a voice from out of the sunshine; “come, we must go back to the carriage.”

“I am coming,” replied Adelaide, in a low, clear voice. Charlie immediately knew

it was her laugh he had heard in the casino. She raised her eyes now, which had been fixed on the gray earth, and saw the two standing so near her, and looked from one to the other, with a grave interest. Then she quickly turned, and went out of the shade into the sunshine.

Charlie followed her as though drawn by some magic chain; and Lil went with him. When they came out into the light they saw ahead of them two ladies; one evidently middle-aged, who walked with considerable grace. The other was Adelaide, who, though tall, carried herself with a peculiar air; her figure was poised most delicately. They walked on through the heavy scented avenue of Japanese medlars; and Adelaide turned aside a moment to look down into the water of the fountain. As she rejoined her companion she looked back at the two who were following on the sweet sunlit path. That scene was printed for ever on Lil's mind. The scent of the medlar carried always so vivid a memory with it that in after years it was like spoken words to her.

On, past the canaries, the lizards, the heavy-headed coxcombs, to where the carriages stood. Adelaide and her companion got into a private carriage and drove away.

"They are residents here," said Charlie.

These were the first words he had spoken since their first sight of Adelaide.

The sun was setting ; it was time to go home.

As they drove to their hotel, Charlie took out his pocket-book and opened it.

“ I wonder,” he said “ whether I brought Jack Poynings’ address.”

“ Why, I thought you did not want to meet him,” exclaimed Lil, in surprise.

“ He is a bore,” said Charlie ; “ but he knows everybody in Rome.”



## CHAPTER XVI.

“**I** AM going to hunt up Jack Poynings, this morning,” said Charlie, the next day, when they were ready to go out.

“Very well,” said Lil, “I will go up on the Pincio, and you will find me there.”

She was delighted to see him take an interest in anything again; and she went off very contentedly to bask in the broad sunshine that lay full upon the Pincio. How enjoyable it was, after all this sight-seeing, to climb slowly up the hill, and turn now and again to look back at the view of Rome, which gradually unfolded itself. How green the grass was to her feet, how splendid the huge gray aloe spikes, rising from it, how pure that clear high sky above her head.

Having reached the summit, she went and leaned upon the parapet and looked at that marvellous basin below her, where Rome lay still and beautiful in the sunshine. It was another day of fairyland.

“I have my Italy now!” she said to herself, as she looked away to St. Peter’s; “I can never lose it again.”

She did not notice how the time passed, she

was almost startled when someone touched her and she found Charlie was at her side and a gentleman with him.

“My wife,” he said; “Mr. Poynings. Jack is coming home to lunch with us, Lil, and then he is going to take us to one of the prettiest houses in Rome, so he says.”

“Not a house, a flat,” said Mr. Poynings; “nobody lives in a house here. How do you like Italy, Mrs. Newman?”

Jack Poynings was just the man to ask such a question, and to expect an answer in two words. He was perfectly empty as to the inside of his head, and very bald as to the outside of it; he was always laughing, and never said anything worth hearing. Yet he had an extraordinary faculty for getting on in society, and always knew everyone wherever he might be.

It came out, as they walked down the hill, that he was going to take them to an afternoon “at home;” and Lil felt a little startled when she understood that it was to be at the house of Adelaide’s mother. Jack Poynings knew them intimately, and had full permission to take his friends to their afternoons. Charlie, with the directness of aim which he could use when interested in anything, had discovered all this, and made arrangements accordingly. So all Lil had to do, was to open her trunks and get out a dress which had no travel stains upon it.

Lunch over, they went out and walked through the streets. "It is but a little way," said Jack Poynings. Lil felt very strange, as if some strong wave of destiny were sweeping over her, as she went on under the guidance of this man, whose frivolous small-talk jarred upon her, to go to the home of the nymph of the ilex grove.

Suddenly, as they were going down the Via Condotti, Jack Poynings turned into a doorway. "Here we are," he said, but they climbed two stories before they arrived at the front door they wished to enter. A trim little page answered Jack Poynings' knock, and they were shown through a hall, where some large green plants made a pleasant colour, into a room dimly lit, and with a heaviness of incense on the air. There was a low murmur of voices; several people were in the room; a lady detached herself from one of the groups and came forward; Lil was introduced to her; she recognised, immediately, that this handsome woman was one of those they had seen in the Ludovisi gardens.

Mrs. Mainwaring remembered noticing the Newmans there, too; she had been struck by them. She was a woman with strong social instincts, very hospitable, and always glad to make new friends, if they appeared at all desirable. She was charming to Lil; sat by her and talked to her for some time. Then she brought to her a bright young artist, who

admired Lil very much indeed, but thought her one of the most absent-minded beauties he had ever talked to. For Lil's eyes and thoughts were with Charlie. He was at Adelaide's side, speaking eagerly with his old earnest manner, which she had not seen for so long. He looked like the Charlie whom she had married; not the weary irritable man of the last few years.

It was wonderful to watch, it delighted her. She was quite content and happy while she could see this pleasant cheerfulness upon his face. It seemed to grow stronger during their stay, which was not very brief, for Jack Poynings was too popular with everybody to be easily spared; Charlie was too interested in his conversation to notice how time passed, and Lil was forgetful of all else in watching him.

There were few people there who were not intimate friends of the Mainwarings', so nothing interrupted the talk between Adelaide and Charlie. He found an indescribable charm in the sound of her low-toned voice; it had, indeed, a charm so great that for a while you scarcely observed how much there was in all she said. Adelaide Mainwaring was a woman of that rare character which discovers its beauties as you grow familiar with it, just as a light grows stronger upon near approach. Charlie did not realise immediately that he was talking to a woman of intellect; what he

felt was an extraordinary personal attraction. It was as if he had suddenly met with some new exotic flower, the perfume and colour of which was so strange and delicious, that he could not tear himself from the enjoyment of them.

Adelaide Mainwaring was not beautiful, though elegant in the extreme. But she possessed the strong artistic temperament which makes the eyes flame and the lips tremble with pure enthusiasm. A voluptuousness, as of a blown rose, was in her air and manner, a delicate warmth which impressed those who were about her with a sense of riches. She had studied and loved art till it filled her whole being; her enthusiasm seemed to colour the very air she breathed. Her vivid words, her low thrilling voice, her impassioned look, all were as so many sharp sweet stings of wakening life to Charlie. His artistic nature stirred within him, and the power of pleasure suddenly leaped into its strength. He remembered that he was in Rome, that the greatest glories of the art world were about him, that he was free, that in fact, life was ready at his bidding to become delicious.

“I am longing to understand the beauty of Rome,” said he, as he listened to her words, quick and many, yet spoken with no effort, but an eloquent ease as if thoughts came perpetually before her eyes and formed themselves there; “you know what is beautiful in

that casino in the Ludovisi gardens, for instance, but I did not—I suppose that is why nothing attracted me.”

“And the Ludovisi Juno is so lovely, with her grand unconscious face, which always makes me feel as if she had risen above emotion, into a different condition, where she has found a perfect calm.”

“I am afraid,” said Charlie, rather dejectedly, “that I have not a pure enough taste to appreciate statuary as I might; I should like to study it; where shall I begin?”

“You must go to the Museo Torlonia,” said Adelaide, very earnestly. “Mamma,” she added, turning her head to Mrs. Mainwaring with a languid movement like that of a water lily moved gently by the tide, “are we not going to the Torlonia Gallery, to-morrow? Mr. and Mrs. Newman have not been there yet.”

“Oh, come with us then,” said Mrs. Mainwaring, who thoroughly understood making up parties and helping people to enjoy themselves; “we shall be delighted if you can.” Charlie’s assent was sufficiently visible in his face, so Mrs. Mainwaring immediately went over to Lil and asked her would she go with them? and what time would suit her best?

“I think it is better to go early,” she went on, “if you can manage it. Suppose we come for you in the carriage, at half-past ten?”

Mrs. Mainwaring’s easy kindness was very charming, and Lil liked it.

Charlie and Lil and Jack Poynings left together. Silently they went downstairs, out into the Via Condotti, which was lit now, and looked pretty enough with all its gay shops. Then Jack Poynings began to chatter.

“Very nice people these, aren’t they? best people in Rome always to be met there, too; pretty set of rooms they have, eh, Mrs. Newman?”

“Very pretty,” said Lil.

“And how do you like the ladies themselves? Miss Adelaide is rather art-mad, you know; talks your head off about the Renaissance and all that sort of thing if you let her; but she is a most fascinating woman when she likes!”

“I can’t imagine her anything else,” said Charlie, in a low voice. Lil had been looking into the pretty shops as they passed up the narrow street; the way Charlie spoke attracted her attention, and she looked up into his face.

There was a dreamy look in his eyes, a tender expression about his mouth which she had not seen for many a long day, which had been upon his face when their love was young. She had not been able to call it there for a long, long, weary time; its absence had chilled her heart, and had made her feel as if the world had grown cold and dark.

It had come upon his face again; it was there; but was not for her.

Jack Poynings left them at the door of their

hotel; hardly knowing what she did, Lil shook hands with him, and went up the stairs to her room. She sat down wearily in a chair, feeling suddenly so tired that it seemed too great a task to lay her hat aside. In her pretty dress, she was a lovely picture of a fair tired woman. She knew nothing of that. She only knew that a blank wall was rising in front of her, that something had happened or was going to happen, which would shut her out from the light. She did not think clearly what it was; she tried to believe that she was only so very tired; too tired to think.

Charlie lit a cigarette and walked about the room, an absent look on his face. He did not seem aware of her presence. She did not attempt to remind him of it.

Dinner was eaten, the evening was passed, and some great gulf seemed still to lie between these two. Hardly a word did they interchange; Charlie was wrapped in his own thoughts, and Lil had a strange feeling as if her heart was a stone within her, and she had enough to do to carry it about.

The morning came, a brilliantly beautiful one. Lil had to put on her cloak immediately that breakfast was over, for Charlie seemed filled with a fever of apprehension lest she should not be ready when the Mainwarings came.

She was ready, however, standing at the door of the hotel when the carriage came down

the street. Adelaide looked out smiling, and seeing Lil there held out her hands to her as the carriage stopped. Lil took them and gazed a long moment into the dark mysterious eyes that met hers. In that moment she knew that these eyes held a fate for her in their power and beauty; she knew, too, that she could not help loving Adelaide whatever dark fate might fall between them.

It was a glorious morning indeed, and Adelaide seemed a part of it, so tender was her face, so radiant her expression. She had a peculiar habit of abstraction which sometimes offended people who did not understand her. She sat by Charlie's side in the large open carriage; but though when he spoke to her, she answered him, it seemed as though the answer came from far away. They drove through the Corso, and Mrs. Mainwaring bowed to several people who were passing through that bright busy street, but Adelaide did not appear to observe them. Her eyes were sometimes closed, sometimes fixed on the clear sun-lit sky, visible between the high houses.

"I expect some friends to meet us at the gallery," said Mrs. Mainwaring; "Mr. Poynings, for one, said he was coming. I don't fancy he cares much about statues; do you, Adelaide? He is not generally fond of coming with us to such places. I expect it is to meet you, Mr. Newman."

Mrs. Mainwaring formed a charming centre to a party. She talked incessantly about nothing in particular, but always in the kindest spirit. She was affectionate, and made herself at home with people the moment she had made their acquaintance. If they were well-off and good-looking, she had not the slightest difficulty in making of them intimate friends at once. Lil listened to her a great deal, and talked to her a little, and learned to like her very much. But she could not help noticing that Adelaide did not always reply to her mother, and that sometimes she seemed to shrink away from her a little.

The sun steamed down upon the muddy Tiber; and when they crossed one of the bridges it lay below them like a stream of sluggish molten gold.

“Isn't it lovely?” said Mrs. Mainwaring. But no one answered her. Lil had long since exhausted her ejaculatory capacity; and Adelaide looked as if she could not speak. Charlie gave one look to the river which to-day was wearing its true poetic colour, and then his eyes turned back to Adelaide's face. He was watching the expressions which passed over it, and trying to guess at their meaning.

The carriage stopped in a sort of side street, which looked like the back entrance to some stables; Mr. Poynings was immediately at the carriage door, and there was a lady with him. The party was complete, and Mrs.

Mainwaring led the way down the dark, uninviting path, from which all sun was shut out by high palace walls. A ring at a great bell, and a door opening in the wall, admitted them suddenly to fairyland. It was only a courtyard full of sunshine and orange trees; but it was exquisitely pretty after the shaded, dirty streets. The green-leaved full-boughed trees were covered with golden balls; some of the oranges were still half-green, and these perhaps were the prettiest. Lil uttered a little cry of delight and then was silent as she went into this sweet place.

Suddenly a hand stole through her arm; it was Adelaide's. They said nothing but went on, silently looked about them, through the beautiful courtyard, to the door of the gallery.

How cold that gallery was! It seemed to Lil that something death-like fell upon her as she passed out of the sunshine. It was a chill like that of the ilex shade.

"Miss Mainwaring," said Charlie's voice at that moment, "you have promised to help me understand these things. Here is the catalogue writ in choice Italian; I can read Italian only a little. There are five hundred statues in this gallery; how am I to know which to look at?"

"Come," said Adelaide, "I will show you."

It seemed as if she had forgotten him till now. In a moment she turned the light of

her face full upon him and smiled her pleasure in the task before her. She drew her hand from Lil's arm and went quickly, with her graceful step, down the gallery with Charlie at her side. Very soon they paused, in front of a most beautiful Venus. They were alone. The others lingered about some of the statues near the entrance.

The Torlonia Gallery is deliciously arranged; the statues are separated by innumerable curtains of a dull, faded colour, which form an admirable back ground for their pale beauty.

The place had a strange effect upon Lil. Its grandeur, its gloom and chillness, affected her like some dim and awful dream. She moved silently on between these lines of statues, looking at them, but more conscious of the two living forms moving on still in advance of the others.

The seated Livia charmed her; she stood a long time looking at the beautiful figure of the Roman lady, and fancied herself standing alone; but a voice at her side said:

“Do sit down a moment, Mrs. Newman; you are looking awfully white.”

It was Jack Poynings, who had been with her all the time, and had made several ineffectual efforts to attract her attention.

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Poynings,” she said, suddenly aware that she was very tired, and that the offered chair was just what she needed.

But she said no more, and Jack stood looking at her dolefully.

“Doesn't this place strike you as being excessively like a tomb or something equally dismal?” he said, presently. “Suppose we go out among the oranges and wait for the others there? I'm sick of the fine arts; one gets a positive surfeit of them in Rome. Shall we go out?”

“I am very cold,” said Lil, doubtfully; “perhaps too cold to appreciate anything; but I should like to go into the ante-Phidian room over there.”

Jack, who was the most good-natured of empty-headed beings, submitted willingly, and they went across into this room. Charlie and Adelaide were here alone. Lil had not known anyone was there, and her sudden shrinking back was momentarily perceptible even to Jack's not very alert faculties. But she conquered it instantly and advanced into the room.

Adelaide was standing in front of the “Vesta;” she had been speaking and her face was full of emotion. When she saw Lil, she turned to her, and putting her hand within her arm again, drew her in front of the statue.

“Look at that face with its deep-lidded meaning eyes, and its tender generous mouth,” she said. “Do you feel what those hands mean? To me the down-drooped one says ‘silence,’ the raised one ‘look up.’ She speaks to

women. Whom else should she speak to? It is for men to talk. We must learn in silence. Oh, the majesty of that strong womanly figure, that pure face with its marvellous expression of complete knowledge, of absolute quiet. That face has haunted me in my dreams. It will haunt you, Mrs. Newman, if you look at it long enough. Oh, to have lived in the days when art was alive!"

She turned and went away out of the room. Her eyes were wet with unshed tears. Charlie followed her. He scarcely seemed to guide his own feet, he followed her blindly. Lil remained gazing up into the sweet woman's face bent down towards her with a light in it as though the vision of the great beyond had once gladdened those eyes and made them goddess-like. But what was known to that stately face was held there secret. An atmosphere of stillness seemed to breathe forth from the cold marble.

"I will try!" said Lil, to herself, "I will try to learn—I will endeavour to look up, and surely I can be silent!"

That strong sweet face and the gestures of the meaning hands often afterwards returned to her. Friendless and alone in her difficult path, this voice from long past ages penetrated her inner ears.

"Shall we go out now?" suggested the faithful Jack Poynings again, after he had let her look a long time at the Vesta.

“Yes,” said Lil, “I am very tired and cold. But that statue had really made me forget it for the moment!”

They went down the long galleries to the outer door; the others had wandered away into the side rooms, and they saw no one as they went on. There was a faint sound of voices sometimes, and once Adelaide’s low-toned laughter reached them.

“How delicious the sunshine is!” exclaimed Lil, thrilled with delight as she entered its warmth.

“I’m so glad you like it,” said Jack Poynings, cheerfully; “I don’t believe Miss Mainwaring does. She revels in chilly, tomb-like places. People who have what is called the artistic temperament seem to me generally to like uncomfortable things! Hasn’t your husband got an artistic temperament, Mrs. Newman? I remember he used to write verses when I knew him years ago, and now, like Miss Mainwaring, he is fascinated by that horrid cold sculpture gallery.”

All this he said, leaning against an orange tree, and professedly studying its bark. In reality he was covertly observing Lil’s face. He began to think there was something queer about the quiet of this woman, who looked as if she ought to be what he would have described as “awfully jolly.”

She had found a seat in the sun, upon the

side of a stone basin; and she sat there, very still and silent. Her eyes were fixed upon the door of the sculpture gallery. Poynings, watching her face, saw suddenly a strange dark look come over it, a heavy look, as if a cloud had darkened the resplendent sunshine in which her form was bathed.

Charlie and Adelaide were just coming out together. She was speaking, and his eyes were on her face, and once, as she spoke, she raised her own eyes, full of fire, to his, and they seemed to draw light into his face, as the touch of a torch might bring sudden flame into kindling wood.

No one could look at that and not see! Jack Poynings looked, and saw, and understood. He was sorry for Lil, and sorry for himself. The sight did not please him, for he adored Adelaide Mainwaring. Yet, to him, though painful, it was not serious. He could not view it so. He did not like to see Adelaide flirting with a married man, but still, with a woman of her type, he could only regard it as a flirtation of the most innocent kind imaginable.

Lil looked and saw, and the whole naked truth stood before her eyes, alive, not to be put down or ever hidden away!

Charlie Newman was in love, in love with Adelaide Mainwaring. So deep, so overpowering was the passion that it had caught him unawares; it bewildered him by its

sudden intensity. He did not know his own state yet.

But his wife knew, and the earth seemed no more to be solid under her feet.

END OF VOL. I.

# IN THE FLOWER OF HER YOUTH.

A Novel.

BY MABEL COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF "TOO RED A DAWN," "AN INNOCENT SINNER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# IN THE FLOWER OF HER YOUTH.

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## CHAPTER I.

**A**LMOST every day Charlie and Lil went somewhere with the Mainwarings, or visited them at their rooms.

It was an intimacy which could not but increase rapidly. Mrs. Mainwaring liked new faces, loved to live in public, enjoyed going about a great deal. She was interested in Lil, partly for her own sake, partly for her father's. She always cultivated artistic and literary society, for Adelaide preferred it, and was best appreciated in it; and she thought that, when in London, she would like to know the Warringtons.

This made the intimacy easy. But whatever difficulties there might have been, the forces which were at work would have overcome them. One of the great mysterious laws of human life was in action, unseen, in the midst of this little group of people all ignorant and unconscious. Perhaps when the science of sociology has reached its positive

stage, we shall not be so easily surprised by the phenomena which occur amongst us.

In the beautiful city where a life-time of enjoyment and study is all too short, this little group of pleasure-seekers passed the sunny days, driving and walking, laughing and happy. The only one whose laughter was sometimes forced, whose face was often sad, and her step weary, was Lil. For she saw, or thought she saw, the impending hand of fate; the black shadow which it cast, fell upon her before it touched any one else. She could not but see it, for she knew Charlie's face by heart; the meaning of each change of expression was familiar to her.

Jack Poynings guessed something of what was going on, and consequently did not often join the party. For Adelaide ignored him very easily when she had a more sympathetic companion; as she had now. And, though he admired Lil, he did not care for the society of a woman who scarcely noticed his existence; and he began to think Lil's bright hair and vivid face a delusion and a snare, when he found that she could not be induced to flirt or to chatter nonsense.

For, indeed, Lil had never felt so silent as now. She had been startled by the sad reality of life, when she felt how ill and weary Charlie was, and she had no money or power to help him. But now she felt that something

far more real than that byegone trouble was close at hand.

That trouble was indeed gone! Not only were they in the midst of the beauties of art and nature, revelling in sunshine and enjoying each hour of the day, but all this, or something else—had at last done its work. Charlie was himself again. His spirits were inexhaustible; he never appeared tired, or out of sorts. His interest in art had been thoroughly re-awakened by Adelaide's society, and he was never weary of visiting the various galleries. His step had recovered its buoyancy, his eyes had caught their old fire. But Lil knew that all this was not merely the result of change of air! That light in Charlie's face was simply reflected from Adelaide's. When he left her, it was exactly as if the sun had set. When the party separated, his face faded; when it was again united he seemed to spring to life again. The whole man changed in Adelaide's presence. Lil grew accustomed to silence when she was alone with him; she did not care to break it only to meet with a cold and indifferent answer. He did not know he was cold or indifferent; he only felt tired, and indisposed to speak. The sun had gone from his sky; his instinct was to be dormant till it should rise again.

The truth was that he was Adelaide's slave, and followed her with his whole being, just as the sunflowers lean to the light. He was in

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the strong current of an irresistible passion which swept him along so swiftly that he had no time to realise its immense power. But there came a moment when he must struggle and awake!—or be sucked under and succumb, losing all hold upon himself.

It came, that dreadful moment.

Three weeks after that never-to-be-forgotten visit to the Ludovisi Gardens, Mrs. Mainwaring proposed to go again. She had an order which would admit them all; and the weather was still perfect.

“Yes, let us go,” said Adelaide, in her low, languid voice. She was always languid; but her repose was so generous and full of latent life that it stirred and aroused those about her.

Her words decided the plans always; for Charlie cared not where they went so that he might follow her, might hear her speak, might watch her dreamlike face. Mrs. Mainwaring, up to a certain point, obeyed any whim of her daughter's. And as for Lil, she had surrendered all desires of her own, any preference for one place over another. What was the majesty of the Pantheon, the splendour of the Sistine Chapel, to her? Once, an age ago, as it seemed—really but a strangely short time—these objects of art had been a deep excitement to her; now they had become removed from her and she could not turn her mind upon them. They appeared re-

mote and inaccessible as the universe of stars ; for straight before her eyes, perceptible to her every sense, was taking place something which absorbed the attention of her whole being.

It is very strange to go to a place, of which you have dreamed all your life, and to find it blotted out from your vision by an occurrence in your own personal career. It is very strange to visit something, which in itself you imagined must be productive of happiness, and to find yourself, spite of all that surrounds you, absolutely miserable.

All this Lil was experiencing. Rome was no longer to her the city of art ; it was the scene of the strangest phase of life she had ever lived through. The Ludovisi Gardens were not to her the most beautiful gardens in Rome ; they were the place where first Charlie and Adelaide had met.

For a moment, when she had heard Mrs. Mainwaring suggest spending an afternoon there, she thought of saying she would rather not go. But in another moment she had silenced herself. Why make a difficulty ; why take the trouble to speak or attract attention to herself ? Surely these gardens could have no more terrible associations for her than the streets of the city ?

And yet she felt as they drove up to the gates that day, as if she could scarcely breathe, as if the life were dying away within her.

It seemed to her that holding herself so forcibly in check must stop her breath soon!

And so it must, if it could have been maintained.

There were the peacocks, gorgeous as ever, stalking in their stately fashion about the gateway. There was the long cypress avenue—everything was as perfectly beautiful as ever. Charlie thought the whole effect even more exquisite than when he first saw it.

They turned into the Casino to look at the sculpture, before going on into the gardens.

“You told me I should have looked at the Juno,” said Charlie to Adelaide. These two led the way as usual. He did not complain now that the gallery was cold or dreary; he took his warmth, his sunshine, with him when he entered. Lil’s heart sank till it seemed to her too heavy to carry with her—surely she must sink under such a weight!—as she watched his face and saw how different was its expression from that day when they had visited this place together.

“There is the Juno,” said Adelaide, as they passed into the inner room. “She appears expressionless at first, I know very well. But, as you approach, you see that this results from a great stillness, a quiet, so intense that it covers all else and subdues the separate emotions into a whole of perfect consciousness. Consummation, complete knowledge, complete experience, is written in every line of that

sublime face." She caught her breath suddenly in a sort of awe and added, "Enthusiasm itself seems petty here."

She stopped speaking, and they stood there in silence; Charlie's eyes wandered from the marble face to the living one. At some moments there was an air of abstraction and rapture upon Adelaide's countenance which gave her face a grandeur. She seemed to forget herself entirely in her enthusiasm. Presently she spoke again in her low voice, which was never raised, however intense her interest in what she was speaking of.

"To touch upon such a state as that of this conscious and perfected Juno, passions and emotions must all be set aside, and life be realised as a broad stream which flows on towards a divine state, spite of all small obstacles or momentary pains. Ah! but we can never reach this condition, can we, Mrs. Newman? A great poet may rise above his own emotions and view them from a superior platform; but we, who are only women, cannot hope to rise out of the passions of the hour."

"It is impossible," said Lil; "we cannot escape from ourselves. That is not the face of a woman, but of the beyond which may come after a woman's life. The Juno has escaped from herself and reached heaven."

There was something strange in the sound of Lil's voice, quiet though it was. Adelaide turned and looked at her.

“Mrs. Newman, you are as pale as the statues! This place is too cold, let us go out into the sunshine.”

But Charlie lingered. He could not feel that the gallery was cold; he was impervious to such sensations. And he loved to hear Adelaide talk out her thoughts, as she would do sometimes, seeming to need no hearer. She seldom would speak in the sunshine.

He paused before the “Telemachus leaving Penelope.”

“Sad Penelope!” said Adelaide; “the light in her face is that of mother-love, as she looks down upon his lesser form. How beautiful that look of passionless affection is!”

Lil had gone out into the garden with Mrs. Mainwaring.

They were alone, these two; no one else was in the gallery but the custodian who stood at the door.

“But not so beautiful,” said Charlie, “as the love that has passion in it!”

Adelaide did not reply; but she looked at him to better understand his meaning; for there was something which startled her in his tone. She met his eyes and did not immediately withdraw her gaze. It seemed as though each looked into the other’s soul in that strange moment. It appeared to them both as if some event were occurring. Adelaide’s face changed; she grew a shade paler; without a word she turned away and went out into the garden.

The others had walked on and were only just in sight. Adelaide followed them ; Charlie kept at her side. In absolute silence they walked on through the lovely garden, unconscious of its beauty, unconscious of the golden sunshine which made the world that day all glorious, and but very dimly conscious of what was happening within themselves.

A strange sweet dream had fallen upon them, and in their shy unacknowledged joy of mutual sympathy there was something too wonderful, too absorbing, to admit of any other thought or feeling.

Through the paths hidden by tall hedges, through the avenue of medlars where the scent of the sweet blossoms made the air heavy, through the whole length of this walk the intoxication of a marvellous passion was upon Charlie. He had looked into her eyes and met their answering gaze. It seemed as if he stood alone in the world of flowers and sunshine, with this woman. She was a flower herself—a poem—a being made to live out the poem of love—and in the depth of her eyes he had seen awake a passionate sympathy. His yearning look had called it forth !

It was but a few moments walk through the high hedges and the sweet avenue. During those few moments these two, in whose hearts the brilliant star of love had arisen, seemed to themselves to be alone in the universe. They knew of none other life but their own. For

those few moments they obeyed their own natures as simply as the flowers amid which they walked.

Mrs. Mainwaring and Lil were standing at the end of the avenue. Mrs. Mainwaring was looking at the cones upon a magnolia tree and admiring the colours in them. But Lil stood like a statue, her face towards the two who approached her. Both walked with their eyes upon the ground. There was something in those faces which struck her to the heart like a death chill. She looked wildly from one to the other.

“Shall we go into your favourite ilex grove, Adelaide?” said Mrs. Mainwaring, as she heard the footsteps on the gravel path beside her.

“No, not there,” cried Lil, almost violently; “at least, I will not go! I cannot bear it!”

Her check upon herself had given way at last. She felt the demon of jealousy rise furious within her.

Mrs. Mainwaring turned, surprised at her manner. She was startled by her face.

“Mrs. Newman, you are ill!” she exclaimed.

“No, I am not ill,” said Lil, with a sort of sullenness such as she had never exhibited before. The simple passions sometimes appear to touch ground in our natures and rouse the very animal upon which our better self is built. Lil, stung, wounded, furious, felt at that moment as if she could bite a tender hand that touched her.

Charlie looked at her. It seemed to him as if he had been to sleep—dreaming—and suddenly had been awakened. He saw where he was—in the very midst of the current—in danger of going under and yielding up himself to the passion that was on him which the existence of social law rendered akin to madness.

For this woman before him, with the white face and trembling lips, whom he once had loved—this woman claimed him. He was bound to her by links of iron, as firmly as though he loved her still! He had enough affection for her even yet to feel suddenly how cruel a thing it was for her to have to stand there with a pain upon her face which turned its brightness into pallor.

“You are very tired,” he said, gently; “we will go home.” He drew her hand under his arm as he spoke. “Do not you come yet unless you are tired, Mrs. Mainwaring,” he said, turning to her; “I will find a cab outside and take Mrs. Newman home.”

“Take the carriage,” said Mrs. Mainwaring; “I insist upon it; it will hardly be a quarter of an hour in going to your hotel and coming back again, and I daresay we shall stay an hour longer. Don’t run the risk of waiting at the gates, for Mrs. Newman looks quite worn out.”

Adelaide stood back, dumb and frightened. She had, so far, been an innocent child in her

delight, given up to pleasure too deep, too natural, for thought. Suddenly, a pang of fear and shame shot through her, giving her a horrible consciousness of wrong. There, in that golden sunshine, amid the fragrant garden, came upon her a feeling unknown in her innocent life; a sense as of sinfulness.

“You are very kind,” said Charlie, with a strange guilty feeling of not deserving to be well treated. Then he turned and walked away with Lil, without having dared to raise his eyes again to Adelaide’s face. He had forgotten when he took that look of love from her eyes, innocent as a child, that he was bound in links which made those glances guilty. How could he meet those eyes again till he had burned out the memory of having but for a moment insulted this being, pure as the snow fresh from heaven!

The scent of the Japanese medlars had no sweetness for Lil, it made her faint with its heaviness. Never again could that scent seem sweet to her. It must always recall to her the first agony of loneliness, the intolerable bitterness which falls upon a woman when a love she has once had, and which she still returns, is taken from her.

Silently they walked on in the long slanting rays of the sun. Lil’s head was bent; she looked at the ground. She had no word to say. A commonplace was impossible to her just now. The mask had been thrown off;

she could keep silence, but she could no longer pretend to be happy. And she would not condescend to reproach a man whom she loved, because another woman was fairer in his eyes than herself. Not so low as that, she whispered in her heart;—I have not fallen so low as that!

But she was sinking fast towards that level. Misery crushes like a heavy stone. The spirit must be richly sweet which will yield sweetness out of pain as crushed flowers do.

The stone is heavy upon Lil's heart—soon its whole weight must press upon it!

## CHAPTER II.

**A**DELAIDE! her existence was a new light in Charlie's life; though he started in horror when he found himself betrayed into loving her, yet he could not help turning his face towards the flame of her being. His passion for her was unlike any other emotion he had ever experienced.

Lil had been his second self. Adelaide was a revelation, a fresh glory as of the sun new risen in the sky.

Lil was like himself. She was similar in type and temperament, and being intensely sympathetic by nature, she was swayed by his moods. Adelaide was utterly foreign to anything with which he was familiar. She was languid and warm as a rich summer noon, and he had no power to chill her or change her glow into gloom. She lived in a sphere of feeling remote from his, and her look of love had come to him from out that far off region. He understood Lil, and had always done so from the first stages of their connection. Adelaide was a mystery to him. He could not always reach her; indeed,

she sometimes seemed to him to be totally inaccessible. This arose from their vital difference of disposition. She was to him an undiscovered country, and had that fascination which ever belongs to the unknown.

He was absorbed in the inner contest. All that night he was haunted by Adelaide's face with its sweet unconscious smile. He scarcely knew when he dreamed or when he was awake ; for still she was before him.

Lil had hidden herself in a silence which he had not the courage to disturb. A fever seemed to be upon her which held her from sleep or from rest : she could not read or distract her thoughts, her mind was too full of an intolerable fire. She longed to be entirely alone, since she could no longer be loved. But that was impossible. She looked from her window into the street. So many houses !—so many homes !—and only one place for her. That place was by the side of a man who was weary of her, to whom her presence was a bitter reminder of the chain by which he was bound to her.

She made no mistake in this, she told herself, as she tried to hold her beating heart still. She had seen his face change and fall when his eyes fell on her in the gardens. Her presence was bitter to him then. He had done all in his power to

hide it; he had done all in his power to help and shield her at the cruel moment. She recognised this and felt that in doing that he had claimed her generosity. She had nothing—nothing—to reproach him with. But she knew, too well, that her image and her actual presence were to him the reminders that he must put aside for ever the cup he longed to taste.

To a proud woman, the burning humiliation of becoming an unloved burden is beyond all other shame.

In the morning Mrs. Mainwaring called, herself, to ask after Lil. She was kindness personified when her sympathy was aroused; and Lil's white face had alarmed her.

Lil left the sitting-room when she heard Mrs. Mainwaring's voice outside. "Tell her I am ill—anything," she said, in a sort of wild appeal to Charlie; "I cannot go out to-day!"

Charlie told Mrs. Mainwaring that his wife was ill. He did not know what else to say.

"I was afraid of it, when I saw how white she got yesterday," said Mrs. Mainwaring. "I hope she is not going to have the fever. It really is not safe to let one's-self get low in Rome. It is dreadfully unhealthy, unless one can eat and drink a great deal and never get into low spirits, you know, Mr. Newman; when we drove to Tivoli, the

other day, we were too late coming home. I saw that horrible blue mist rise on the Campagna, and it made me very uneasy, though I said nothing. Everybody has told me long ago we ought to be so careful about getting home before sunset."

"I dare say Mrs. Newman will be better in a day or two," said Charlie, hardly knowing how to answer.

"I am sure I hope so, for if not she will be seriously ill, and when once that fever gets hold of you it is not so easy to shake it off. One of my friends suffered from the effects of it for a year, and another died of the weakness, after having left Rome. I am afraid we were out too late ; but I don't think Rome suits Mrs. Newman. I have noticed how pale she has looked for some days. And to tell the truth I am anxious about Adelaide. She does not look like herself at all to-day. I don't think it's any use to stay in Rome if one feels ill ; it is dangerous. We have lived here for some years without a serious illness by carrying out that plan. Directly Adelaide looks pale we go away. I think I shall arrange to go away now, for Adelaide looked strange and miserable this morning ; and I advise you to leave Rome if Mrs. Newman is at all feverish. I have a perfect horror of the Roman fever ; it is most weakening. I will go back to Adelaide now ; we shall stay at home to-

day—but, if you like to call in this afternoon, I shall be very glad to hear how your wife is.”

Lil came back into the sitting-room and returned to the place she had left: she leaned her head back upon her chair and closed her eyes. She had no plan, no idea, no light. There was nothing to be done but to suffer as silently might be.

And this she did. Charlie walked about restlessly for a little while, and then he said to her, “Would you not feel better if you came out into the sunshine?”

“No,” she answered, very quietly, “I am too tired.”

They dared not meet each other’s eyes. The fiction of her illness must be preserved between them, else the whole fabric of their association would crumble away, leaving merely the bonds which held them.

Neither dared risk the destruction of the house of cards in which they lived. It seemed to them both that a glance of the eye was too great a risk to run; both looked away and took refuge in commonplace phrases when they spoke.

“Can I not get you anything?” asked Charlie, with a miserable guilty feeling of “making believe.”

“Nothing, thank you,” said Lil. He took his hat and went out without any further words. When the door had shut behind

him, Lil changed from a statue to a living fury. She tore at the neck of her dress as if she were suffocating. She pulled the pins from her hair with a passionate feeling that any fastening was intolerable.

She was sitting like this, her loose hair about her face, her bosom heaving as if some agony were hidden there too great to be contained, when Jack Poynings, with a slight tap at the door, walked in. He had often done this before ; the hotel door stood open and the servants knew him as a frequent visitor. But now he felt instantly, at the first sight of Lil's quickly uplifted face, that he had done wrong.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "a thousand times. I ought not to have come in like this. But—is anything the matter?"

"Yes," said Lil, feeling how impossible it was to say no, when he had surprised such a look upon her face, "I am ill."

"Good heavens," he exclaimed, "you are indeed ! Does Newman know it ? Is he out ? May I fetch a doctor ?"

"No, no," said Lil, "I only want perfect rest, I am over tired ; I want to be quiet !"

Such an expression came into her face, as she said this, that Jack felt half afraid. He was in the presence of some feeling deeper than he could understand.

"I will leave you to be quiet," he said, "will you send for me if I can serve

you in any way. I may come to ask how you are to-night? Be careful, Mrs. Newman; beware of the Roman fever!"

"The Roman fever!" repeated Lil, when he was gone. "What is it? Have I got it, I wonder? My veins are full of fire, my head burns. Has Charlie got it? has *she* got it? Are we all sick with the Roman fever, or are we all mad? I think it is that! Surely this madness can be stopped! Surely we can all be sane again, like other people! No; not now! never can it be the same again. We cannot go back and forget. I am afraid to go on living. I have such a terror of what the coming days will bring!"

While Lil, alone, tried in vain to calm herself, and walked her room wildly from end to end, Charlie was walking through the streets with the same vain purpose. He wandered through the Ghetto, and found in that dark quarter nothing which fixed his interest; he went through the dirty, picturesque streets of the populace; he walked till he was weary; but he was no calmer!

It seemed as if a steam engine had got inside his head. He could not think with that intolerable thud, thud going on, he said to himself. Yet he must think! he must decide, before he returned, how best to conduct himself between these two women -- both of whom he loved.

By degrees he began to see that there lay the point of his agony. If a man has grown weary of his wife he most often learns to dislike her and is careless whether his conduct offends her or no. But, though he had no longer any passion for Lil, he could not harden his heart towards her. For the years of their life together she had been his invariably gentle and loving companion. Never by any word or act had she given him cause for any feeling but love towards her. It was as impossible to think of hurting her as to take the unoffending life of a favourite thrush, because your fancy has led you to like better the song of the nightingale!

He saw this clearly. He knew that Lil had already guessed too much. He knew that he must hide from her all that he could in order to avoid wounding that tender nature. He knew that her sympathy with him was so keen, her love for him so strong, that it would be a hard battle to hide any feeling of his from her.

But it must be done: not only for her sake, but for Adelaide's. Adelaide, who, with all her rich development and warm womanhood, was as innocent as a child. Adelaide, who was guarded by a mother whose moral standard was that of conventional right and wrong.

He dared not think of Adelaide,—“that way madness lies.” He must concentrate his

mind on the one course open to him, concealment.

He had arrived at this conclusion half-a-dozen times, and was beginning to be too tired to walk, when he suddenly realised that he was in the Via Condotti, just outside the house in which the Mainwarings lived. He looked at his watch; it was late in the afternoon! He must have walked for hours, and that steam engine was still in his head!

He had a vague remembrance that Mrs. Mainwaring had asked him to go in in the afternoon. Was Adelaide ill, and might he not even ask how she was?

He could no more have resisted the attraction which drew him to the house than a stone thrown idly into the air can rebel against the force of gravitation.

“Yes, Mrs. Mainwaring was at home.” He was shown in to the pretty rooms where Adelaide held her little court. There were no courtiers now; no admirers, no chattering friends.

Adelaide was sitting alone; her head drooped, her hands in her lap, making no pretence of occupation. She rose up at the sight of him like a pale ghost. He had no idea himself how disturbed and worn he appeared. Silently, for a strange second, they stood looking into each other's sad faces.

Heaven knows how that silence would

have been broken, had not Mrs. Mainwaring come through the doorway from another room. She was a little startled to find Charlie Newman standing speechless there and Adelaide with her eyes fixed on him.

"Oh, Mr. Newman," she said, "I am so glad to see you; I have been feeling so anxious about your wife! You look very disturbed; tell me, is she worse?"

"I—I really don't know," said Charlie, appalled by recollecting that he had indeed not seen Lil since Mrs. Mainwaring had been at their hotel in the early morning.

"I have been out all day," he went on, feeling as if some explanation were necessary; "Lil seemed to prefer to rest quiet."

"Yes, I dare say rest is very good for her," said Mrs. Mainwaring; "but I don't think she ought to be alone. You don't look at all well yourself; sit down."

"The fact is," said Charlie, "I have got a frightful headache; I don't think I know exactly what I am doing; I have got such an intolerable thumping in my head."

"Oh, good gracious, Mr. Newman, we really are all going to have Roman fever!" exclaimed Mrs. Mainwaring; "that is just like Adelaide; she has not been able to hold her head up all day. See, here is a bottle of Eucalyptus tonic; it is said to be the best thing for the fever. Take it home and both of you take some; and pack up your things."

I am quite decided to leave Rome ; it is thought to be the healthy time now, but I've no confidence in the place ever being healthy. Adelaide insists upon passing a great part of the year here, and, of course, in some respects it is very charming and like no other place in the world. But it seems to me, after all, to be nothing but a horrid old graveyard ; there are dead people everywhere, not to mention that dreadful malaria. In two days we shall be off to Paris. Take my advice, and do the same."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Mainwaring," said Charlie, humbly accepting the bottle of Eucalyptus ; "I dare say you are right. Good-bye, I won't take up your time, for I am sure you will have plenty to do if you are going so soon."

"Yes, we really shall be very busy," said Mrs. Mainwaring ; "we are not just travellers like you ; this is more our home than any other place. I do hope you will find Mrs. Newman better."

Charlie went away, having received nothing from Adelaide but the strange look when he entered, and a bow, with averted eyes, when he left.

A blank, immovable wall had risen between them. Never again could they enjoy each other's society, innocently, as they had done until yesterday. Never again ! They were separated now as by an angry sea.

Charlie walked quickly the few steps from the Via Condotti to the Bocca di Leone. He hastily entered his hotel, and ran up the stairs. He so much lacked courage that he dared not delay. He had left Lil too long, he had been cruel to leave her alone like this when she was ill. He knew very well that she could not speak sufficient Italian to make herself understood, that she had no money—that, in fact, however ill she might be, she was helpless. And he could not conjecture in what mood he would find her. He felt as if she had a right to be furious, or to be cold. For the first time in his life he was afraid of her.

He found her very quiet, lying on a sofa. She had worn out all the fury she had to expend for that day, at least. But she was really feverish; her hands were burning hot, and her eyes glittered strangely.

“You are indeed feverish,” said Charlie, as he felt the hand which she held out to him, though without a smile. “Mrs. Mainwaring has sent you this Eucalyptus tonic; you must take some.”

“She is very kind,” said Lil, quietly. A stab went straight to her heart when she found he had been there; but she was too proud to show her jealousy.

“She is very kind; I will take some. But, Charlie, I do feel ill; I think Rome does not

suit me ; may I go home ? I could travel very well alone now I know the way."

"Mrs. Mainwaring has been advising me so strongly to take you away from Rome that I had quite decided to do so. We will pack our trunks and look up the trains."

"Thank God," said Lil, to herself ; "but Charlie," she said, aloud, "must you go ? There is still so much to see here."

"I am quite ready to go," said Charlie. He knew that Rome would be a barren wilderness to him without Adelaide. He was afraid to tell Lil that the Mainwarings were leaving ; the reason of his own readiness would seem too horribly obvious. He busied himself with any details, thankful for occupation, spite of the thud, thud of the steam engine in his head, which even dinner, that best enemy of headaches, did not drive away. He hunted up time-tables, planned different routes home ; insisted upon packing portmanteaus and making every sort of preparation that he could think of. All this served to brace him a little. He grew stronger as he realised that they were really leaving the city of delights ; that soon they must return to London and take up their position there. He remembered that Lil was his wife, the faithful friend of his poverty, and now the sharer of his good fortune and the mistress of his new home. He knew

that he had many small matters to attend to in connection with that fortune; that already he had neglected business long enough. He saw that at home, entering upon their new possessions and mixing in the society which would come about them, they would find duties which would help to restore a right feeling. He desired above all to do his duty to Lil, for he was touched to the heart by her gentleness and quiet. Home would be the place for him to do his duty best, where the circle of friends, who knew them of old, would impress upon him the feeling that Lil, and Lil only, was the woman he must be satisfied by.

He resolved never to see Adelaide again; unless, it might be, in his own house, where his position and Lil's would add a multitude of safeguards and help him to suppress his emotions.

This resolution quieted him more than anything else; it brought him some sleep. Lil had none; she lay still with wide eyes looking into the darkness. She was silent, but she had a sensation as if she were weeping inwardly, and weeping her very strength away.

And so it seemed; for in the morning she could hardly stand. Mrs. Mainwaring, who was always out early, called again and asked for her. Lil was in the sitting-room, and this time she made no attempt to escape. Mrs.

Mainwaring was shocked at the sight of her face and the new lines of pain upon it.

“Why, you hardly look fit to travel,” she said, “but still, you must go. You must not be here an hour longer than you can help. This air is not only poisonous, it is very relaxing. I believe the best plan would be to go to a mountain town from here and get some clear air before starting on the long journey to Paris. We think of staying at Siena; what do you say to travelling with us? It is always easier and pleasanter for a large party than a small one; we can often get a carriage to ourselves if there are enough of us. Besides, neither you or Adelaide to-day look fit to be left alone at all, and there is so much to do on a journey. I would look after your wife and Adelaide and see them into the trains you know, Mr. Newman, while you attended to the luggage; then, if you would arrange with those dreadful *cocchieri*, who always cheat me, I would choose the rooms at the hotels. Quite a blessing it would be to divide the labour; and I am sure I could make things easier for poor Mrs. Newman, who really scarcely looks fit to take care of herself at all.”

Lil sank into a chair while Mrs. Mainwaring was speaking, and covered her face. This one ignorant member of the party—was she the instrument of the horrible fate which was upon them all? Lil felt as if

she were in the agony of a nightmare. She saw Charlie was helpless. He could not politely refuse such a proposal, even if he desired to do so ; and she did not know that he did so desire.

But he, knowing how firm his resolve had been, seeing with how slight a touch his destiny could utterly destroy it, felt for the first time that he was utterly powerless in the stream of circumstances which shaped his life. He turned pale as he stood there when he heard Mrs. Mainwaring begin to make her proposal ; but, before she had finished, when he saw how impossible it would be for him to refuse, he felt the warm blood thrill through all his veins. He was to see Adelaide, he could not avoid it ; he was to travel with her ; to watch her fair, soft face through the long days.

Oh ! how he loved her ! What a burning passion it was which leaped with new vigour into consciousness within him !

It was all settled in a few words ; and Mrs. Mainwaring sat down, on the instant, and wrote to a *pension* which she knew of in Siena, to engage rooms for them all for two or three days.



### CHAPTER III.

**A**DELAIDE sat in her room, watching her maid who was busy packing. She made no comment, gave no orders, took no part in what was going on. She seemed quite careless what was done with herself or her belongings. It appeared to her as if she would never again take any interest in daily life.

Something had happened to her. She knew it only too well, yet dared not confess it even to her own heart.

She had been raised to the height of emotion, and flung again, suddenly, to the ground, all in one terrible and breathless moment.

Adelaide Mainwaring—whom no offers could tempt to marriage, who chilled off her admirers by her indifference, who scarcely seemed to distinguish one from another, but had moved on in her own orbit undisturbed by her satellites; this Adelaide had been roused at last, and shaken to the very deeps of her nature, only to realise, at the same instant, that the volcano awakened within her must for ever remain hidden.

For the first time in her life, she felt the

strange sympathy which we call love. And, as she awoke to the divine joy of that sympathy, she awoke also to the agony of despair. Two cries had gone from her heart to heaven in one breath; the cry of the spirit of love starting into life, the shriek of grief with which that spirit fell back, and hid its face of unearthly beauty. For it had no place, no right in Adelaide's heart. It was a guilty and wretched thing, this shape of loveliness which had arisen in her. Amid her pain and suffering, she sometimes paused to wonder how a thing of flower-like loveliness and seemingly natural innocence should look like a thing of sin.

She, too, had found in the same resolution as that which Charlie had formed, the only comfort. She would never see him again.

Mrs. Mainwaring had been to do some shopping, and so make one or two other calls as well as that on the Newmans. She came in, bright and alert, all her business done.

"I believe I have settled everything, Adelaide," she said, cheerfully, sitting down, and carefully depositing various small parcels which she had brought in, on a table at her side. "I met Mr. Poynings just now, in the Spagna, and he seemed quite overcome at the idea of our going away. I should not wonder if he comes in and proposes to you again, to-night."

"Oh, mamma," said Adelaide, appealingly,

with a look at the maid who was smiling over her work.

“Well, my dear, I beg your pardon, I’m sure ; but I didn’t know there was any secret about Mr. Poynings and his attachment. He’s always telling people that you would talk him mad in a week about the Renaissance and the glory of art, and all the rest of it ; and yet he would resign himself to that if you would only marry him ; you will have to, in the end, I expect, if you so coolly refuse all the better offers you get. I wish I knew how high your ambition goes ; but I have some comfort in thinking that if you fail and have to come down to Jack, he’s got a very good income.

A sigh was all the answer Mrs. Mainwaring got this time. Adelaide knew by long experience that it was hopeless to try and persuade her mother that she had no secret ambition in the matter of marriage ; and equally hopeless to try and stem her eloquence. But the piteousness of the murmur to which she gave utterance, attracted her mother’s attention.

“Oh, I don’t want to annoy you, Adelaide, I’m sure,” she said, “and you never will talk sensibly on this subject ; we will say no more about it. I have made a capital arrangement while I’ve been out, which I think will be very pleasant for everybody. I really do think you will like it, as you seem to enjoy

the Newmans' society ; they are going with us to Siena for a few days, and very likely we shall all go to Paris together."

Adelaide sat still, and speechless.



## CHAPTER IV.

**S**IENA, one of the most poetic spots imaginable, is fitted to be a very hot-house of romance. No love-born gallant, twanging a guitar, would appear out of place in these quaint old-world streets; a serenade is a natural thing where the men who saunter about in the moonlight are always singing. And those steep, narrow streets between the high, beautiful palaces are the very places for love meetings and love whisperings. No history or romance could find a background more beautiful for itself than in the marvellous scenery of Siena. And then the remoteness, the sense of distance which one has, from modern life. A different code of morals and of manners may be appropriate amid this garden-like Tuscany, in this old-world city, with its memories of past majesty. A man might woo quickly, stirred by the magic of this ruddy country; a girl might ripen suddenly into a very Juliet, with the strange stimulus of perfect beauty all about her.

The deep red-golden tints lay on the lovely land in all their marvellous richness; the olive

orchards gave their weird contrast of dim gray green ; the sun lay full upon it all, and called forth its utmost beauty when Adelaide looked out from the window of their *pension* that first morning in Siena.

Lil had refused to leave her room. She said she was worn out. Perhaps she was. The journey there had been one of those experiences which make a heavy mark upon the mind. All those long hours she had seen through the fringes of her half-shut eyes the tragedy progressing. Charlie was gentleness itself to her ; considerate and kind, he seemed a model husband. But she had seen how keenly the flame of his being leaned towards Adelaide, struggle though he might ; she had seen Adelaide waver between the double impulse of simultaneous passion and of shrinking terror.

She saw now when chance would have it that these two unfortunate beings must come in contact, the thrill of acute delight passed through both agitated frames. She saw how it was an event when their glances met, a thing to tremble at if their hands touched. She felt the chill, like ice, of Charlie's gentle manner towards herself ; for under that gentleness and visible through it, was a coldness, mastered by a tender conscience. He touched her as he might touch a statue. And she saw before her very eyes the passion, the warmth, that once had been hers, given to

another woman. And she saw that other woman tremble under it, vibrate with its touch.

Gradually jealousy grew all powerful within her. It blinded her eyes and hardened her heart. She hated them; these two who made her suffer.

Mrs. Mainwaring was with her in her room this morning, making some effort towards her comfort. And Lil, who longed only to be left alone, had to be grateful for the real kindness shown to her, yet she could not clearly see Mrs. Mainwaring in her present state; what she saw was Adelaide's mother, one who had helped to bring this hideous wretchedness upon her.

Adelaide looked out at the perfect landscape with a trembling delight in its beauty, for there was some one by her side who seemed now to enter into her every feeling yet whom she hardly dared speak to. They stood there silently looking at the beauty which lay so still in its richness.

Mrs Mainwaring came into the room. "Are you not going out, Adelaide?" she said. "You have so desired to see Siena, I wonder you waste any time indoors."

"But you are coming, mamma?"

"No, dear; I agree with Mrs. Newman, a little rest is very necessary sometimes. Your enthusiasm carries you through anything, but I'm not artistic enough to go out when I am

tired, even to see Siena. I have no doubt Mr. Newman will take care of you ; surely you want to go out and see the pictures and all the rest of it. Don't you, Mr. Newman?"

"Oh, of course ; I shall be delighted to go with Miss Mainwaring," said Charlie, wondering as he spoke what was to become of them if this kind of thing was to go on. "Do you think," he added, making a feeble effort to draw back, "that I may leave Lil?"

"Oh! I will take care of her," said Mrs. Mainwaring, with hearty kindness; "I am sure she will let me look after her; you know, Mr. Newman, we have never been here before, we have often planned to come but something has prevented it. Adelaide has been most anxious to come and study Sodoma's pictures, and if you will take care of her my mind will be easy, and I shall be so thankful to rest."

In blank silence Adelaide left the room. Charlie wondered while he waited whether she had resolved not to go out, and if so what reason she would give. But, however she may have desired to do this, she evidently saw no way, for presently she returned in her walking dress, and they set out together without more words about it.

Lil heard them go out and, rising, looked from her window which opened on the street. She saw their retreating figures ; she saw them pause at the end of the street, looking,

apparently, at some approaching object. Lil soon saw what it was—two great white oxen, with their branching horns, were coming down the steep street; they drew a pretty basket-cart full of wood, and a handsome Tuscan peasant led them, walking in front with the cords over his shoulders and looking very much as if he were drawing the meek, slow, beautiful beasts after him.

Adelaide was in ecstasies over the picturesque group. Lil, from her high window, watched her rival's face with its changing wealth of expression.

And she hated it! She had fallen so low in the fury of jealousy and the sense of wrong that raged within her that, at this moment, she hated the face which but a short time ago had seemed so charming.

But when she found how fierce this feeling was, she shrank away from the window frightened at herself.

“Oh, I cannot have come to this!” she cried out. “Do I hate her—Adelaide, a creature tender and innocent enough to be an angel—a woman whose hurt to me is all unconscious; O, God, save me from myself!”

She was not really tired or desirous of quiet; indeed, she seemed possessed by an unnatural restlessness. She waited until Mrs. Mainwaring had settled down to read in her own room and then she dressed herself and

crept quietly out. She longed to be free of the house, to feel the fresh air and, above all, to be alone.

At the end of the street in which they lodged was an open space where stood a church. The peasants went in and out to their prayers. At the side of the church was a wide view over the country. Lil leaned her arm upon the wall and looked long at the wealth of loveliness before her. She knew how beautiful it was, that it was more beautiful than anything which she had ever seen. Imagination could never have brought before her mind such exquisite shades of colour as those which lay over this landscape.

Yet, though she recognised its glorious beauty, the scene was barren to her. It produced no glow, it called forth no delight, she had lost, for the moment, all power of appreciation. The bitter feeling which swelled her heart shut out all gentler emotions.

She thought of the two, now together, walking through this lovely romantic old city. She fancied them looking at the palaces, entering the churches, searching for the rare pictures. Surely, now they had not her presence to remind them of her existence, they would forget it; they would be happy together!

The thought was a pain to her like the pain of death, without the release that death would have brought. It was impossible but

that she must suffer like this; her heart, her life, her very self was bound up in Charlie, was united with him absolutely. To detach her affection, her existence from him, was, indeed, a pain like that of death. If he had died, and she were weeping now over his grave, her grief would have been an easier one. She would have understood her sorrow; she would have had the right to speak of it, to cry out aloud. She would have had sympathy. Now her suffering must be buried in her own heart; no one dare offer her consolation even if any guessed her pain. And it seemed that God and man alike commanded by their laws that she should permit none to guess it. Her husband was dead to her; she stood alone and unloved, but she must keep her desolation a secret within herself.

“I cannot!” she exclaimed, striking her hand violently upon the stone wall; “I was not brought up in the conventionalities of society. What have I to gain by suffering in silence? I will rebel. I will be free.”

Her action had been so rough and sudden that she had hurt her hand. This roused her, and looking round she found a group of peasants, who had just come out of church, were stopping to stare at her. She must have been speaking aloud in her excitement.

She did not wish to become the centre of attraction in the character of a mad English-woman. So she hastily walked away and

climbed one of the steep streets. Up one queer little crooked hill and down another and she found herself in the Piazza del Campo, immortalized by Dante. Its quaint shape and singular appearance arrested her attention. For the first time she recollected that she knew neither the street nor house in which she was staying. From here she felt she could find her way back, but it would not do to go any farther. It is a strange experience to wander about an unfamiliar town where you are unknown to all the inhabitants save those of one house and from that house to feel it better to be absent.

Mrs. Mainwaring, whom she had known about a month, was the one member of the party who could honestly be glad of her appearance. It was a mere make-believe, she told herself, that amiability of Adelaide's. Two women, placed as they were, must equally desire each a stiletto for the other. Not just now, perhaps, for surely Adelaide must be content when she had her admirer, her lover, as her companion! What matter if he were another woman's husband? She had all his sweetness, the tenderness which had once belonged to another woman.

Lil was startled at her own thoughts as they formed themselves in her mind. At one moment she thought these hideous things of Adelaide, at another reproached herself with being guilty of some insane injustice. But in

the end bitterness won the day, for she could find no way out of her gloomy and passionate mood.

After the long years of mutual dependence which she had lived with Charlie, it was an extraordinary experience this sensation of solitude, of suffering alone, with no one by her side to scold or sympathise. It came upon her as she walked, miserable and desolate, up and down the Piazza, that she had all but lost her individuality in this close association with the man she loved. She had to find it again now, and it was a pain to her like that of death or of birth.

As she walked, absorbed in her dismal wild feelings, there came a sudden sweet voice at her ear. It was Adelaide.

"It is Mrs. Newman! And alone too. Oh, where is mamma? Mrs. Newman, you look ill; you are white! Take my arm, you must not walk alone."

Lil had indeed turned white. It was no illness, but a mental shock. A minute ago, what had she thought of this woman? What fate had she wished for her? And now there was this fair, flower-like face close to her own, full of tenderness and warm affection.

Silently she submitted to be led home, her arm through that of the woman whom half-an-hour ago she had fancied stabbing with satisfaction. Charlie fell behind; he was suffering too, if not so keenly as Lil, and was

very glad to be unobserved for a little while.

The two women went back to the *pension* together. Adelaide talked about Sodoma's pictures, about the striped cathedral, about the beautiful palaces. She was evidently nervous and unnaturally excited; something had disturbed her. But she was capable of suppressing herself and endeavouring to make the strange position a shade less terrible to her rival. They went up the stairway of the old palace in which their *pension* was kept, and Adelaide made the way seem short with her quick, soft words. At last they reached the door of Lil's room. "Let me take off your cloak for you," said Adelaide; "you are so tired."

Lil did not resist her. It would have seemed like pushing back some tender bird that pressed its timid, downy breast to yours.

There was a couch in the room. Lil, really weary with emotion, sank down upon it, and Adelaide loosened her cloak. Lil lay back and watched her as she put the cloak aside, and, when Adelaide turned again, suddenly put out her arms to her. Adelaide fell on her knees by the couch and pressed her burning cheek against Lil's face. For a long, strange moment these two held each other in a warm embrace. When Adelaide stirred to move away, Lil held her for an instant closer, and kissed her passionately.

Adelaide returned these kisses and then quickly drew back and left the room. Charlie was pacing the corridor; he had seen Adelaide enter Lil's room and waited till she came away before he went in himself. Adelaide, apparently blind to his presence, hurried into her own room where she found her mother sitting reading. She sat down in a chair and swayed herself backwards and forwards as if to assuage some intolerable pain or restlessness.

"Why, child, what is the matter?" exclaimed Mrs Mainwaring, in alarm.

"Nothing," or "I don't know," were all Adelaide's answers, while she sat there pressing her hands to her head, with wild action, as if some strange things were within it.

And, indeed, strange things were there. Strange fancies, strange thoughts, and a terrible consciousness!



## CHAPTER V.

**M**RS. MAINWARING passed a night of anxiety, such as she had never known before. Adelaide was always delicate, and, from her excitable temperament, a responsibility. But her mother had had some idea in former times of trouble, of what ailed her. Now she could not understand her condition. She was perplexed to the last degree by Adelaide's unaccountable restlessness, and by the strange, almost sullen, silence, she preserved in spite of it. But at last Adelaide slept; and Mrs. Mainwaring anxiously watching her sleep, till she felt certain it was assured, heard her whisper one word—one name—which made her start and quiver with amazement.

She went back to her own room buried in thought. She wondered a thousand times—could she have been mistaken? She doubted her ears, doubted her memory, as we do when some incredible thing has occurred.

Mrs. Mainwaring, so far, had been the only one of the party who was quite undisturbed by any strange feelings or unusual experiences. But the next morning, when she dressed to go to the breakfast table, she looked harassed

and uneasy. She had carried the others over all difficulties by her natural brightness and her social qualities. This morning it seemed as if these had deserted her. They all met at breakfast, except Lil, who pretended to be tired, and was in reality pacing her room like a caged animal. Several times, Charlie, looking up, found Mrs. Mainwaring's eyes fixed on his, with an expression in them quite new to him, and which disconcerted him strangely. But he did not understand it, fortunately for him; probably, if he had not been innocent of what she suspected him of, he would have understood that questioning, uneasy look.

"Mamma, you are more tired this morning than if you had been to see those beautiful pictures yesterday," said Adelaide; "you must come out to-day; do let us all go together."

"I don't want to see any pictures," said Mrs. Mainwaring, irreverently; "I'm not in the mood for them. But I should like a long drive; shall we see if Mrs. Newman will go?"

"Let me go and ask her," said Adelaide, rising quickly.

She went to Lil's door and spoke to her. At the sound of Adelaide's voice, Lil came and opened it at once; she was dressed, and Adelaide saw that her absence from the breakfast-room, did not mean she needed rest.

"Do come out with us, Mrs. Newman," said Adelaide; "we are going for the loveliest

drive in the world ; you know it is a sacred duty to go out driving when one is in Siena ; will you go ? ”

“ I think I must indeed stay at home and write some letters,” said Lil, after a moment’s hesitation. In that moment, a rush of questions had swayed her this way and that. Could she endure to sit opposite Adelaide, and her husband, the man who once had loved her, and whom she still loved with all the foolish faithfulness of a devoted woman, and be unable to hide from herself the sight of the passion which existed between them ? No, it was impossible ; it would be unbearable. Yet she found it harder to refuse Adelaide than anyone else, as Adelaide had guessed instinctively.

“ No, I cannot go,” she said, with decision ; “ I have to write to papa. I think, Miss Mainwaring, it is a week since I wrote to him.”

“ Oh, then I will not persuade you any more,” said Adelaide ; “ yet, Mrs. Newman, the air of this place is so delicious ; think how much good it might do you ! ”

“ No, I cannot come,” said Lil, drawing back into the room, and pretending to turn to a table on which lay her writing materials. Adelaide went back to the breakfast-room. Lil listened to her footsteps passing away down the corridor. Hot tears had risen to her eyes, and in another moment, would have

been upon her cheeks—tears of rage and disappointment and burning jealousy. “Oh, they will be so much happier without me!” was the thought that repeated itself over and over in her head. But, on the instant, she heard Charlie’s voice and footsteps—and the tears sank back to her heart, unshed. Pride gave her a strong self-control. She sat down at her table, and when Charlie entered the room, was too busy writing, to all appearance, to pay him any attention. He very readily accepted the situation. Bitterly she thought to herself, how, a year ago even, he would have entreated her to go out—have declared that he would not go himself, unless she did. Then, he never would take a pleasure unless he shared it with her. Now, he was so easily put off—so readily content with any arrangement she might choose to make for herself.

The carriage had come; Adelaide and her mother went down the stone stairway. Adelaide was quiet, and Mrs. Mainwaring unusually grave. Lil listened to every sound with acute intelligence. They were in, and the horses started off, clattering up the stoned street. Lil rushed to the window to see them go; she could not resist it; there was fascination in this feeding of her agony. Charlie was leaning forward, speaking to Adelaide with that smile in his eyes, which, with him, existed only for the woman he loved. Oh, how well she knew that look! that look of tenderness.

She leaned out of her open window, confident that he would not see her, his eyes were so intently fixed upon Adelaide. But, suddenly, he leaned back and looked up, and in so doing caught sight of Lil's face, her figure stretching out into the sunshine. Such a stricken face—white, and stricken; was that indeed Lil? He almost uttered an exclamation, but checked himself in time. But he looked so startled that Mrs. Mainwaring asked him what was the matter. "Nothing," he said, and relapsed into a silence from which it seemed he could not rouse himself. He was aghast at what he had seen. Had Lil penetrated into his very soul? Was she aware of his every feeling that she should show such suffering on her face? Was it then impossible for him to baffle her insight?

The scenery around Siena is so exquisitely lovely, that it seems like sacrilege to talk of ordinary things when one is amid its glory. It is intoxicating to some natures, this rich beauty which lies in such abundant wealth upon every line of the landscape; to others it is quieting; it seems like something too beautiful, which one cannot rightly understand. The sense of beauty is stretched to its utmost and the whole being grows still and silently joyous, even when one is set upon cheerfulness; it is easy to be quiet amid these hills and valleys of Tuscany, where colouring has reached its climax, and where nature calls you

every moment to observe some delicacy which she has wrought. These three, each oppressed with a secret care and strange anxiety, drove on, as though they had got astray into fairyland, and could not yet rouse themselves from the dark and terrible dream of real life. For a long time no one spoke at all. They passed through the valley where tall, ghostly white poplars rose out of the hollow, and held their pale branches against the ruddy foliage of the rich hill-side. On over the hill into another and lovelier range of country, where the olive orchards gave the dim grayness which is so eerily beautiful.

Every now and then, Charlie found Mrs. Mainwaring's eye fixed upon him. She always looked away instantly, but after meeting this gaze once or twice he grew uneasy. He could not understand that new look. Why should she think of him instead of the lovely landscape? Adelaide never took her eyes from the distant hills. Why should Mrs. Mainwaring watch his face? What was she trying to read there?

While these three were passing through the beautiful country, separated, yet united by a common uneasiness, Lil at home, alone, shut in her room, was tearing her heart to shreds. "Hell has no fury like a woman scorned." The black rage of jealousy, which was rising within her, seemed to herself as if a mouth of hell had been opened and its

scorching fire had entered her very soul. She did not know herself; many times she put her hands to her head and stood still, trembling, trying to recall that woman which she once was—gentle and indisposed to anger; now she felt herself transformed, converted into something horrible. “Oh, if I had but a friend to speak to, it might help me to find myself again!” she cried aloud, as she struggled with her passion. But she was alone. She had to fight out the frenzy by herself, without any aid from outside her own breast.

A woman who loses her lover suffers, yet she is free to forget her pain; but a woman, whose husband wearies of her, is brought face to face with an insoluble problem, an unceasing agony.

Lil, as yet, could not think, she could only feel. She did not realise to the full her position. She only knew that the man who had loved her had taken the love of her life away from her before the fascination of another face. She could not yet grasp the full horror of the situation. She forgot that Adelaide might be more keenly hurt in the affair than herself, that Charlie, loving such a woman as this, could have no choice, but to repress his passion. All she saw yet, was herself, alone, neglected, though not openly; she wondered, would open neglect have been easier to bear? This was so trying, so cruel, because her husband



we go to the ...  
if you would

In ...  
pressed was she ...  
seemed ...  
looking ...  
was very ...  
seemed ...  
He was never ...  
making a ...  
the effort was ...  
mean her ...  
upturned ...  
his

- I will come if ...  
she could never have ...  
voice sounded ...  
and cold which ...  
den warmth—the ...  
loved how full of ...  
how gentle ...  
could be cherishing ...  
and hatred towards ...  
as her own soul and ...  
his mute appeal ...  
must be some ...  
surely she had been ...  
nightmare.

But no, this was not ...  
from her chair without ...  
year ago, it would have ...  
forget; lately it had gone ...



tried his best to conceal it, and yet he was evidently helpless before the force of this new passion. For whom? A woman whom he had known a month. Lil looked back over the long years in which she had worked, denied herself, conquered her defects of character and education, surrendered her own ideal of life, desired none of the pleasures which were natural to her—all for love of him. And now in one short month of Adelaide's society, all the memory of this was swept away, and there was only left the ruins of a marriage. Its ruins! Is this what it always comes to? asked Lil of herself. Do people, after the first blush of their happiness has gone, live on amid such ruins as these? "Oh, I cannot do it!" she cried; "it is intolerable, I will not be tied to a man who is sick of me, the shame of it would kill me! I must find some way of escape."

How different was her picture of that drive from the reality! She pictured these two in a lovers' heaven, each drinking in the tender tones of the other; she saw Mrs. Mainwaring intent upon her own pleasure, indifferent, because ignorant. "Oh, I hate them all," she cried aloud, with hands tightly clenched. "I hate them that they can be so base, so treacherous, so false to me! I hate the mother for her blindness. Ah, well, she will be rewarded. She will be ashamed when she sees the position her daughter has placed herself in. Her

shame is greater than mine ; I am glad of that, —I am glad of that.”

It was a sort of madness that was on her, that made the blood seem fire in her veins, that made her heart seem black to herself, too black to contemplate without a shudder. Now she rose like an avenging fury, and shook her trembling hands, impotent in their wrath, as though she could scatter curses on the absent who tormented her ; now she shrank back, terrified and shuddering at her own wickedness.

It is the frenzy which drives men and women to murder. Jealousy, that black fever which runs so close upon the heels of love, the joyous madness ; it is a poison hard to get out of the blood ; it dims the eyes, and makes the world look different ; it takes the energy out of the mind ; it saps ambition at its root ; it kills the capacity for healthy pleasures. Here was Lil, amid the perfect wealth of nature and art, so changed by this fell disease, that she preferred to remain within four walls, to yield herself undisturbed to the agony which was upon her.

When she heard the carriage come clattering down the street—an unmistakeable sound, for, as a rule, only carts drawn by oxen passed beneath the windows,—she looked into the glass and was shocked at her face. She tried to recover her balance, to still her whirling brain, to call up a usual, a familiar expression

The effort was too great, she almost fainted under it. But she heard their voices on the stairs, Adelaide's low, rich laugh, and Charlie's voice speaking in tones of ordinary cheerfulness. The sounds went through her like stabs. She put her hand to her heart, as if physical pain were being inflicted there. She looked wildly round as if for escape. There was none. She must stand her ground. She must face these people, a rival, a false husband. Surely her pride could give her strength to hide the pain from them? Charlie's hand was on the very door, when suddenly she seemed to become transformed. She heard him say to Adelaide, as they stood in the corridor, "You are very tired, do not go to the cathedral now!" that was all, but oh, how well she knew every intonation of his voice. How clearly she heard the infinite tenderness expressed in those simple words. She hardened suddenly, her face changed and grew cold. Quickly she sat down to her writing-table and took up her pen; she had not written one word since she had been left alone in that room.

He came and put his hand on her shoulder. "Busy still?" he said. His voice startled her, there was something new in it, a tone which had never been used to her before. It was wonderfully gentle, but it sounded like the voice of a stranger; someone removed, and far away from her. "Will you not come, if

we go to the cathedral? I should be so glad if you would."

Lil turned and looked up at him, so surprised was she at the way he spoke. He seemed unconscious of it himself, he was only looking rather anxiously for her answer. He was very pale, and there was something, as it seemed to Lil, altogether unnatural about him. He was never good at concealment. He was making a fierce effort to master himself; and the effort was evident. Lil sat still for a moment, her hands on the table, her face upturned to him, her eyes trying to read his.

"I will come if you wish it," she said; and she could never have guessed how soft her voice sounded. The heart that lay all stiff and cold within her, was touched with a sudden warmth—this face, so familiar, so well loved, how full of pain it was, how appealing, how gentle! It seemed incredible that she could be cherishing within herself such wrath and hatred towards this man whom she loved as her own soul, and who came to her with his mute appeal in his eyes. Surely there must be some terrible hideous mistake; surely she had been dreaming—touched with nightmare.

But no, this was not so, for he turned away from her chair without the caress, which, a year ago, it would have seemed so strange to forget; lately it had gone out of fashion be-

tween them. But now if he had stooped to kiss her, she would have, indeed, fancied all her suffering to have been born of imagination. But no, he turned away and sat down, with a weary air, which reminded her of the miserable time at home before the money came. She leaned over her table again with a heavy sigh.

The walk to the cathedral was given up. Adelaide was in so strangely overwrought a state when she got to her room, that her mother would not let her leave it again. "Adelaide," she said, fixing her eyes upon her, "we will go straight on to Paris. This place does not suit you any better than Rome. It is very strange, for mountain air generally makes you strong and bright; but it is very evident that Siena is doing you no good."

Adelaide's only reply was an undistinguishable murmur. She was lying on a couch and had drawn a shawl about her. When her mother gave her that keen look, she put the shawl so that it covered her face. It seemed as if her strongest desire was to hide herself away. And, indeed, she knew of nothing else which she did desire. She had but one purpose—to keep her secret from everyone about her. She did not appear any more that evening; and when Lil saw her the next day, she looked broken and haggard as though she had been through a heavy illness.

Mrs. Mainwaring found her position a difficult one. She did not like to start for Paris while Adelaide looked so wan, for fear of wearing out her strength completely; and she could not exactly suggest to the Newmans that they should leave Siena. So it went on from hour to hour, from day to day, all the members of the party in a sort of despair, yet none of them knowing exactly how to act, how to break the horrid spell which seemed to lie upon them. Charlie, of course, should have been the one to act; he might have left Siena. But there is one thing in which our common nature is but weak, and that is in the resistance of temptation. It is surprising, how strong we can be sometimes, but too often that strength arises from our fear of consequences, our dread of disaster to ourselves or others, these terrors having more power over us than the temptation. So it was with Charlie Newman. His love remained mute, because he knew too well that the recognition of its existence would be pain to Adelaide, pain to Lil, pain to himself; therefore he resisted the incessant temptations which were about him, and preserved his silence. But the temptation to see her face, to hear her voice, to listen to her words, and drink in the light of her bright spirit—this he could not resist, for he did not see that any greater disaster could result from it, and therefore the temptation had its full sway

over him. He could not contemplate the idea of going away, of deliberately leaving this woman who had become the sunshine of his being, now that circumstances had thus thrown him so intimately into her society.

And so the bright days of brilliant sunshine succeeded one another, and these four people met incessantly, went out together, took refuge in small deceits to conceal the difficulties of their association.

Lil went out with them, and, indeed, went wherever Charlie wished her, for the pleading of his eyes was irresistible. And thus it was that gradually, a strange conviction was forced into her mind, something more incredible and terrible when first she began to realize it, than anything else which she had experienced.

Adelaide grew whiter and more fragile-looking with every successive day. Even Lil, who was not accustomed to her, could see that she was being consumed by some internal and tormenting fire.

The effort which Charlie was making momentarily to master himself, to keep within the limits which he had set himself, was gradually becoming written on his face in new lines and a changed expression. An overpowering weariness of life appeared to oppress him, save when Adelaide was near, and then he started strangely into animation; an emotion roused him which he had hidden, a joy awoke

within him which had to be disguised. But its existence could not be concealed from eyes like Lil's. His moods shook her, his passion swayed her, his pain cut her to the heart.

And, oh, that mute look in his eyes, as though he had resigned himself to live in silence, and speak out of his soul no more!

The sight of all this, gradually affected Lil so that her own frenzy grew still; she began to see the situation more clearly.

And the strange conviction which was forced into her mind, which rose like a hideous fact before her eyes, never again to be hidden away was this—

These two were sacrificing themselves for her. She, it was, who was the most considered, who was treated with an infinite tenderness and respect by both.

One day when Charlie spoke to Adelaide, Lil heard her reply in a manner which she could hardly have imagined her capable of. It was fierce, angry, almost rude. And then, seeing Lil near her, she changed suddenly, and a smile of angelic sweetness came upon her face. Lil was half frightened by the transition. What did it all mean?

That she, who was used by them both as if she were some tender thing, was in herself, the blank, immovable wall which separated them. And they, knowing what they did, with open eyes and bleeding hearts, yielded

up themselves before her rights, without a protest, but with a marvellous graciousness.

Immovable! Could it be? Was she indeed born, sent into the world to stand immovably where she was not wanted, to make others unhappy? And, above all, was it to those she loved, that she was doomed to bring pain, and disaster, and distress?

The thought was too ghastly.



## CHAPTER VI.

**M**RS. MAINWARING, a woman who could not endure inaction, grasped the key to the situation forcibly at last. She told the Newmans that Adelaide appeared really ill. She thought, after all, it would be better for them to travel alone. She managed to do this without rudeness. True, Charlie was beyond recognising rudeness, he knew his unstable position too well, and Lil would not have blamed Mrs. Mainwaring, even if she had been rude.

Trains were looked up, portmanteaus strapped—the carriage came—and all at once the wrench was over.

“When shall we start?” said Charlie.

Siena had no attraction for him now; he could no longer see its beauty, and, as for Lil, she fancied she was growing blind to everything outside her own sensations.

It was a horrible condition to be in. “Surely,” she said to herself, “this cannot last! I must be able to end it, in some way. It is not possible to go on suffering like this to the end of my life!”

“I should like to go home, Charlie, if you would,” she said. So it was settled easily, for

to go was what he desired. They prepared to start as soon as possible, and were soon on their way, travelling night and day to London. Lil did not appear to feel fatigue; in truth her mind was too full of a thousand wild and terrible thoughts for any weariness of her body to make itself noticeable. In the long dark hours of the night, the tempting dream of suicide, which has fascinated so many of the weak and miserable, often came to her. It is so easy to think—one desperate act and I shall be free, I shall have put an end to all this. But her belief in her own immortality took away for her the charm of of this dream. When the mind is accustomed to regard death as the happy entrance into an improved state of existence, it is hard to reconcile oneself to appearing upon that new stage in a thoroughly undignified manner. "I might be no happier," thought Lil, "and how miserable I should make Charlie for ever so long. I dare say he would be glad if I died quietly and naturally, but if he thought he had driven me to suicide, it would haunt him. It would be a selfish thing to do, even if I was happier, for they would both be wretched. Besides, I don't want to die yet!"

Indeed she did not—she was young and ardent. Her whole nature rebelled so passionately against repression or unhappiness, that she certainly could not yet bring it to submit

to the idea of death. It was only in the stillness of the weary nights, with no sound in her ears but the ceaseless noise of the train, that this temptation became visible to her. She could not sleep; and she grew to fancy sometimes that she was already in another world, and was being punished for her sins by an eternal vibration. There was no object to distract her thoughts, but the weary, indifferent face opposite her. O, was it possible that all her life she was to be opposite that face, with that cold look upon it?—that never again was her presence to bring the old familiar light into those eyes? Ah, no! she could not live on, unloved, a burden, an obstacle! It was impossible. Love was her creed, her religion, her very life. She had no other faith to cling to, no other hope to live for. There was nothing which the dull years would lead her to, if love was denied her; there could be nothing to make the present moment precious if she was to be this hateful thing, a woman unloved. Ambition had become dormant in her since her marriage; she had given herself up so wholly to the labour and the pleasure of her domestic life, that she could not understand the possibility of living in any other interest. If Charlie did not want her—if she was not needed in her home—it seemed then as though the heavens and the earth had fallen away from her, and half-consciously she treasured the idea of self-destruction, putting

it far back in her mind as a course only to be taken when all else failed. She wanted to live—but in her present position life would become unbearable in time.

In Paris Charlie got a copy of the *Times*. He glanced it through, and then threw it aside, remarking that there was nothing in it.

Lil picked it up, and looked at it, without thought, without expecting to see anything which would interest her. Yet she had no sooner glanced at the page as she held it before her, than her eyes grew suddenly dim and her breath came quick and short, and then her heart seemed to die away within her with the pain of a new hope and a new fear.

It was but a brief report of a divorce case which so affected her. It was that one word—divorce—which rushed through her mind like a living flash of fire. Was the thing possible—did the laws, after all, leave a loophole of escape for miserable women like herself? She knew nothing about it; she was utterly ignorant of the law of divorce. It seemed to her as if the new thought had a hope in it! She determined, immediately that she should be at home, to learn all she could on the subject, and see what power she had.

So ignorant was she of the iron hold which the law keeps over the innocent, that she fancied here was hope!

## CHAPTER VII.

T home again. But a new home. It seemed to Lil that everything in her life now was new and strange and difficult to understand. Sometimes she longed for the old cottage—but not often; for she very quickly remembered that her life had not all been happiness there—that there were bitter memories attached to that place too. And the memories that were not bitter—could she bear them?—would they not cut and bite as only memories of dead things can?

But the dreariness—O, the dreariness—of that return home! Lil wondered sometimes what gave her the strength to live through it—and in silence. She forgot that she was young and full of dormant power that was roused by degrees as her life grew more difficult. She forgot it, because the loss she suffered from gave her a sense of death and despair, a feeling as of age and of desolation.

Ah, what a loss! Everything reminded her of it—she could find no rest anywhere. There was no grave where she might plant flowers and weep silently for the dead. Her dead were with her—her strangled love could

not be put away—she moved amid the corpses of the past, and if her happiness was dead, her agony was alive, preserved in life by an hourly, an intolerable irritation.

This house which every day grew more artistic and charming—it was no home to its master. He had one room in it which he called his study, and where he spent many hours alone. It seemed he was writing; but Lil, who once was too much a part of himself to be excluded from anything he did, now knew nothing of his work. He lived his life away from her. And when he did come to her in her drawing-room, where she too often sat for long hours buried in terrible and morose reverie, it was to suggest going out. He constantly asked visitors to the house; they seldom dined alone; and Lil knew very well that many of the people who came he did not care to associate with. Whether consciously, or whether unconsciously, she could not discover; but he evidently clung to anything which served to prevent their being alone together. If no one was with them in the evening, they went to the theatre as a matter of course.

Sometimes Charlie asked her when she intended to write her long-talked of play, and made a weak pretence that her interest in the stage was his reason for taking her so often to the theatre. Thus he would try sometimes to cover the ugly fact that he was glad to

go to any crowded place to find refuge from himself—from her! It was a weak pretence, because both knew so well that only among a number of people were they at ease together. But Lil could not force herself to countenance the pretence by any actual work; her whole mind was centred on her own immediate life, which contained in its inner places a tragedy more appalling and more terribly absorbing than any fiction could be. But she found in the theatre a certain excitement and interest which, for the moment, helped her to forget herself. She had a strong dramatic instinct, and even a mediocre performance interested her; when a good actor was before her, her very breathing was swayed by his. She forgot her individuality, her suffering self; and that moment of forgetfulness was to her an intoxication for which she learned to thirst.

All this time she avoided her father. He was very busy, so that this was easily done. Her wish was not to distress him unnecessarily; but the mere sight of her face when she first came home from Italy told him that something was wrong. The unhappy pair acted their parts so quietly and well that he did not suspect the cause of her altered looks in the least. He believed her to be very ill; but this she denied.

She cast about in her mind how to learn all about the law of divorce, and at last went

quietly to the British Museum, where she got out a legal handbook, and studied it. Amazement fell upon her soul as she read. She leaned her head on her hands to hide her burning face. She was sickened to discover what fearful bondage was that which she had blindly taken upon her!

Liberty! Yes, there was liberty—offered at what price? She might have it, perhaps, if she could disgrace herself, shame her womanhood, play false to the faithful love in her heart, and outrage her better nature. She might have it if she could make of herself a thing to be pointed at, and then stand in the common court for men to stare at her. She might have it if she would sacrifice all the sweetness of a sacred devotion; if she could so shame herself as to bring shame on the man whom she still adored. It seemed all this; all that was most horrible to her, for she had met with no temptation to unfaithfulness. Her love was still given utterly to this husband from whom she desired to be free!

There was no liberty for her while she was pure, while she was honest! There is no liberty even for those who may be inconstant but cannot deceive.

It is only to the basest, she thought, to the most profligate, that liberty is to be given; only to those who have no sense of shame, no delicacy, no gentleness. A woman who is

honest in every sense—who keeps vows when she has made them, who tells the truth, and has no dark places in her life, is a more absolute slave, a more helpless and hopeless prisoner in a loveless marriage, than any victim of Russian tyranny. He, at least, can ask for sympathy, can raise his voice, can protest against injustice. But she must be silent and endure without a sign the bondage which makes her days black instead of beautiful—else society will hold up hands of horror and alarm.

“O, pitiless laws!” cried Lil, in her heart. “Can it be possible that we, who do not desire to offend, are held in this grip of iron? that these links, these iron links, are only unloosed for those who respect neither themselves or others?”

Lil leaned back in her chair, and her eyes grew dim. The reading-room vanished; she saw no longer the students who sat by her; she breathed no longer the heavy air of the close room. She was back in the old island garden where her girlhood had blossomed; where she had lived innocent and ignorant; where she had loved as naturally as though she were a free bird of the air. No one had told her how terrible, how irrevocable were these bonds which her love must wear! Yet her own quick brain, taught to think for itself, had caught some dim idea of what these vows might bring. The sun was on her

head ; she heard the rush of the river in her ears, and the thrilling song of her father's well-loved thrush ; she felt the old hound's cold, friendly nose pressed against her hand. She was standing at her father's window, looking in at him as he sat at his writing-table.

“Papa, doesn't it seem rather rash to take a vow at seventeen which one has to keep all one's life !”

What a question ! And how her father's face altered as he listened to it. She could see the change of expression now ; she understood it, as she had not understood it then, spite of her questioning spirit. O yes, she understood it now. O, what a world ! where girls, ignorant, full of the faith and enthusiasm of youth, enter these iron bonds as if they took on them mere silken chains, easily snapped at any moment. Cruel—cruel—said Lil ! Why did he not tell me that men change—that they are inconstant—that the deepest affection wears itself out—and that then men and women are left chained together like prisoners !

“What good would it have done had he told me ?” she said, her heart rebelling instantly against any reproach to Brough ; “he would have frightened me ; and, if I had not married, what would that mean ? I should have lost those happy, happy years—that early time when life was all lovely—because *he* loved me.”

Her eye fell again on the book—was there no mode of evading these laws?—no loop-hole whence there might be escape, however narrow and difficult the way?

Collusion—what did that word mean? Her eyes and hands fastened on the book—was there a way by which men and women did evade these laws. Yes—perhaps—and how! By swearing false oaths—by making false declarations—by paying witnesses to tell lies.

“A large proportion of the opposition so assiduously exhibited in the Divorce Court is advisedly simulated, in order to meet the requirements of a law which appears designed to encourage ingenuity, deceit and fraud.”

She shut the book, and put it aside—pushed it from her, as though it hurt her.

If you are not disposed to pay the heaviest price for your freedom, you may get it by a series of clever lies.

“Can all this be true?” said Lil, to herself, as she sat there with a feeling as if she were, indeed, the helpless victim of an unreasonable tyranny. Suddenly came a desperate hope. “Perhaps this book is not to be trusted! How can I find out without rousing any suspicions or making Charlie uneasy? I must think.”

Thoughtfully she went home, her mind full of perplexity. She did not know how to get

the sort of law-book she wanted ; she could not tell how to know when she had one which was reliable.

“ I have it ! ” she exclaimed, as she reached her own doorstep. “ Alfred Davies will be here to-night. I will get it out of him ; I have heard him say he has common law at his fingers’ ends. I will tell him—what shall I tell him—why, of course, that I am writing my play ! I want a plot ! Oh, I am so glad I thought of that. Even if Charlie hears, it will not trouble him, because he knows I really do mean to write a play.”

A sort of exhilaration came upon her now she had some plan. Positively she might learn something ! She was too ignorant to know what sort of escape she hoped for ; but she had a dim idea that it might be possible for a lawyer to show a way out of his own mesh !

Alfred and his wife were coming to dinner. Charlie asked them whenever there was no one else, and they seldom refused. Davies was not doing well, his own habits were incurably extravagant, and his wife loved dress better than her soul. He was one of those men who always feel that fortune goes in for favouritism ; he could never get over the idea that it was “ cursed hard ” that his uncle shouldn’t have left him even a few thousands. He looked at all Charlie’s investments in pictures or valuables with the critical eye of a future possessor ; he gave himself all the

privileges of the heir. At the same time he was careful to do this pleasantly, because he was always in want of money, and he found Charlie gave way invariably after a certain amount of importuning. He considered it only fair that he should have the run of the house and as many good dinners and as much champagne as might be; how could a poor devil of a barrister get decent dinners when he had boys to educate, feed, and clothe?

Lil tolerated these people. Mrs. Davies sat in the drawing-room with her after dinner, and talked about her servants, the fashions, admired any new thing which Lil wore, and insinuated, incessantly, the horrid contrast between the houses of the rich cousin and the poor one. Lil knew beforehand everything which she would say, as soon as the first words were out of her mouth. After all, it was, perhaps, better than being alone with her own terrible thoughts. She knew well enough that Charlie would not choose Davies's society, were it not that he must have some companion to save him from himself—or from her! Sometimes, as she thought of this, and noticed how long they stayed from the drawing-room, a wild feeling of anger against her husband would rise up in her heart, like some evil thing that had so strong a life it could not be quite killed. But most often her heart ached for him—she could not help grieving over

the ruins of his happiness, the total absence of all joy in his life! She loved him still, so well, that she could not but grieve over this, however bitterly she rebelled against her own position.

“Papa used to say,” she thought as she sat at the dinner-table this evening, “that I was full of dramatic power. I don’t believe it. I don’t think I can act well enough to ask Alfred Davies to come up and talk to me, without showing my whole history in my face!”

Yet she did. She told him she had a plot in her mind for something she wanted to write, and would he come up before the evening was over, so that she might ask him about a few legal points? Her face and voice were quiet, though her heart was beating like a frightened bird.

“After all!” she thought, “I can act when I want to!” In the drawing-room she sat patiently listening to Mrs. Davies’s aimless small talk, and even answering her correctly, while her mind was busy upon her device.

Presently Davies came in alone. “Now, Mrs. Newman, I am at your service.” He saw her glance at the door behind him, and answered her unasked question, “Charlie has gone to his study: Mrs. D., you may sit and nod over the fire as you do at home, for we have business.”

The drawing-room was a double one, and there were fires in both rooms. Leaving "Mrs. D." with a novel in her lap and a heap of papers beside her to amuse her, the others moved away to the second fire in the smaller room. The light there was dimmer. Davies made a step as if he would take one of the lamps in. "No, no," said Lil, "I like the soft light, if you don't mind."

She drew a chair close to the fire, and sat down with her back to the light. She had a fan in her hand, with which she sheltered her face from the fire.

"Charlie thinks I could write a play, Mr. Davies, because I am so fond of the theatre, and papa would like me to try, so I really am going to make an attempt. Of course the first difficulty is plot."

"More important in a play than any other sort of fiction," observed Davies.

"I know," said Lil, "that is why I am taking so much trouble about it. There is nothing like law for a plot."

"And nothing in which novelists and playwrights make such egregious mistakes."

"Exactly," said Lil, eagerly, "that is just why I am going to bother you. I don't want to make any mistakes, I want to know all about the law of marriage and divorce. I have been reading B——'s handbook, is that to be trusted?"

"Oh, not at all reliable!"

“Thank heaven,” said Lil in a low voice ; and then recovering herself, said quickly, “some of the statements there did not suit me at all, and I shall be glad if they are wrong!”

“But why choose such a subject?”

The question startled her for a moment, but she quickly recollected herself.

“Well, you see, Mr. Davies, we are so accustomed to adaptations from French plays, which are all dependent for their interest on the law of marriage and divorce, that it seems quite the right thing to use for one’s plot. Besides,” she went on, with a sudden flutter of the heart at her own audacity, “from some articles I have noticed lately in the papers, and which I had not properly understood till I looked up the subject, it seems as if the difficulty of divorce may become a burning question.”

“Oh, there is nothing to be done, any access of freedom would be most dangerous. What is the use of ventilating such a hopeless subject?—and for fiction—forgive me, Mrs. Newman, but it really seems to me a loathsome one to choose.”

“Ah!” said Lil, “it may be loathsome, but whether it is or no, it becomes sometimes of vital interest!”

Her voice was so low and earnest that he looked up quickly ; Lil put up her fan to hide her face, while she took an instant to

draw breath. "How stupid I am," she said to herself, "I must remember I have no personal interest in this!"

"Well, that may be," admitted Davies, reluctantly, "when a question becomes vital, we hear enough of it, we need not hear of it before." Davies was a man of the world in the common-place sense of the word; he was full of "fast" proclivities; he loved licence. Such men hate free discussion of social problems.

"But, of course," went on Davies, after a moment's pause, "I will tell you anything you want to know, only—do keep out of the Divorce Court—let me entreat you to do that! It would be such a mercy if lady writers would keep out of the Divorce Court!"

"Oh, I have no idea of going into the Divorce Court, if I can help it!" exclaimed Lil. "No! no! what I want to know is whether there is any way of evading that terrible Court, or going quietly through it, so that no one need hear of it, or for people to live in different countries and under different laws be free of their marriage tie, or if, indeed, there is no way—no way—of escape for people who are once tied together, without sinning against themselves or any other!"

"None that I ever heard of," said Davies, coolly. "You will write something powerful if you put all this passion into it. How much

you are to be envied, you that are gifted with imagination, and can create such excitement for yourselves! We poor, plodding commonplace fellows are out of all that; and if I did not know you well, Mrs. Newman, I declare I should have supposed you were in earnest just now! But, of course, that is absurd. What an excellent actress you would make!"

An excellent actress! When she had so forgotten herself that she could not tell whether this man saw through her or not! By one of those efforts which emergencies only make possible, she said, quietly:

"I have often been told so. But, in truth, I am very interested in my plot, and in my characters, and sometimes I am carried away like this. Now, tell me, Mr. Davies, is it not the fact that the divorce law gives freedom only to those who have offended against the marriage law?"

"Certainly, what it does is to give redress to the party injured, and to punish the offending party."

"Then my poor heroine, who is as virtuous as a woman can be, has nothing to gain from the divorce law?"

"If her husband has ill-used, deserted her, been faithless to her, she has everything to gain from it."

"But he is my hero, and is incapable of committing any of these crimes."

“Then, if she is virtuous, she will desire to keep her vows.”

“But her husband is tired of her, and she desires to give him his liberty.”

“If neither of them will put themselves within the pale of the law, it cannot deal with them. Law has to do with the guilty.”

“But don't people talk about what they call the liberty of the individual?”

“A married woman is not an individual, Mrs. Newman, according to law, and her husband is not supposed to desire to be free of her, because her children are his heirs. The law of marriage is intimately mixed up with the question of property. The laws do their best to protect the rights of the individual; his liberty must take care of itself.”

“Alas, yet there are people who want liberty, and do not care for property!”

“Then they are idealists, and I fear if you put them on the stage, they will call forth no sympathy.”

“Oh, Mr. Davies! how instantly the expression of genuine feeling calls forth a response in a theatre.”

“True; the common people are sentimentalists. But you have not given me the motive for your heroine's desire for freedom. I suppose if her husband is tired of her, he wants to marry some one else?”

"I suppose so—Yes!" said Lil, while her heart gave a great leap within her.

"Bigamy is worn out, I fear," said Davies, "except as a melo-dramatic sort of crime, and you will get no sympathy for a woman who gives her husband the opportunity of committing bigamy; she makes herself odious at once by violating the laws and the usages of society. She would be an intolerable as well as an impossible heroine."

Lil gave a sigh so heavy, so sad, that it startled Davies and frightened herself. She rose abruptly, feeling that she ran too great a risk of betraying her bitter interest in this subject; she crossed to where Mrs. Davies sat in the other drawing-room. As she moved she thought with terror that no way was left her but that which seems to those who have never really considered it, so cowardly, which does, indeed, need so much courage—self-destruction. The temptation assailed her once again, for her difficulties were insurmountable. She whispered Cleopatra's words to herself as she crossed the room, with Davies close behind her.

"Patience is sottish; and impatience does  
Become a dog that's mad; then is it sin  
To rush into the secret house of death  
Ere death dare come to us?"

"Am I to be greater than Cleopatra?" she asked herself. "No, I am weaker; my loss is as great as hers, to me, yet I fear to enter

the next life uninvited!" But a sudden resolution took form in her mind. She would provide herself with a means of death, which she would always carry with her. She would not be quite helpless, absolutely without any way of escape!

She found Mrs. Davies deeply absorbed in a newspaper. "Have we not been talking a long time?" she said.

"Not long," said Mrs. Davies, "at least I think not. I have found this paper amusing. I don't seem to have time to read at home, and this is such an extraordinary idea about the Czar of Russia. Have you seen it? that he was not killed at all, but that he wanted to abdicate, and took the only means he had of doing it. It is suggested that he had a prisoner assassinated who was very like him, and that he has disappeared, leaving no trace of his existence. Perhaps he is living in London now, enjoying himself quietly. Why, Mrs. Newman, how white you are!"

"Yes, I am tired to-night," said Lil. "I have been reading at the British Museum, to-day, and the air there is very oppressive." She stood steadily and faced Alfred Davies as she spoke. She felt he was covertly watching her, and that he did not believe her paleness arose from so innocent a cause as the air of the Museum.

Mrs. Davies rose. "You must go to bed,"

she said. "You look quite tired out. Come, Alfred!"

They were gone. The door was shut, they had left the house. When she had heard the front door close, then only Lil had courage to put out her hand and take up this paper. She devoured the words, they seemed to her alive with meaning. If the Czar, the Emperor of all the Russias, could even be supposed to have done this, to have escaped from himself! to have kept his life, his individuality, yet to have disappeared from his surroundings, why might not an insignificant person, known but to a few people, instead of to a nation, actually accomplish it? The Czar must be known in all the civilized nations, thought Lil to herself. I am known in a certain square of London and a dozen houses! If it can be but suggested as even possible for him, surely it would be easy for me!

She fell into deep thought, standing there with the paper in her hand. She remembered to have read, but a few days before, of certain soldiers who had deserted many times over, and enlisted again under new names. That must mean that they had repeatedly destroyed their individuality, disappeared from among their friends, taken up new names and characters. How extraordinary it seemed to her! She began to tremble as she stood. Her eyes glittered as though

they burned with fever. A suggestion had come to her, which filled her with excitement. The law would not help her; the law compelled her to stand still and suffer. Why not step out out of the law? take help and guidance from the lawless?

“If I am driven to it, I will do that,” she whispered. “Courage! courage! I can do that! I should be dead—dead indeed! to everyone I have known and loved. I should have to learn how to live for myself then!”



## CHAPTER VIII.

**T**HE idea sown so unexpectedly in her mind clung there, and she went about in a dream, wondering if indeed she dare lose herself in the sea of life!

Her passionate desire for some sympathy—a friend in her need—grew stronger. She began to feel that she would have to go to her father in the end, but she resisted the impulse as long as possible.

Overpowered by this sense of loneliness, she one afternoon left the house which had begun to feel like a prison to her, and went to see old Mrs. Warrington.

The ancient lady looked very little changed since she had held up her hands in horror over Lil's wild girlish romps with the dogs. There comes a period in some people's lives, a starved condition of age, when nothing changes them but death. The years which had been such an experience for Lil, had seemed to the old lady but a brief time. She had long since done with all the emotions and excitements of this little life, and was busy laying up her stores in heaven.

Nevertheless, old worldly instincts were not

dead in her. She never forgot that Lil was now a rich woman. She no longer teased her about the price of coals or butter. But she very often reminded her of the camel and the eye of a needle. And she always had her best tea-set out now when Lil came, and treated her as a quite grown-up person.

Lil had tea with her and sat by her in a low chair, and wound some wool for the old lady's knitting, and told stories of her travels. She made herself as pleasant as she could, but all the while her thoughts were afar, wandering in dangerous, strange ways.

As she talked she watched the shrewd old face. After all, this woman must have the wisdom of experience. Something, no longer repressible, rose within her and made her speak.

"Granny," she said, "what ought a woman to do whose husband is tired of her?"

Granny dropped her knitting in her lap, adjusted her spectacles, and stared hard at Lil before she replied. Lil had prepared herself for this scrutiny; her chin was in her hand; her eyes were fixed on the fire; and she sat motionless.

"My dear," said Granny, "she must do her duty."

"Her duty?" said Lil, "and what is that?"

"Ah!" said Granny, her eyes becoming introspective; "I know what a task it may be for a woman to do her duty! What I suffered with your grandfather, my dear! He was,

without exception, the most trying man I ever met with. Your father has broken my heart with his godless ways ; but he has never worried and harassed me as my husband did."

"And you did your duty?" asked Lil, who knew, from experience, that Granny would not be shy in answering such a question.

"I endeavoured to walk in the straight path, my dear child, as is needful for one of the elect of the Lord."

"But, Granny, you have not yet told me what a woman's duty is."

"You must remember, my dear, that the state of marriage is a holy one. That which God hath joined together let not man put asunder."

"That bewilders me, Granny. Do you mean because people are married in church that God has joined them together?"

"You know I place no trust in the formal written prayers which the church-people use in their celebrations. But you have vowed before God to love, honour, and obey. He watches to see that you fulfil your vows."

"Granny," said Lil, "what does He expect people to do if the love dies away?"

"My dear, these are foolish questions. Married persons should not think of such things. A woman who respects herself and her husband will do her duty. It is sinful even to think or talk of such disobedience to God's written laws. God is not mocked ; he

has given us the Scriptures, child!" she said, with a sudden change of manner; "what makes you talk like this? You are not talking of yourself? That Swift has not come back again, has he?"

"Oh, Granny," said Lil, "what a question to ask!"

"Tell me, child, has he? Is he after you again?"

"I have not seen him for years," answered Lil, rising from her chair; "I must go now, Granny. What could make you think of that Dr. Swift? I had almost forgotten his existence."

"I am glad to hear it," said the old lady, still eyeing her with stern suspicion; "but remember the eye of the Lord is upon you!"

Lil put on her hat, and after an embrace, even more solemn and impressive than usual, went homewards, through the dusk. She found Charlie in the dining-room, sitting by the fire with the habitual look of weariness and disappointment on his face which seemed to have become a part of it, so constant was its presence. The despair in her own heart was so heavy that she did not feel as if she could make the least effort to move the cloud which hung between them. She sat down on a chair just inside the dining-room door. It did not appear to her to matter where she was, so long as she had somewhere to rest. She had no impulse to come to the fire, create a blaze, and

delight in the feeling of being at home. All that was past for her ; over, and dead. This house could never be a home to her. She had never felt herself its rightful mistress, and to-day she was so weary and dispirited, after her visit to her grandmother, that she felt more homeless than usual. After a moment, Charlie turned and looked at her ; but she did not raise her eyes to meet his.

“Will you not go and dress for dinner ?” he said, very gently. “I have tickets for the theatre to-night, to see the new American actor, as Iago. Will you go ?”

“Oh, yes,” said Lil, making an effort to find her voice ; “I shall like to very much.”

She rose and went slowly away upstairs to her dressing-room. Why was he so good—always gentle—always kind ? Why did he take so much pains that she should have all the amusement he had ? Why did he not go out alone, amuse himself with other women, take to his club ? Why did he so disarm and soften her, that instead of any anger against him she could only feel humbled and ashamed that she should be in his way, a burden which he must carry wherever he went ? He was the same man she had loved, and could not but love still ; the same, with the same gentle nature and lovable disposition. As she had said to Dr. Swift long ago, “my husband is a gentleman.” How true that was she felt now more than ever. As she dressed, she looked

critically in her glass. All this hidden emotion was telling upon her; it was beginning to make itself very visible in her face. No wonder her father thought she was ill; her looks suggested the existence of some hungry and exhausting disease.

“I must do something soon,” she said to herself, “every day of this life is adding years to my age. Why should I grow haggard before my time? Why should I make *him* look as he does this evening? If *she* were there—if *she* had come into the room instead of me—how his face would have lightened. Oh! how much more misery must I suffer before I have courage?”

They drove away to the theatre as soon as dinner was over. Their stalls were near the front. When they entered, Iago was already on the stage, and Lil sat down with her eyes upon him. She never thought of looking round the house after the fashion of many theatre-goers; she forgot in the intensity of her interest that anyone else was there to witness the impersonation. At the end of the act, when the curtain dropped, she turned at last to speak to Charlie, but she forgot what she had intended to say, she was so startled by a change in his face; such a change! She only saw his profile; he was looking down as though nothing in the house interested him so much as the orchestra. But she saw an extraordinary expression beneath that pre-occupied air; some-

thing which could not be hidden from her. What was it? Quickly, she turned in her seat to look round the house; something, some one must be there—who——? She needed not to look far. Two or three stalls only separated them from Adelaide Mainwaring. She was sitting, still as a statue, her eyes upon the programme which she held in her gloved hand. Was she reading that programme, with those heavily drooped eyes? After all, was it Adelaide Mainwaring? Yes; but ah! how changed! The rich full blown rose had drooped—it looked as though nor sun nor rain had blessed it—as though the very sap of life were denied. The warm colour that used to come and go in her cheeks, it was gone! Her generous form was more slender; her very hand looked thinner; her head drooped as though out of sheer languor. Lil gazed in incredulity upon this changed woman. True, it was Adelaide. But what—*what* had changed her so! She did not move, and Lil still looked in wonder and with a horror growing in her heart, when Mrs. Mainwaring, who was sitting beyond Adelaide, caught sight of Lil. For a moment Lil did not see her; and Mrs. Mainwaring in her turn stared in surprise at Lil's face, where trembling emotion was visible. The rise of the curtain roused Adelaide, and Lil also; and then Lil called up a smile as well as she could, and bowed. But Charlie would not move. He knew all that happened without any need

to use his eyes. Lil saw that he would not look, and she dared not speak to him. Her pleasure in the play was gone. These misunderstandings with the hot-headed Moor; how easily might they have been prevented! In her tragedy no one was blind, no one was foolish; all were resolutely walking on straight with open eyes. What was it to be strangled by a jealous husband? What, indeed, to being treated so gently, so generously, by one who could not love! Death—why, if easeful death would come, all would be over—but now instead, the days must go on, each one more empty than the last! She, at least, did not feel that death would come easily to her, despite her haggard looks. She felt that she had a terrible power of suffering and living on——, but Adelaide! She herself, in all her misery, was strong and bright by comparison with that faded rose, no longer red, but white. “And I that sit between them, here! am I to stand between them all my life? O, I cannot; a just God could not ask it; a merciful law-giver would not command it.” The words burned in her brain, and drowned Desdemona’s wail of death, and dazed her eyes so that she could not see Iago’s face of triumph. The moment the curtain had fallen, Lil drew her white cloak over her shoulders and moved towards Mrs. Mainwaring. That lady was not glad to see her; but she liked Lil personally very much and tried hard to seem pleased.

“Are you staying in London?” asked Lil.

“Only at an hotel, for a few days; we had to come over on business, and we are going back to Paris immediately.”

“Where are you staying,” said Lil; “may I not call?”

Thus “cornered,” Mrs. Mainwaring gave her address; and then, saying Adelaide was tired, hurried away in no very good humour.

Lil said nothing to Charlie, who had been compelled to follow her and offer his civilities also. She sat in the carriage with closed eyes; and when they reached home went straight to her room.

Her purpose was growing strong within her. Its presence gave her strength; she was determined to do no terrible deed, rashly. She would see, to the full, with her own eyes, its necessity.

The next afternoon she went alone and called at the Mainwarings' hotel. They were at home. Mrs. Mainwaring was writing letters, Adelaide was sitting with a book on her lap, and her eyes fixed far away. She rose and greeted Lil with almost passionate affection; and then relapsed immediately into the same still mood. It seemed to have become habitual. Lil asked them to dinner the next evening. Mrs. Mainwaring immediately began to make excuses, but Lil interrupted her. “Dear Mrs. Mainwaring,” she said, “you told me how much you would like to meet my father; well,

now there is the opportunity, don't refuse me. I am just going to make some calls, and will get a few really nice people to come."

Mrs. Mainwaring's society-loving spirit found this hard to resist. She hated hotel dinners and dull evenings, and hardly any of their friends knew them to be in town. Surely, at a dinner party, with a number of people there, there could be no harm?

She accepted. Lil rose to leave at once, for she had to go and secure her other guests. She kissed Adelaide when she went away, with the strangest feeling of awe and wonder at the thought of the future which lay before them. What would it be?

Lady Warrington was always most agreeable to Lil now. She had no engagement for the next evening and agreed at once to come and bring Brough with her, so Lil's mind was at rest on that point; Brough was certain to appear in time and with a necktie tied to perfection. When he went out on his own account, these details were matters of uncertainty.

Her other guests secured, she went home; there was a red spot on each cheek when she looked in her glass. What wonder! She had determined that to-morrow was to seal her doom.

What did she want?

To see them together again; to try once more whether she was deceived!

## CHAPTER IX.

**T**HE house looked charming on the evening of the dinner ; Lil had exercised all her artistic taste upon it. The rooms were beautiful in colour, and the air was sweet with the scent of flowers. As she went into the drawing-room to await her guest she paused a moment before a mirror, where she was reflected above a bank of ferns. She was dressed well ; her hair fell away from her forehead like sunny silk ; her cheeks were flushed. She looked her best, as she stood there, mistress of a beautiful home. "It is all mine," she thought, looking at the pretty room reflected in the glass. Just then she saw that Charlie came in at the door behind her. She did not move ; she looked still into the glass. "And he is mine !" she was saying to herself. He walked away from her, towards the fire ; and then she turned and covertly watched him, while she opened and shut her fan without noise, yet with a violence that bid fair to shatter the thin ivory. For the first time since her marriage she felt herself to be absolutely separated from this man. She had a purpose in her mind which he must never know ; which

must be hidden from him always. Never before had she kept a secret. She had thought it impossible. Impossible! What is impossible to a woman hard driven?

The guests came all in quick succession, while Lil's cheeks were still hot, and everyone told her how well she looked. She greeted her father with a surreptitious hug. What a delight it was to have this dear burly Bohemian to whom she might cling under all changes of sky. At least she could not be unfathered!

Brough was under orders to make himself agreeable, and to talk well; moreover he was in a good humour. He thought Lil looking well, her house charming, and the wine was good. There were some other good talkers there also, and the little dinner was one of those pleasantly merry ones where everyone is pleased and amused. There was a great deal of quiet laughter broken sometimes by a brief outburst from Brough; he never could reduce his laugh to the proper social level any more than his ideas.

After the first greeting Charlie and Adelaide never spoke, interchanged no glance. Both faces were masked, and the smiles upon them were as lifeless as those of masks. Lil observed them unceasingly from under her long lashes, with devouring eyes. O, what a watch both had set upon their own words and looks! Could it be maintained?

After dinner there was music. Lil had secured some distinguished amateurs. All the while she fulfilled her office as hostess and kept the ball rolling, she was watching—two people only! Adelaide sat alone. She no longer formed a centre round which admirers naturally gathered. She had shut up her charms; the attractions of her sweet voice and manner, and the wealth of her fertile mind, all were unseen, unheard. She seemed too languid to speak; and those who were drawn to her by her face, found only disappointment in store.

Charlie saw this, too—saw her sitting alone—though he never turned his eyes towards her. Lil, moving here and there, watched him—saw the irresistible magnetic power at work. It drew him steadily in one direction, draw back how he might. Lil, unseen, unnoticed, contrived to follow his course. When at last he was at Adelaide's side, she was standing behind them—not near enough to hear them speak, but near enough to watch their faces. She was hardly able to stand, yet her eagerness was so great she would not go back a step to find a chair. She was near the fire, and she put her hand on the mantelshelf to steady herself. Charlie sat down on the couch by Adelaide's side, and began to talk to her with his eyes on the ground; she replied without raising hers, and, apparently, with the most languid manner. But her hand

trembled so, Lil could see it, that suddenly, and without knowing that she did it, she dropped the fan which she held. Charlie stooped and picked it up, and gave it back to her. Something in this momentary contact broke the spell which seemed to be on them both—their eyes met—and for a long delicious moment the vivid fire of love lit those fervid glances. Words were not merely unnecessary, they would have been intrusive. When the emotions are instinct with life, they pour themselves through those “luminous windows.” To Lil it seemed as though some actual contact of soul with soul had taken place before her eyes; she felt more of an eavesdropper than if she had overheard actual words. Why, what a living fact was this, straight before her!

Charlie rose abruptly, and went away leaving Adelaide alone. Lil watched him as he crossed the room. He was pale, but there was a strange exhilaration in his face—a brightness as though for one sweet moment he had caught some heavenly warmth.

Lil put her hand to her head. Something was throbbing there wildly. What was she to do, alone, unadvised? Oh, it was impossible that she could carry out her difficult course unaided.

“I cannot do it alone,” she said to herself; “if I do not need an adviser, I must have an accomplice!”

She made an effort, steadied herself, and went across the room to her father.

"Papa," she said, "I want you to give me some hours all to myself one day very soon."

There was something in her voice which made the words sound like an appeal.

"Why, you little witch," he said, "you shall have them whenever you like. You know that, baby!"

"Not in your study," she said; "no, nor in your house; we might be interrupted."

"Why, this is quite exciting! Shall I come here?"

"Oh, no, no, not here! No, I think I should like to go out with you somewhere, into the country, where the air is fresh."

"All right, little woman, I'll manage it. Don't look so terribly in earnest, it shall be done. I must see what engagements I have, and then I'll take a morning and put it at your disposal."

"Soon, papa, very soon?" she said; and now her earnestness struck him more than ever.

"There's something wrong, child!" he said.

"Nothing," she answered. "Hush!" People were coming to her to say good-bye. Very soon everyone was gone, and Lil was left alone in her drawing-room. Charlie had gone downstairs; she knew very well he would not come back to her again. She was alone. Alone! could she ever be so again! Her

thoughts, the dark and horrid shapes of jealous rage and wild despair, which she kept at bay only by using all her strength—they were present, like living beings, whenever she was off her guard. They were there, with importunate voices. “Kill him—kill her—or do like other jealous wives—disfigure her—avenge yourself, and use all this wild force that is rising in you!”

“Ah!” she cried, aloud, as though real voices had spoken in her ears. “All that is old, stale, worn out! Those jealous women were unreasonable fools. What has Adelaide done to harm me! Nothing—except to kill herself, by inches, before my very eyes, out of suppressed love for my husband. She cannot help living, or loving! If I could kill that inhuman law which has made me into the hateful thing I am—a mere millstone round this man’s neck—why, I would do it. But I cannot! I am powerless. I must suffer. Only, great heavens!”—and in the intensity of her feeling she sank on her knees there in the middle of the room, and raised her hands in entreaty—“give me the strength to prevent their suffering too! Shall those two lives be killed for me? No, it shall not be, I will evade this hideous bondage.”

But how? It seemed impossible. Yet there was a thought forming, and growing more and more distinct.

“Make the door on a woman’s wit, and it

will out at the casement ; shut that, and 'twill out at the key-hole ; stop that, and 'twill fly with the smoke out at the chimney."

Like Rosalind, Lil was banished ; like Rosalind, she must learn the lightness and agility of a woman's wit. But she was leaving behind her the romance of her life. For her, there could never again be any thought of love. Stern deeds were all that lay before her. The cold resolute action of shutting a door which would bar all light and life from out her existence.

But she had drunk so deep of misery, that to feel there was a chance of shutting that door—of barring herself away from all she loved—excited her as though some long-looked-for release from prison were before her. She walked about the drawing-room as though it were her prison cell, and she had got a breath of coming freedom ! Ah, what dungeon of a Russian prison could be more terrible than this flower-scented drawing-room ? This unhappy prisoner stood there, fast bound by an iron law to preserve the appearance of love when love lay dead !—to look contented before the world, and to carry on the mockery of married felicity ! What physical bondage, she thought, can mark so deeply as one which hurts the very soul ?

Charlie stood immovable between these two women. He could not act if he would ; what could he do ! Such a woman as Adelaide

was unapproachable in any fashion which was possible to him ! He knew, since he met her eyes, liquid with love, that she had given herself to him in spirit ; that she, too, suffered. The sense of this was intoxicating ; it went to his head like wine. But in the very midst of this fever of delight he was steadied by the consciousness—not to be ignored for a second !—that she was as far removed from him as the stars of heaven. Her own keen, subtle delicacy shrouded her like a veil ; he knew that she would never let him look into her sweet eyes again, or see her fair face unhidden by a mask. She was as sweet and pure as mountain snow, and that purity which was her most fragrant charm was upheld by a steady strength of character. He could but stand aside and tremble at the consciousness that against his will he was momentarily wronging her in loving the sweet memory of her face. Then she was guarded by a mother who lived with the fear of the world before her eyes, and who watched her daughter with that suspiciousness born of a radical disbelief in human nature. She needed no Cerberus ; her own strength and innocence were far more certain defenders ; but still Cerberus was there.

Even if he had it in him to offend her by the sight of a love he was not free to offer her, Adelaide belonged to that order of women who are totally unapproachable save by a straight route.

So that he was powerless here. The only power he had was to wring his wife's heart ; and this some men would have done remorselessly, and found in it some consolation for their own disappointment. But Charlie was made of different stuff from this. All the passion of his being was for Adelaide ; but that could not destroy his tenderness for Lil. Until so lately how dear she had been to him ! —it was difficult even now to separate her wholly from himself even in thought. Their beings had become so blended that it was strange to feel them pulling away from each other, and reaching out in different directions. Lil had no longer any power over him ; the thought of her brought no gladness with it now, but only the heavy sense of a terrible blank. She had been his love ; she was not now ! Perhaps if she had only been his love, he might have turned against her, as men can against women whom once they have adored. But though love may become hatred, it is not so easy to convert friendship into enmity. Lil had been so much to him beside his wife. She had been his most intimate friend, his dearest and most congenial companion, his adviser, his cheerful and unfailing helper in all things large or small. Because he loved another woman with a passion more powerful than that which Lil had inspired in him, as a man's love is stronger than a boy's, was it possible he could forget the gentle comrade-

ship of years? If Adelaide's love had been given to him as freely as the scent of a flower, he would have turned from it rather than insult and wound his wife, endeared to him in so many ways. It was impossible for him to do a thing which would hurt her! Because he could not give her his love, it was all the more needful that he should give her what else he could. At least, he might save her from pain.

It was this resolution which made him shrink from being alone with Lil. He knew she must feel keenly that the old tie of love between them was gone. At the least, he could spare her this consciousness. At the least, he could avoid hurting her.

And so he left her alone with her own dark moods and wild thoughts. Furiously she battled with the worser nature which would arise in her, and which gave forth the old ugly cries of hatred and revenge! Till far into the night she walked about the drawing-room like some caged creature, battling with the cruel instincts within her, and clinging passionately to the nobler inspirations of her soul. While Charlie was sternly facing his task of passive submission, she was nerving herself for her daring deed by which she meant to overcome the laws which she saw crushing and oppressing her husband.

Her mind teemed with strange suggestions

to-night, her head was full of plans, her woman's wit was busy finding its way out of the difficulty.

And so, while her husband was steadily looking round his prison walls, and measuring his powers of endurance, she was reaching out her hand for the key which was to set him free.

Ah! if he could have guessed it!

The thoughts which made Lil's face white with pain when at last she slept, would have made his white with horror could he but have guessed them.

For her resolve was now made, and her determination fixed as adamant. She could suffer no more herself, she could no longer endure to witness the suffering caused by her existence. She thought she saw a chance of escape from prison; at all hazards, with all her skill, she would make the attempt. If she failed, she resolved, like many another unhappy prisoner, to take her own life rather than go back to her chains. Strange, now that her mind had absolutely accomplished this decision—and it is a frightful one for a human being to come to—she slept peacefully for the first time for a long while.

In the morning she went out immediately after breakfast. She went a long way from her home, and visited several chemists at considerable distances from each other. She

returned home weary but satisfied. She held a talisman in her hand; if her desperate attempt should fail, she would fall asleep to wake no more upon this sad earth.



## CHAPTER X.

**T**WO days elapsed before Lil heard from Brough—two days which, after this expedition among the chemists' shops, she spent either in walking her room from end to end, or sitting with her head in her hands. She thought hard during those two days. Her plan became definite.

On the evening of the second day she got a little note from her father. It was to say that he and Lady Warrington had an invitation, for the next day, to an "afternoon tea," on board a man-of-war. Lady Warrington hated being in a boat, but he enjoyed going on the water, and loved a ship. Would Lil go with him? They could go down to Gravesend, where the vessel was lying, on a river steamer, by which means they would get as many undisturbed hours out-of-doors as any young woman could possibly desire.

Lil approved of the plan; it seemed natural, and she was very anxious not to arouse Charlie's suspicions as to her making any confidences to her father.

So she sent to say she would go. And she

passed an even more restless night than usual. Her brain seemed on fire. To-morrow she had to tell her tale, for the first time, to relieve her bursting heart; to explain and justify, to excuse and accuse!

For she had determined to confide fully in her father. As she said to herself, though she might do without friend or counsellor, she could not do without an accomplice! And oh, what a sensation of relief there would be in daring to speak of her misery! Secrecy was foreign to her whole temperament. She was essentially easy, light-hearted, friendly in disposition. Experience was teaching her, as it does most of us, that this is a hard world to live in, where light hearts may be out of place; and that though one may love one's friends, it will not do to lean upon them. She had succeeded in tearing herself away from her dependence on her husband; in standing alone, and taking her life into her own hands. Her father was her one other friend, and to him she was going with indeed a confidence—but, nevertheless, with a determination ready formed and immovable. She had not to ask his advice, she had only to tell him what she meant to do and ask him for his help.

She showed Charlie the note, which, fortunately, was so worded that it did not suggest any desire of her's, except for a day in the fresh air. They had to start early, and she came down to breakfast ready dressed in a

costume of dim green, which set off her bright hair and fair face wonderfully well.

She looked unusually handsome this morning; the fire of a desperate resolve was in her eyes; and her spirit alternately leaped up with the vigour of this piece of determination and melted with love towards the man for whom she meant to give up everything which she possessed. Charlie was startled by the brilliance of her eyes; he noticed how handsome she looked. He watched her, as she sat pretending to eat her breakfast, and the sight of her beauty and the sense of her gentleness filled him with a feeling of remorse. He tried to rouse himself—to be himself—to recall some of the cheerfulness which in the old, old days of happiness made their home-life charming. It was impossible—he could not struggle against an oppressive feeling of despondency and misfortune. The spirit which could kindle his, was not only away—separated—but drooping like an unwatered flower; it cut him to the heart every time Adelaide's wan face rose before his eyes. Not long ago it was Adelaide who bloomed, and Lil who was pale. What could be the secret of the change, he wondered? Lil could not hide the fire in her eyes, nor could he help noticing it.

“Have you got something particularly pleasant to look forward to, to-day, that you have not told me of?” he asked, at last. “It can't

only be going out with Brough that makes you look as you do!"

"Something pleasant!" she repeated; and she rose from the table as she said it. The words affected her as with a shock. Something pleasant!—what a mockery the words sounded in her ears! Should she ever be able to understand them again? Could she ever again be like other people, living in small enjoyments and natural pleasures? "Oh, yes, it is going out with papa—you know how I always enjoy that—and I have been feeling so ill lately, and the air may do me good."

"You have looked ill lately, but this morning you are different. Are you feverish? I can't make you out!"

"Perhaps I am," she answered. "My chest is oppressed—I feel, in this house, as if something was suffocating me! As if I were being crushed! I have always felt so here! It is worse this morning—I can hardly breathe—I am so glad I am going out!"

She hardly knew what she said—her words appeared to form themselves.

"And you have not touched your breakfast!" said Charlie, startled now by her excited manner; "you are not well. I believe you have never got rid of that horrible Roman fever."

Lil laughed—a laugh so unlike her own that it dismayed herself, and she checked it in alarm. "No," she said, "I don't think I ever

have got rid of that Roman fever. Perhaps it will kill me yet. Mrs. Mainwaring knew some one who never shook it off, and who died of it at last, long after the first attack."

Her eyes were fixed on him, and they glittered strangely; her breath came quick and short. No actress ever watched the effect of her words more anxiously.

"Lil," he exclaimed, "you are not fit to go out! Let me send and tell Brough you can't go."

"Nonsense!" she said; "I am all right with papa, and the air will do me good. Send for a cab for me, and I will go at once—good-bye!"

"Without any breakfast?"

"Oh, I cannot swallow anything," said Lil; "let me go!"

Charlie sent for her cab, and then waited for her to come down again, with an unusual feeling of anxiety about her. He could not understand the state she was in. She was back in a very few minutes, her costume complete, dressed in dim green to her fingertips. She had never looked prettier in her life. A spot of colour was in each cheek, a fierce light in her eyes.

"Are you sure you are fit to go out?" said Charlie, anxiously. "Well, if you will go, you must. I hope your father will look after you. Do tell him you have had nothing to eat! He will make you eat, I know, if any-

body can. Stay! you must have your fur cloak with you. Why, you are mad to think of going on the water this chilly weather with no wraps, and when you are so delicate!" He sent a servant for her cloak and put it into the cab with her.

"Goodbye!" she said, as the cab drove away. She was indeed in a state of unnatural excitement. It seemed to her that she was behind the slowest horse that had ever been between the shafts of a hansom. It appeared ages before she reached Brough's house. He was standing on the doorstep, looking out for her.

"That's right, baby," he said, in his big, jolly voice. "In plenty of time. Isn't it 'perfect weather?' and, by Jove, don't we look stunning to-day! Come in, Lady Warrington hasn't done breakfast yet—you know, we never are early. Come and have something; I guess you've done nothing but dash the hopes of the morning with a cup of warm coffee, as Thoreau puts it; women never understand the importance of eating. You may wait for us, cabby."

Brough had the remarkable faculty of making friends with everybody. He was always so hilarious, so genuinely jolly with any companion of the moment that even cabmen admired him—said he was a "gene'lman," and charged him too much, with an agreeable manner born of the conviction that they would

get what they asked. And so they did. Brough had never driven a bargain in his life. Financial matters were out of his mental grasp. Left alone, he got into debt, and paid too much for everything. It was absolutely necessary that he should have some one clever, like Lady Warrington, to arrange these little matters for him.

That lady was sitting over her chocolate in a very pretty morning costume. She gave Lil a frigid cheek to kiss. Though she viewed Lil in quite a different light since she had become an important person possessed of means, she had never really overcome a particle of her dislike of her, born of jealousy. She did not at all admire this arrangement, which Brough had shown unusual obstinacy in carrying out, of his going down the river with Lil. She must, herself, be all-important with any one for whom she cared ; and she felt very very angry when she found that it made a sort of highday and holiday for Brough, to take Lil out alone with him.

While he made his final preparations, which consisted in writing an urgent letter in a great hurry, and trying to decide which of two red-ribboned straw hats looked the cleaner, Lil sat and talked to Lady Warrington, answering her remarks rather at random.

“What’s the matter with the girl?” thought the shrewd little lady, “she is queerer than usual.”

At last, a general consultation having been held over the straw hats, and the letter sent to the post, Brough was ready. They got into the hansom and drove off for London Bridge. Lil slipped her hand through Brough's arm, and leaned back with a sigh of relief.

"When are you going to begin talking, baby?" asked Brough, presently.

"Not now," said Lil; "I want to think till we get on the boat."

"I don't think a woman could maintain the mental effort of thinking for such a long time as that," remarked Brough, gravely. "However, you can try, if you like."

Brough was in one of his happiest moods. He enjoyed everything.

"I love this dark old river," he said, as they went down to the steamer; "it has a charm all its own, here, where its waters are so muddy that the sun converts it into a sort of liquid gold. The busy life of the old river does me good, it smacks of the sea; there is a taste here of straightforward life amid the elements. Come, Lil, are you in a dream, or are you listening?"

"Both, papa," said Lil. Their friendship was one of those delightful ones which admit of such an answer. "Go on talking," she said, "I hear, and I enjoy, but I can't answer."

"Mysterious young woman!" said Brough, rubbing his nose, which was a habit of his

when perplexed. But he soon forgot Lil, in the delight of an idle morning, out in the sunshine, among the barges. How jolly, when the steamer was off, to know that there was nothing to do but sit i' th' sun, and look at the changing river banks and the manifold life on the stream. None but hard-working people know how to thoroughly enjoy such brief holidays. Brough could hardly keep still a minute. He was like a boy let out of school. He wandered from one side of the steamer to the other, leaning over to look at the boats and barges.

When, at last, they passed some big ships that had the air of wide ocean about them, he grew quite excited. There is something adventurous in the idea of a seafaring life which will excite the imagination of those to whom the reality would be intolerable.

At last it dawned upon him that Lil had become a statue—that she no longer listened to him—that something of which she was thinking made her blind and deaf. He came and sat down by her.

“Now, then, old lady,” he said, “I’ve worked off my effervescence and am ready to listen. Suppose you begin to talk.”

“I want to tell you a story, papa,” said Lil, in a low voice, “but I don’t know whether I can ever begin it!”

“Oh, yes; you’re a capital hand at a story. Let me light this cigar and get my hat at right

angles with this infernal wind, and then you must begin."

He lit his cigar, and settled himself down at her side.

"Now, baby, go ahead!"

Thus invited, Lil felt that her hour had indeed come. She clasped her hands tightly in her lap, as if their clasp could keep her voice steady, and began. At first she trembled and hesitated, but soon she gained strength.

She told him a story about two people who loved each other—who married young, and who lived many years of happiness together. By degrees, her story grew more detailed, more full of life. She showed how, as time passed on, the love which had bound them together had loosened and grown less. "They were too much alike, I think," she said, "too much alike! There was not enough of the unknown to keep alive the newness in their affection. It faded, and grew dim. They became more like an attached brother and sister than husband and wife. So far, this is no uncommon story, is it, papa?"

"Perhaps not," he said; "but go on."

She went on, and gradually he grew absorbed in listening. It is not often one hears a heart history from the lips of one who has suffered it. Lil's words were hot, and instinct with life as words of one under torture. She showed the growth of the new love in the man's heart—how the wife saw it—how she had battled

with the devil of jealousy—how she had fought it down, and then faced the position with something like cool judgment. She told how then this wife discovered that the others were suffering even more than she was; that their determination to respect her and themselves was sapping their very lives. She told how the wife, possessed by the new thought that she it is who is the one out of place—the one who creates the misery—wonders if she is to kill two lives? “No, rather kill myself!” she says; but then she does not want to die.

“Oh, papa,” said Lil, “why should a young woman, still full of life, have to surrender it because her husband is tired of her? Surely there is some other way of escape!”

She described how the idea of divorce occurred to this unfortunate woman; how she investigates the possibility of such release, and finds it impossible without such publicity and misery as no one of the three would willingly cause the others. Moreover, there was the appalling fact that the necessities of the divorce law put them outside its pale; no one of them was capable of giving that law any power over them.

“Oh, papa, is it not cruel,” she cried, “that such people as these I am talking of, have no redress, no chance of liberty, no escape from leading false lives! It is a hard law which gives freedom only to those who take licence?”

“Go on with your story,” said Brough, in a

very subdued voice. It quieted Lil, and she went on more steadily.

“She cannot kill herself—this woman—for many reasons. One is, that the commonplace expedient of suicide would be a cruel deed to do; it would remove her, certainly, but then it would distress these others who are so tender of her by showing them how she has suffered. It would poison their love with remorse and perhaps remove its sweetness for ever. This can only be the last resource, the result of absolute despair. For, strongest argument of all, the woman does not want to die—yet! She is too young and strong for that. But her pride will not let her live, a burden to the man who once loved her. Perhaps you will say she is too proud, papa, but can a woman be too proud? Why should she submit to this hideous position? People seem to think it very dreadful for a woman to let a man maintain her who loves her, but to whom she is not married; for my part it seems to me more wicked, more ghastly, for a woman to let a man keep her who does not love her, even if they were married twenty times over. I have thought—oh, how I have thought about it, night and day!—and I am sure it is the more wicked thing of the two.”

“Yes, I knew you would regret, some day or other, that you had ever learned to think,” remarked Brough, grimly. “But go on, I want the end.”

“There is no end yet—that is to come!” cried Lil. “Tell me what such a woman should do—a woman who cries out to Heaven against the injustice of her legal bondage to a man who is sick of her—a woman who only desires freedom, that she may live a life of her own, without a sense of sin and degradation upon her, without the knowledge that she is poisoning the lives of others whom she loves, who only wants to escape quietly, without distress or scandal, leaving her husband with room to breathe freely—what should this unhappy woman do?”

“Dramatically speaking, she has but little choice. She may kill the others, and be a murderess; kill herself, and be a suicide; or, if she objects to crime, she might efface herself.”

“Ah!” cried Lil, with a wild, panting eagerness, like that of a terrified bird when it is caught and struggles in the hand of its captor, “that is the only way. Help me to do it, for I am that unhappy woman.”

“You are not in earnest?” asked Brough, the strangest look on his face, the strangest sound in his voice.

“Cannot you see that I am in earnest?” cried Lil, in a kind of fury. “How can you ask me such a question?”

“Because I had a kind of forlorn hope that you might say no—that you had been trying your dramatic powers on me. Then is all this true, and of *yourself*?”

"It is, indeed," said Lil.

He looked at her face, which was bowed low. He saw something there which made him know she spoke the truth. He got up suddenly and walked away. He leaned against the side of the boat and groaned.

"Oh, Lord, Lord," he said aloud—he always very easily forgot the trifling fact of other people's existence—"why do such uncomfortable things happen?"

"What's the matter, sir?" asked a man who was close beside him. "Feel ill?"

"Feel ill? I should think so!" replied Brough, and walked away, leaving his sympathetic friend to gaze after him in amazement.

After a while of walking about, and giving vent to occasional groans, to the surprise and consternation of bystanders, he recovered himself sufficiently to go back to Lil. She was sitting motionless where he had left her.

"Now, baby," he said, "why have you told me all this after hiding it away for so long? What do you want?"

"To escape," she replied, without raising her head.

"But you cannot, and you know it! The thing is impossible! You promised to love, honour, and obey, and so on, and you've got to do it."

"I never promised to make my husband miserable by my existence, and to let him get thinner and more wretched every day, without

making an effort to save him! It is because I still love and honour him that I desire to escape and let him be free."

"But you cannot do it. Why worry yourself into fiddlestrings over an impossibility? You cannot set the man free except by dying, and you don't want to do that."

"I do not want to commit suicide; but why should I not die naturally?"

"What under heaven do you mean?" asked Brough, trying to see her face, which she still bent down.

"Why should not Mrs. Newman—Lil Newman—your daughter, and Charlie's wife, die naturally, and without any trouble? That would cause no great distress to anybody. Charlie will be very sorry at first, but he would soon get over it. There would be nothing to fill him with remorse; I know what tortures he would suffer if he thought he had driven me to suicide. And why should not this human organism which sits here beside you, after ceasing to be Lil, become somebody else altogether?"

"Oh, I see where you are," remarked Brough, and then was silent. After a minute or two he said—

"Have you realised what that means?—the dangers, the difficulties?—the giving up all your friends and connections?"

She looked up quickly.

"Your daughter would be dead! but this

poor little creature that sits here—would you not still be her friend ? ”

He put his big arm around her, and held her close to him, by way of reply.

“Then I don’t want anybody else,” said Lil, feeling herself fully answered.

“The assembled multitude think we are sweethearts,” said Brough, presently ; “ what a mockery ! But, my dear little baby, my darling little Lil, you can’t really mean to carry this thing out ? ”

“I am absolutely determined,” “ she said, raising her head and looking him straight in the face now. “ I can live no longer in that house : I will not disgrace the name of love by continuing to be the wife of a man who loves another woman. The only doubt is, whether you will help me, or whether I shall do it alone ? I think it will kill me if I do go out of my life quite alone ! ”

“You can never be alone while I live, baby ; you know that. But this idea of yours, though it might do in a play, is utterly impossible in real life.”

“ What else can I do ? I cannot live with him any longer, as I have told you ; my whole womanhood rebels against being the monstrous thing I am in his house. For love’s sake I would suffer anything ; I would endure all changes with a man who loved me, but I cannot, and I will not, be the kill-joy to a man who does not. Think,” she said, with a sudden

softening of voice and manner, "how long I have had his love. Can I expect more? I do not, I cannot blame him. Perhaps if some other woman were in my place, I should say she ought to stay in it, and make three lives wretched for the sake of keeping the laws. But I am no heroine. I cannot do it, and I will not!"

Brough listened to this passionate outburst, and sat a moment in silence afterwards. Then he said, very earnestly—

"Child, you are over-excited; your imagination is hard at work, and makes things seem more terrible than they are. Your idea is one born absolutely of madness. If you will wait till your brain clears, and you are cool, you will thank me for telling you this."

"What!" exclaimed Lil, drawing back and looking fearfully into his face. "Are you going to desert me? A moment ago you said you would help me, and now you speak like this!"

"It will be the best help I can give you, child, to show you the common-sense view of the affair. You are married, and you can't help it. There's no getting out of the situation without flying in the face of society."

Lil turned on him with an expression, he, at least, had never seen on her face before.

"Who taught me to think for myself, and not to obey the dictates of society? You! Who told me that laws were made for the

convenience of men, not men to be broken by laws? You! Who showed me that the true way of living was to follow one's own highest standard of right and wrong without attending to conventionalities and common-place views? You! Perhaps," she went on, less vehemently, but more bitterly, "if I had been taught by women and learned that to be a capricious slave was my right vocation, I should submit to be the thing I am in Charlie's house. But you taught me that to be an honest rebel was more righteous. That is all I am now. I only ask for justice, for myself, for my husband."

"My child," said Brough, very gently, "you both married of your own free will."

"Our own free will!" repeated Lil. "How old was I? Seventeen! What did I know of the world, of life, of the changeableness of human nature? What right had I to take vows for a lifetime? If Charlie and I ever did wrong, it was in taking those vows before that altar; and for that I pray Heaven may forgive us!"

There was something in the tone in which she said these last words that gave Brough a heavier sense of how terribly in earnest she was, than anything else.

"But it is done," he said, after a moment's pause; "it cannot be undone. You cannot escape, so put the dangerous thought out of your mind."

“I will escape!” she said, doggedly. “I am driven by despair. You have seen many things, but, perhaps, you have never seen a desperate woman. To live as I have been living is far worse than death—it is committing moral suicide.”

“Child,” said Brough, in a voice of pain, “believe me, you are over-excited.”

“That is possible,” she answered, “but it does not alter the facts. Look here, papa; inside my dress I carry with me, fastened round my neck by a chain, a phial. It is more precious to me than all the money in the Bank of England would be, if that were mine. You can see in my face what it holds: it holds my death. I have sworn to myself by all that I hold sacred, that if I fail in my attempt to escape, I will die. I am absolutely desperate. I am prepared to drink this at any moment when I see I cannot struggle any longer against my hideous fate.”

He looked at her in silence. Either this was not Lil, or he had never known his daughter until now. Lil’s voice had lost its passion, her face its fire, when she spoke of this final resource of hers. Her voice was cold and steely; her face was pale and rigid. Icy, impassive, she sat there, her eyes on the deck, her hand resting on her bosom where her talisman was hid. A chill ran through Brough’s veins—a chill of horror. He saw in that face, that attitude, something terrible.

He recognised that under pressure Lil was capable of becoming a criminal. She had an enormous capacity for love, for self-sacrifice; she had abundance of courage, but she had not that passive endurance which enables women to become domestic martyrs. Lil was capable of being an heroic criminal, and she had reached the state in which the deed appeared easy. Brough saw that written in her cold face; but he tried to shake off his consciousness of it.

“You are talking terrible nonsense,” he said, roughly. “My Lil is not the girl to do a cowardly act like that. Come, face it out, child—face it out! The least wrong you can do in the position you are placed in will be by remaining quiet.”

“But I cannot do that,” she answered, in the same impassive voice; “it is beyond my strength. Look at me, and see how it has aged me.”

“You are ill, that is all,” said Brough, looking in bitter distress at her face; “miserably ill, and overwrought!”

“I have borne all I can,” she went on, “and I can bear no more! A little while ago I thought I had not the courage to die—that I was too young!—but since I found a hope of escape, I knew that death would be easy by comparison with the life I have. I might have borne it a little longer if I had found no hope of escape—but now—oh! impossible. If I fail, I die! I am resolved.”

She raised her eyes now, and looked full at him. There was something in them as far removed from health as is insanity, and as dreadful. Brough shuddered. He would have been chilled to meet that look in the eyes of a woman on her way to be executed for the murder of her own child. In Lil's, it was awful! For some moments of a dreadful silence he sat still and numbed. He suffered as from a physical shock.

"Have you any plan?" he said, at last, in a voice so low as to be almost a whisper.

"Yes," she said, beginning to speak quickly. "You and I will have to go out of town together, on the idea that I am ill, and want change. A sudden attack of some kind can easily be simulated—such a death as Adelaide Neilson's, for instance. We should be obliged to take a doctor into our secret; for he would have to give a false certificate of death. If everything were hurried over, by the time Charlie was called on the scene, there might be only a coffin to show him, nailed up—or, safer still, a grave! He thinks I am ill—I see no reason why he should suspect false play."

The tears had rushed to her eyes now, and she was beginning to sob.

"Hush, dear little woman," said Brough, "you must control yourself! Do you not see we are close in? In a few minutes we shall be on the ship. For God's sake don't begin

to cry now. We won't stay long; the dear old Admiral, who was so anxious for me to come down, will give us something to eat and drink, and then, as soon as decency permits, we'll go home again. But you must keep your head till we've got through!"

They were, indeed, just in. There lay the gallant ship, her deck all covered with gay striped awning; and a boat in charge of a ship's officer was waiting to take the visitors on board. Lil controlled herself by a great effort.

"I am all right, papa," she said, "don't fear."

"Don't you see, baby, dear," said Brough, "that this doctor part of the business makes it impossible. No man would peril his reputation in that way; you couldn't get it done. It is impossible!"

Lil said nothing. That last word fell heavily; for she knew that Brough had seized upon the difficult point of the undertaking. She only repeated to herself, "Make the doors upon a woman's wit"—and, resolved to put all her thinking power upon that one point. At present the great thing was to appear as collected as possible; so she tried to rouse her spirit and look quietly round at the brilliant scene, as she followed Brough up the side of the ship.

It was wonderfully pretty, indeed, and for a moment it almost interested her. The deck

was all covered in with bright coloured awning, and over the exquisitely clean and beautiful floor was moving a crowd of ladies and gentlemen; most of the latter, ship's officers in uniform. At one side of the deck they were promenading; on the other, dancing; the band was invisible, being on the lower deck, but the music was good, and very inspiriting in this gay oasis on the sunlit water. A crowd of the ship's men stood watching the dancing with most interested expressions on their hard faces.

"I expect the Admiral will be very comfortably out of the way of all this fuss, in his own rooms," said Brough. "Shall we go straight there—I know he's generally got some uncommon good wine—or shall we walk about and look at all these fellows first?"

"Oh, let us walk about a little first," said Lil, "I shall feel better able to talk naturally in a few minutes. The music does me good."

So they walked down the deck, through the promenaders. They attracted a great deal of attention. Brough was always stared at when he went among people; he was so handsome, so tall, with such a sparkle of wit in his eyes. He wore his accustomed black velvet coat (which even to please Lady Warrington he would not discard in the daytime) and the red-ribboned straw hat. With his buoyant stride and breezy air, this man of letters looked

a stalwart giant among the kid-gloved dandies, some of whom, ship's officers though they were, looked mere boy-butterflies. Lil, at his side, so like and so unlike him, such a charming figure in her green dress, with the sun on her bright hair, had a great deal of staring all for herself. She did not observe it. Oh, what a shock it would have given to that decent, gay, social gathering, if they could have guessed the thoughts which filled the minds of these two handsome new comers!

While Lil was looking at the people, Brough was watching her face.

"Baby," he said, suddenly, "we must act in some way, and at once! I do not like your look; you are over-strained."

"I know it, papa," said Lil; "I hardly thought I could live out the last two days."

After that they said no more, but walked quietly down through the laughing, chattering crowd, and back again. Brough had almost forgotten where he was, he was so buried in thought over this new and terrible revelation. Lil had a certain feeling of relief now that another shared her secret thoughts and fears. She breathed more freely than she had done for days, and she looked about her at the faces and the dancing with a certain languid interest. How remote she felt from all these people who looked so gay and content. It was strange to walk among them

and know how near to death and despair her own life lay.

Suddenly she started violently and began to tremble.

“Hold me tight, papa,” she whispered, “or I believe I shall tumble down. There is the very man—the very man—the very man!”

“What on earth do you mean?” said Brough, with a momentary feeling that she really was out of her mind.

His first anxiety was to deposit her safely in a deck chair. That done, he asked again, What did she mean? Her eyes had become inturnd—she hardly seemed to hear or see him, she was thinking desperately. She took Brough’s hand with a sudden clinging action.

“Can I humble myself so? Can I tell him? Oh, what humiliations one may suffer! But I can, I will! He is the very man!”

“Who?”

“Did you not tell me that this ship sails in two or three days for China?” said Lil, whose eyes were flashing now, with the fire of quick determination.

“Yes. But tell me who you have seen!”

“Dr. Swift—my old admirer. He is on this ship; he is in uniform; he must be one of the officers. He has told me, too often, that he would do anything in the world for me. I do not think he has a conscience! I do not think he cares what he does! I know he will do it for me! The ship sails directly. He will

be safe out of England; he will forget it, perhaps, before he returns! Oh, if I can only bring myself to ask him!"

The sentences came clear, sharp, short; in a flash she had seen all the possibilities of the situation. The last words were a cry of agony.

Brough grasped her hand tight.

"My poor baby," he said, "this is terrible."

But he said no more. He did not think she would have the courage to expose her misery to such a man as Dr. Swift. It was a most unfortunate thing that she should have seen him, for Brough's idea—the only one he could find—was procrastination. He had resolved to sacrifice certain engagements and have a great scene with Lady Warrington in order to take Lil away alone with him for a time. He thought it was just possible that she might recover a more healthy tone of mind away from her husband. That was all the plan he could form, and he had determined to carry it out. Nothing could be more annoying than that anything or any one should turn up to keep Lil to her dreadful idea. He fancied he might turn her mind from it, if he had her to himself, amusing her, never losing sight of her, giving her mind fresh food. He had been making his plans since they ceased talking and stood thinking about them now, a frown on his forehead.

"You said the ship sailed in two or three

days," said Lil. "Yet it might be done. *I should not go home again at all.* Would you stay with me?"

"Of course," said Brough, uneasily.

Not to return to town now would be much more serious to him than arranging to give up his work for a month. Yet it was not that which caused his uneasiness of manner—he did not think about that. What disturbed him was Lil's frightful intent determination.

"Go and find him for me," said Lil; "I will stay here; I want a minute or two to think in."

Brough said nothing, but walked away from her. He had not the remotest intention of going to look for Dr. Swift; but he, too, wanted a quiet moment to himself. He did not know whether he could "think" in it; he felt utterly bewildered at last. He was entirely at a loss how to act. The most sensible idea that presented itself was to get the boat to land them, and take the first train to town. He must get Lil out of the way of this man Swift; and he resolved to do his utmost to enable her to bear her burden. He wondered perplexedly whether Lady Warrington would be very disagreeable if he took Lil home with him, and, if she was, whether it would matter?

What a horrible situation he was in! and how infernally his head ached, when he had time to notice it!

"I must get something to drink," he said

aloud. He had a rather alarming habit of talking to himself.

He hurried away, and he had hardly got fairly among the crowd before Dr. Swift was at Lil's side. He had seen her the moment she came on deck, and had been watching his opportunity. He did not care to speak to her while she was with her father.

"What a charming meeting, Mrs. Newman!" said the familiar voice in her ear. "After all, Heaven is kind to me. You are the only woman I wanted to see in all England; and when I went over to your cottage and found you had vanished, I thought the fates had turned against me. And now, I meet you on my own ship! And you are looking handsomer than ever. Are you glad to see me?"

She looked at him and succeeded in calling a smile upon her lips.

"I believe I am," she answered.

He had drawn another deck chair close to her's, and was sitting very near her. He was bronzed, handsome, with the same bold handsomeness as of old; a fine man, showy, and effective-looking. Most women would have liked his attentions. Lil shrank from him with horror. Her old repugnance to him was tenfold increased by the feeling that she was about to throw herself on his mercy. His mercy! A man with those bold, ungentle eyes, would have no mercy. But he was her one hope! If she let him go, perhaps Heaven

would deny her any other chance! She knew not where else to look for help. Fate seemed to have brought this man to her for the very purpose of giving her help. She trembled lest her shrinking would be visible. She knew how keen those eyes of his were. She knew, too, how quick his vanity was to take offence.

"I am very glad to see you," she said. "It is a long time since we have met. Did you really go to try and find me? We have been abroad—and—we are living in London now."

We! That dreadful plural! Had she spoken naturally? She wondered how that was possible, for it seemed to her that Charlie and his home were separated from her by a great gulf. It was only this morning she had come out—only this morning!—but the discussion with her father, and, still more, the opportunity that was before her—the bare possibility that she might never return!—removed this morning a whole age from her. She already felt herself to be out on her perilous voyage—out in the world—alone—playing in a drama that was tragic because it was real.



## CHAPTER XI.

“**I** EXPECT there’s a spread somewhere below deck,” remarked Brough, very audibly, as he proceeded to search for a way down.

“Certainly,” said one of the ship’s officers, who was standing near him, and who, unaware of Brough’s habit of thinking aloud, accepted the remark gracefully enough, as addressed to himself; “Come down with me and have some champagne.”

Thus invited, Brough descended, in charge of his hospitable new friend. He found a pretty “spread” below decks; a table, bright with flowers and gay groups gathered here and there, eating sandwiches and drinking claret-cup. A black steward offered Brough some claret while he was admiring the scene; he took a glass and drank it off. He was absolutely parching. But, in the meantime, his entertainer was opening a bottle of champagne, and now urged Brough to come into his state-room, and partake thereof. The officers’ tiny little dens were all converted into reception-rooms, the minute dressing-ables were covered with snowy cloths, on

which private little lunches could be spread. Many of them held one or two visitors, for the officers' hospitality was as large as their accommodation was small, and lady visitors were delighted to be entertained in these minute state-rooms, and observe how exquisitely clean and neat they were, and what womanish refinements a sailor is capable of.

Brough insinuated his big form carefully into a dainty den that looked to him very much like Lady Warrington's dressing-room, only incredibly smaller. He was immensely interested in all the little devices to save space and increase comfort which the officers had contrived, and, for a moment, Lil and her mortal troubles passed out of his mind. He drank some glasses of champagne, and amused his host very much by his conversation. Suddenly, all his bright humour departed as suddenly as it had come. He saw something which inexpressibly startled him. Through an open doorway, on the opposite side of the saloon, he caught sight of Lil, sitting on a low chair in an officer's state-room; she held a glass of champagne in her hand. A man in officer's uniform was leaning over her, speaking earnestly. Her face was towards Brough; it wore the strangest look he had ever seen upon it. Suddenly, she put the wine from her, and raised both hands to her throat as if some pain were there. Brough knew that action; he had seen her do it when a child,

and she was overwrought with excitement. He made a step towards her. If only she would drink that wine! Lil caught sight of him, and instantly put out one hand, with an imperative gesture, which made him understand he must not come near her. As he turned away she gave a sigh of relief. If he had come upon the scene and discovered what words these were Dr. Swift was saying to her, he might have done some damage to that valuable officer, and, worse still, have ruined her hopes.

“Hush!” she said, as soon as she found some voice to speak with. “You mistake me—I have not made myself understood—”

“I will leave the Navy—I will live where you like. You know your power over me. I believe you could awake ambition in me. You excite me as no other woman does. With your love I should be a different man.”

“My love!” repeated Lil. “Are you unable to understand plain English when I tell you that I can love no one but my husband?”

“And you want to leave him?”

“Yes.”

“You do not speak plain English. You speak enigmas. What has he done?”

“Nothing! Oh, Dr. Swift, do not question me! Be generous. I cannot tell you everything—not here—not now—not to you. But you will help me?”

“You know it. I have told you long ago

you can command me. But what is it you suggest? It will be a horrid trick, a painful masquerade, this plan of yours. Far better get a divorce."

"I cannot," said Lil.

"But you can let him get one!"

"What do you mean? You speak enigmas now."

"It is difficult for a woman to get a divorce, but not so hard for her husband. Take my admiration, my adoration, let me be your slave, let me love you as you have never been loved yet, and you will soon have your freedom. It is a hard price to pay for the liberty you so desire, is it not? a hard price, to let yourself be loved!"

"You cannot—you do not understand me! I would sooner live the life I do than be so false to him—to myself—to you! Why should I make of you a tool by which to gain my freedom? I would use no man so. If I loved you, it would be another matter. I have told you I do not. I have a too constant heart, I suppose. I still love the man whom I swore to love."

"I don't ask you to love me; I only ask to be allowed to love you. Accept my admiration, endure my society, put up with the passion which you so scorn, and you shall very soon be free."

A bitter, mocking look came suddenly into Lil's face; a look which was new upon her

features. She turned her head away from Dr. Swift as she spoke.

"I think I know more about this sort of thing than you do, after all. You have forgotten the damages. How would you like to pay those?"

"Your husband wants his release, as I understand, and, in such a case, the money matters are easily arranged."

"It is for such men as you that this law makes loop-holes," thought Lil to herself.

"It is very easy, you see," explained Dr. Swift, "to take a thing in public and hand it back in private."

Lil needed no explanation. She had studied the unpleasant subject sufficiently to know what he meant, but she did not reply directly. She felt afraid that she might offend him, for she could only say that neither herself nor her husband would stoop to such a falsehood. He thought he had made an impression, and began to speak again, but she interrupted him passionately.

"Don't say another word!" she exclaimed. "The horror of a public divorce case would kill me. I would rather go to my death a shorter way. Besides, he would never drag me into a Divorce Court! And, believe me, when I say, once for all, that I intend to keep those marriage vows; I respect and esteem the man with whom I took them. He has done nothing to forfeit my love, my esteem. I will do nothing to forfeit his!"

“You are trying to put yourself outside of the pale of ordinary humanity,” said Dr. Swift, with the savage sound in his voice which, until now, had not made itself heard during this interview. “You might as well give up the attempt gracefully ; it must come to grief in the end.”

“Then you will not help me?” said Lil, half rising, and, as she did so, turning her face up to him. He looked into her eyes a moment.

“You know I will. You have only to look at me, and I will do anything you want. Perhaps I shall not always be unrewarded. Even a slave may get a smile sometimes.”

She turned to him, and a smile broke over her face.

“Now, you are kind,” she said. “Now you are my friend. Oh, Dr. Swift, if you knew how my heart leapt when I saw your face to-day—when I remembered how you had promised to be my friend!”

“I would rather be your friend than nothing,” said Dr. Swift, dropping his bold eyes as he spoke. He knew there was an expression in them which it would be better she should not see.

“Then help me!” she said, clasping her hands piteously, and speaking in a voice which might have melted a man of iron. Swift, with all his faults, was not made of iron, and he had a passion for this woman.

“Tell me, now, exactly what you propose,” he said, “and what you want me to do.”

“Will no one overhear me?” said Lil, in a state of breathless emotion.

“There is no one near enough,” said Swift, speaking quickly. “Pray go on.” He had caught some of her excitement.

Just then Brough passed again, and looked to Lil for guidance. She again signed to him to leave her. He walked off, and sent in his card to his friend the Admiral. He was received with delight into a circle of middle-aged gentlemen, who, as soon as the door was shut, became hilarious and witty, after a fashion. Brough was welcomed as a great social addition, so he did his best to keep up his reputation. He told stories, made jokes, and kept the room in a roar. There was a sentry on guard outside the Admiral's door, so there was no fear of interruption. The Admiral's little select party was about the most jovial on board. Brough almost forgot his anxieties, and talked his best, and laughed with that hearty, robust shout of laughter which was so infectious. He got into his swing of anecdote (nobody else ever thought of telling a story when Brough was in the vein; he always kept the platform), and the incidents of the last few hours became as a dream in his mind. Sometimes, in great trouble, the brain acts in this way of itself; it will return to events of long ago, and recall

them vividly, while the immediate moment becomes remote. But the reaction is all the more intense for this mental rest; when the mind returns to the contemplation of the present, it is to see it with a greater vividness. So it was with Brough. Suddenly, in the full flow of one of his best stories, Lil's white, agonised face rose before him, with that strange look upon it, and her hands at her throat as though she were choking. His little girl!—his Lil!—the child whom he loved so! Was it possible that she really was suffering like this! He stopped speaking; he had forgotten the end of the story. He made an effort, tried to recall it, but in vain. He rose from his chair abruptly.

“Admiral,” he said, “I am ashamed of myself. I have a lady with me on board, and I ought not to have left her so long. I must go. Your delightful society has made me forget everything else. Good-bye!”

He was gone almost before they had time to realise that he was going.

“Queer fellow, Warrington,” said the Admiral, looking round on the disappointed faces when the door had shut with a slam, and Brough's breezy brightness was gone. “One of the wittiest dogs out, but awfully conceited. This is all put on, you know. He knows we want to hear the end of that story, and he likes to go off in this style and leave us longing.”

But Brough had forgotten the very existence of the Admiral and his friends, although he was dimly aware that the Admiral's Madeira was rather "heady." He had not cleared his brain by his refreshment; on the contrary, it was more clouded. He had not thought of eating anything, and the fresh air was exhausting to a man who had been shut up in London for weeks. The effect of the wine he had drunk was to make him feel idle, indisposed for action or decision of any kind. His one dominant idea was to find Lil and take care of her. Beyond that he resolved he would not take up any immediate responsibility. The "thing was too infernally difficult." He hurried into the saloon with big strides, but presently he caught sight of Lil. She was still in Dr. Swift's state-room. They were talking earnestly. When Brough saw her he began to loiter; this he did for various reasons. As soon as he joined Lil, he would have to rouse himself to find out what she had told Dr. Swift, to exert his energies, and get her home. He wanted a moment of idleness. He had been working his brain very hard, perhaps too hard, for some time; he felt that what he had heard to-day was a greater tax on his mind than the work of weeks. He encountered his hospitable acquaintance who had entertained him in his state-room, and lingered to speak to him. Lil caught sight of him at this moment. Her

face fell instantly. She knew every passing expression of his so well that she recognised at once that he was in no mood to be easily influenced. She caught her breath—glanced at Dr. Swift—hesitated.

“What am I to do?” she said. “Papa will never listen to what we propose, to what I am determined to do. He will insist upon taking me back to town. Oh, help me!”

Dr. Swift thought a moment before he spoke.

“Sham to him,” he said. “It’s your best chance.”

Lil looked bewildered.

“Trust in me,” he said, quickly. “Pretend you are very ill. Don’t take him into your confidence till the telegrams are sent, then he can’t back out. I’ll stick to you all through. Believe me, the fewer accomplices at a given time the better. I’ll send the telegrams if you will tell me what to say. Trust me, it’s your best chance.”

Lil saw it was. It would be impossible to overcome her father’s scruples in that place quickly. She could see plainly, as she looked at him again, that he had, with a faculty peculiar to him, cast off the intensity of her distress from his mind for the moment. He was very, very sorry for her, that she well knew, but he would never be persuaded to help her carry out her terrible resolve in his present humour.

“What shall I do?” she said, in a low voice.

“When you see him approaching, faint, and stick to it. It’s safe enough,” he thought to himself. “Only a doctor would know it wasn’t real, and there’s not another doctor on board ship. I’ll get you through,” he went on, aloud, “if you do exactly what I tell you from time to time. In the meanwhile, use your brains, and tell me what to say to your husband.”

“Tell him not to come down,” said Lil. “Give him some reason why he should not come. If he should, he would ruin all.”

“I will say it would make you think yourself worse than you are, or something of that sort. Well?”

“Tell him,” she said, tremulously, “that I am quite happy and safe with papa, don’t forget. And don’t let all these people come and stare at me.”

“No, no. I’ll shut the door, and no one shall know. Quick,” he went on, speaking imperatively. “Make yourself gelatinous. Fall—I’ll save you. Don’t open your eyes till I give you your cue—“she’s coming round” —and suppress your breathing; keep your lips a little parted.”

Lil obeyed his orders with the alacrity of despair. She had determined, once having conquered her repugnance to taking Dr. Swift into her confidence, to utilise his presence, and act without delay. She was resolved not to lose this golden opportunity. Yet she trembled at

the thought of persuading her father to take her view of it. For her strength had nearly all left her; the excitement she had gone through had worn her out, and the fearful position in which she was placed seemed too much for her to understand. She had spent her energies, and now, in the great moment when all must be decided for good or ill, she clung to her new ally, a man she disliked, with the weakness of despair. It was a frightful instant, that in which she determined to deceive her father and fling her whole confidence for the moment on Dr. Swift. She disliked him more intensely than ever, if that were possible, and yet, in this emergency, she clung to him. He was so strong, so ready to help her, so entirely without scruple. The fact was, he enjoyed it. He felt himself to be playing "second lead," all at once, in a drama that interested him.

Brough's steps quickened; he saw Lil suddenly sway and fall. In a moment he was by her side, and took her from Dr. Swift, who had caught her in his arms.

"She is ill!" he exclaimed.

"I'm afraid so," said Swift. "Shut the door if you can; there's precious little room; but we can't have a crowd here, as there will be if we don't take care."

Brough shut the door; he could hardly turn himself round when he had done so. Lil's face frightened him; it was absolutely

white, and she seemed perfectly unconscious. Her pallor was terrible. The truth was that she was in a state of extreme exhaustion. For days she had scarcely touched food, and to-day she had taken neither meat nor drink. She was so worn out that this enforced stillness was grateful to her. She listened with acute interest to every word that passed, but she was not expected to speak, to plot, or plan. It seemed to her, in her exhausted nervous condition, as if Dr. Swift had taken the responsibility of her deed—as if she had shifted it on to his shoulders. She lay perfectly still and motionless, until at last it seemed to her that she was in a dream, and that all her misery was a ghastly phantasmagoria. At last she began to attend earnestly to whatever Dr. Swift said, looking out for the words at which she was to open her eyes. But they did not come. He got his stethoscope and listened to her heart; and then she felt a mad desire to smile, because she knew he shook his head. But the spasm of mirth which passed over her was like that in a nightmare; it did not penetrate the abyss of trembling misery and fear, which seemed to be all that was left of her unhappy self.

“It will be impossible for her to return to town to-night,” she heard Dr. Swift say, at last. “The best plan I can suggest is to take her on shore to an hotel, and let her stay there till this attack is over. She will not be

fit to move for a day or two; she is in a shockingly delicate state of health. I suppose you will be able to stay with her, Mr. Warrington?"

"I must, whether I can or no," said Brough. "Poor baby! I won't leave her, that is certain. I must telegraph to town."

Brough was completely deceived by this seizure of Lil's, and it sobered and saddened him terribly.

"I know the people in the town," said Dr. Swift, presently. "I think I had better send ashore and have a room got ready for her. Then we will have her carried there, for the noise here will try her dreadfully."

Brough thanked him warmly. Swift seemed so useful and good-natured he almost forgot his dislike for him.

"By the way," said Swift, turning back, "shall I send your telegrams for you?"

"Oh, do; that's a good fellow," said Brough. He took out some letters, and on the backs of the envelopes wrote out two brief messages for editors, and one for Lady Warrington. "Now, for Charlie," he said. This took longer; but he finished it at last, and handed it over to Swift. Lil gave a deep, silent sigh of relief and gratitude when she remembered that Swift knew what to say to Charlie, and would alter the message so as not to alarm him too much. All would be ruined if he should come down. Her heart

trembled at the thought. She shuddered at the idea of failing, now she had gone so far. It seemed to her as if in thus clinging to Dr. Swift she had stepped over some terrible precipice, and now lay stunned at its base. A vast distance appeared to separate her from all her preceding life.

Dr. Swift went away. She understood she was to remain motionless until his return.

It seemed a long time that he was away; in reality, he was not gone more than a very few minutes, but to Lil every second seemed an age. She was beginning to suffer now because Brough was deceived. In her nervous state she fancied this sin of hers larger than any other. She longed to open her eyes and speak to him, but she dared not imperil the plot now that it was actually being carried out. Brough himself was completely unnerved and thrown off his balance by the sight of her miserable state.

At last she heard Dr. Swift's voice; he was in the saloon again. In another instant he was at her side, leaning over her.

"Ah," he said, "that is better—she is coming round."

Lil opened her eyes slowly, and met his full upon her. The consciousness of the secret which they shared was in his; it was evidently a delight to him.

"Thank God," said Brough, in a tone of intense relief.

“Now, Mrs. Newman,” said Swift, cheerfully, “we want to try and get you off this noisy boat into a quiet room; do you think you can stand?” He bent over, and put his arm under her head to raise her. Lil obeyed his guidance, and rose up trembling. Her very lips were white now, and she looked ill indeed. She was shuddering to feel herself in this man’s power as she was.

She really could hardly stand, and she scarcely knew how she was got to the boat. The sailors were as gentle and kind as if they had been trained to the work. A cab was in waiting close to where the boat landed them, and Lil suffered herself to be lifted into this.

At last they reached the room at the hotel, where all was prepared for her reception. As they entered, Brough was a step in advance. Swift stooped his head to Lil’s ear, and said, almost inaudibly, “Faint again.” Then he uttered a slight exclamation, and Brough turned to see him holding Lil’s apparently lifeless body. They got her on to a couch.

“The exertion has been too much for her,” said Swift, gravely. “She is in a frightfully weak state.”

He looked so serious that Brough groaned. He cursed, under his breath, the day when she had married and left him, but Lil caught the words, and a shudder passed through her.

Swift sat down and wrote a prescription.

That was an awful afternoon.

Brough left them for a few moments. Swift immediately came close to Lil. "Am I not a good doctor?" he whispered. "How do you like being my patient? Come, Lil, don't be cruel to me after this. Make up your mind to throw over your mad scheme, and come to America with me. Instead of a wretched existence, I would give you a life worth living—"

A knock at the door. "The medicine, please, sir."

Swift took it in, and immediately opened it. He measured out a dose, and, as soon as the door was safely shut again, threw it on the hearth. Then he returned to Lil.

"We would go out of reach," he went on, "and so save all the publicity you dread. You have not travelled, as I have; you do not know the charm of a new life in a new country. All your old miseries would be left behind, and, in a little while, forgotten. And I would only ask you to tolerate me, and let me take care of you."

Lil sighed heavily. To her intense relief she heard Brough at the door.

"Is she any better?" he asked.

Swift took up his *rôle* instantly.

"I'm afraid not."

He drew Brough away to the window.

"I ought to tell you," he said, "that there seems to me cause for the gravest anxiety. The action of her heart is hardly perceptible."

He saw such a look come into Brough's face that an impulse of mercy came upon him. "But rest may do a great deal," he said, "absolute rest. I am not without hope."

"Not without hope!" Brough repeated to himself. "Good heavens!"

He went and sat down beside Lil. She could not bear to think of his silent suffering. She opened her eyes and smiled. She really felt too exhausted to speak, but she made an effort.

"I don't think I'm going to die, papa," she said.

"That's right, baby," said Brough.

A sudden impulse came upon her.

"Papa," she said, very low, "will you refuse still to help me in what I asked?"

"No, baby, no," said Brough. "I'll do anything you want if you'll only get well again."

"Is that a promise?" she said, in a hardly audible voice.

"Absolutely," he answered.

Lil clung to the big hand which he had put on hers. Ah, how low misery brings one," she thought. "How is it possible I deceive him! Perhaps it is no deception in reality. I must be very ill, for I feel like death!"

Her dress had been unfastened at the throat. Brough saw the chain to which she had attached the phial which she had filled with poison. He quietly drew it out, and en-

deavoured to detach it. Lil snatched violently at his hands, and recovered her treasure.

“Give it to me,” he said, pleadingly.

“Never!” she said, in a harsh voice. “I may recover!—I may fail!”

Brough rose without a word, and walked over to the window. He looked out without seeing anything. The future was so black it shut out all else from his view. Either Lil would die, or she would consign herself to a living death with him for grave-digger. Which prospect were the darker he could not tell.

And yet she was afraid to confide in him—yet.

The next time she was alone with Dr. Swift she spoke to him of herself.

“You swear you will nail up the coffin with your own hands?”

“I swear it.”

“But what reason will you give?”

“That I have made a *post mortem* examination, because of the suddenness of the death. The doctor often puts the body in the coffin after that.”

“Yes.”

“And I swear to open it again.”

“Ah!”

Lil had intended to tell her father nothing of her deception (which preyed upon her mind, strange as it may seem, more than the great deception she was practising on her husband) until after the final telegram had been

sent to Charlie. But, as she met Swift's eyes, her courage gave way. She was afraid of him. She determined that when he had returned to the ship, as he was obliged to do at night, she would tell her father all, and make him promise not to leave her until Swift had sailed.

She carried out this determination late that night.

She asked her father to stay with her and talk a little. She was lying in her bed, looking more like a corpse than a living woman. In a weak voice, broken by the most piteous tears, she told him how her illness had been in great part feigned, and what her plot with Swift was; how she trusted to him, her father, to forgive her and protect her.

Brough said nothing at first. He walked about the room thinking. He saw that if Lil would do what she had done to-day it was useless to try and stop her; she would go on to the end.

"I am glad you have told me," he said, a little coldly. "You wouldn't like to be in that fellow's power altogether."

"I hate him," she said, shuddering, "and I am afraid of him."

"He has consented to perjure himself for you, and risk his reputation. He is a calculating man. He has some object."

"You cannot frighten me," she said. "He is leaving England. I trust never to see him

again. No living soul but you shall know my hiding-place. That shall be my one care."

"I hope it will be successful," he answered, rather drily. "Baby," he said, pausing in his walk, and fixing his eyes on her, "you have not taken the irrevocable step yet."

She understood him. She raised herself in her bed, clasped the precious phial at her neck in one hand, and lifted the other solemnly above her head.

"But I will," she said, in a terrible voice. "I will not turn back. If you desert me, I go on alone, at all risks. If I fail, I will die."

She fell forward on her face. Is it strange, after her imitation of it?—this time she fainted in earnest.

Brough could not leave her all that night. Continually he had to promise not to desert her, to be true to her lie. He did so with a heavy heart.



## CHAPTER XII.

**H**OW well she knew her husband. His first impulse, when he had torn open the telegram and hastily glanced at it, was to join her ; he read it again, and concluded she would like best perhaps to be alone with her father.

The third thought that entered his mind was of Adelaide. She was as far removed from him as she was this morning—as utterly inaccessible—yet, somehow, Lil's absence seemed to leave his thoughts freer. When Lil was with him it appeared like a secret insult to let the vision of Adelaide's face for ever shine before his eyes ; now that he was alone the wrong appeared halved. He longed for Adelaide's presence—not for Lil's absence.

He could not go to his study and shut the door and sit down to his writing-table. He kept wandering about the house, which felt so strange and empty. He went into the different rooms over and over again with a curious feeling growing upon him that the whole thing was a dream—that he would wake soon to find himself Charlie Newman of the clerk's stool, with a cottage and a

charming wife, and a dim memory of Adelaide's face as a face out of a dream.

It was strange, how, the weight of hourly self-repression being taken off him, excitement seemed to enter his blood like a fever. He could not rest, and late in the night he went out and walked about the streets. The air sobered him a little and he went home weary and dispirited. What was this foolish feeling of liberty which had so deluded him? Nothing was changed—only he was alone a little while, long enough to realise his own weakness, long enough to discover how his whole being was becoming enfeebled by a craving for the impossible.

The next morning he came down to breakfast feeling very tired and very bored. "The fact is," he said to himself, as he viewed his languid-looking face in the glass, "I want freshening up. I shall run across to Boulogne. It is a good opportunity while Lil is away; I don't care to leave her alone here."

He said this, aloud, for the benefit of his own ears. He wanted to blind himself and he almost succeeded in doing it. He was in need of some fresh air; and it really did seem an excellent opportunity to run away for a couple of days while Lil was in the country with her father. All this he repeated to the housekeeper; not for her enlightenment, but his own; but still he was glad to find she so fully agreed with him. He was

going through that queer sort of half-conscious acting which most of us feel impelled to indulge in now and then ; and which make a man wonder whether indeed he is an individual, or whether Oliver Wendell Holmes had not some good sense in his suggestion that the human being is an omnibus instead of a private carriage. We speak of talking to ourselves every day, and think nothing of the contradiction in terms ; but when it comes to large matters and we speak of arguing with ourselves, deceiving ourselves, blinding ourselves, then indeed it becomes perplexing.

Charlie was obeying a law of nature. One woman, who had held him in a clasp of love so strong it was difficult to imagine it unloosed, had kept him by her presence, in a certain state of quiet resolution ; her touch removed, her influence gone, and the new passion exerted its full power over him. He was impelled, like an arrow from the bow. But his conscience dared not face this fact ; it looked the other way and would not observe. And so he "made believe" with himself and got the very housekeeper to help him. He had no idea of going further than Boulogne ; that would just give him a taste of the sea.

His bag was packed, and he started. The sea air did him good ; and alone on this boat among a number of people who knew nothing of him, of his ties or his obligations, he began

to suffer from a strange, vague bewilderment between his desires and his sense of duty.

“That way madness lies,” he said to himself many a time, and felt half inclined to take the next boat back again and go home to find protection in the familiar surroundings against that self which was overpowering him.

But he did not. He stayed at Boulogne, and thought it particularly uninteresting and uninviting. The next day saw him in the train for Paris. Nature had got her way. And now that she had got it, the better man began to feel ashamed of having yielded to her. All thoughts of the real magnet which attracted him were vigorously put aside. He determined to go and buy some china which Lil had coveted when they passed through; he wondered whether she would like a white cat, and whether it would be a very great trouble to take one across with him. She had admired a pair of bronze candlesticks in a certain shop; he would try to get those for her. He resolved to get her some long gloves, and long mittens; he felt as if he would like to carry Paris home for her. Anything to still that uneasy sense within him of being a weak-minded fool!

The next morning he went out and bought everything he could think of that would please Lil. His room at the hotel became crowded with all sorts of pretty things, from eggshell china to a white cat in a basket.

He stopped short of absurdity, and that was all. Then it occurred to him that he had better let the housekeeper at home know where he was in case of his being wanted. Lil might be really ill, and wish him to come to her! A strange foreboding suddenly filled him and he went in a hurry to telegraph to the housekeeper. He simply had not the courage to write to Lil—from Paris! What would she think? When they met at home and she found he had been to Paris—*without seeing the Mainwarings*—there could be no harm in it.

All this done, he had no occupation but to walk about the streets. At least it seemed so to him! Why did he not go to the Louvre? Because nothing attracted him there! Why did he not go to a hundred and one other places to which other people go? Because he was bewildered by a certain name of a street and number of a house which kept on repeating themselves in his head whether he listened to them or no.

In that street, in that house, Adelaide Mainwaring was living.

Might he not even look at the windows? Could there be any wrong in walking in one street more than another?

He walked up and down the street, for how long he could not tell. He regarded the door as he passed with a feeling of fear; how many times could he pass and not touch

that bell? Was not some tangible though invisible power reaching out from that doorway and drawing him towards it? He was passing it for the hundredth time when a carriage drew up close beside him; the carriage door opened and a lady stepped out. Adelaide Mainwaring was at his side, her hand on that bell which he had so long resisted. It was easy to understand now what he had been waiting for! She saw his face in the lamp-light, and started visibly.

“Is it you, Mr. Newman?” she said, making a heroic effort to keep her presence of mind; “I did not know you were in Paris?”

Even then he might have shaken hands and passed on. But he could not instantly tear himself away from looking at her face, suffused with sudden colour.

“Will you come in,” she said; “Mamma will be so glad to see you.”

They went upstairs to a drawing-room, where Mrs. Mainwaring was sitting reading. She looked up with a face of amazement when she saw who Adelaide’s companion was. She tried to summon her social tact, and to appear pleased, but she did not succeed. Charlie, however, was not aware of what her looks expressed, though he did wish devoutly he could say Lil was in Paris when she asked him!

It is possible for sensation to become so keen that we can give our attention to nothing else. Pain sometimes prevents people

from thinking, or speaking; they are absorbed in suffering. But pain is not the only sensation which produces this effect. Excitement, joy, passion, all are capable of absorbing the faculties by their intensity. The sudden meeting seemed to have swept away the artificial appearance which these unfortunate lovers had before been able to assume; they could not battle with the bewildering sensations which overpowered them. Neither of them knew how the time passed which Charlie spent in that room; neither could have told whether a word had been uttered or not. Passion had its will so far that it crushed every other feeling. No one could have been blind to the emotions which spoke eloquently from the faces of these unhappy ones.

Charlie went away in a dream, hardly knowing that he went, and quite impervious to the indignant flash from Mrs. Mainwaring's eyes. When he was gone, Adelaide sat still and silent as a statue. She often did so now. But the change appeared extraordinary, for but a moment since every curve of her form had speech in it. Mrs. Mainwaring walked up and down the room, turning a furious look upon her daughter when she passed her, a look in which anger and horror mingled.

"Have you not answered Mr. Poynings' letter?" she said presently.

"No," answered Adelaide.

“Go to your writing-table now, and write to him.” Adelaide went to it at once, like an automaton. She took some paper and began to write. “What am I to say?” she asked.

“Accept his offer of marriage decisively; and say we hope to see him in Paris very soon.”

Adelaide leaned back in her chair for an instant as if to draw her breath more easily; but she immediately bent over the table again and went on writing the letter. She gave it to her mother to read, while she addressed the envelope. Then she sealed it up and stamped it. Then she turned and looked at her mother with a face which might have drawn sympathy from a woman of stone.

Mrs. Mainwaring was something harder; she was a woman of the world. She snatched the letter from the table with another glance of horror at Adelaide; and, merely saying “I will see it is posted immediately,” left the room.

When she had gone, Adelaide rose and put her hands to her head with a gesture of wild despair.

“What sort of world do I live in,” she cried aloud, “when my own mother, seeing that I love one man, thinks it righteous to make me marry another whom I do not love? She makes me false to the man I love—to myself—to the man I am to marry. O, hated, detested,

unnatural worldliness, which sacrifices all truth for the sake of appearances !”

Mrs. Mainwaring, having sent the letter to the post, had quietly re-entered the room. She heard these words though they were almost whispered. She came forward and looked at Adelaide, with an expression of distrust and disgust as though her child had become terrible to her. Their eyes met.

These women were perfectly well-bred. They had never quarrelled in their lives, though their dispositions were different as light from darkness.

Nothing was said now. But Adelaide, after meeting her mother's strange gaze for a moment, turned and went away to her room, feeling that indeed she had no mother. From that hour all sympathy was over between them.

Mrs. Mainwaring had now but one fixed idea. Her daughter must be married as soon as possible. She had always dreaded Adelaide's impulsive, emotional character leading her into some difficulty. But she had never anticipated anything so perfectly horrible to her sense of decency and good taste, as that it should betray her into loving a man already married. But this being now visible, and even audibly confessed by Adelaide herself, there was only one course to save her reputation and secure her from further dangers: to marry her immediately. At least none of

their own set had seen anything of this yet; and Adelaide once made Mrs. Poynings, the mother's mind would be at rest!

The only thing that puzzled her was Adelaide's ready obedience. She determined to watch her incessantly. She was so unable to understand her own child that she fancied this creature of impulse, whose face showed every emotion of her brilliant soul, was capable of deceiving her!

She knew nothing of strong emotions herself. She had always lived upon the surface of existence where everything is pretty and pleasant and everyone appears perfectly proper and well-conducted.

She could not guess at the source of Adelaide's ready obedience. She knew nothing of the despair which creates apathy. Adelaide felt herself to be helpless—adrift and astray. She simply gave up a hopeless struggle and allowed herself to be carried along by the current she was in.



## CHAPTER XIII.

**T**HE next morning Charlie awoke to a clearer brain and better understanding of his position. He saw that it was simply madness to go and see Adelaide; that it only agitated and distressed her, and bewildered himself beyond bearing. He did not know what to do with himself; whether to start for home at once or not. He ended by getting a horse and going for a long ride in the hope that fresh air would bring back to him some common sense.

It was not till the evening that he returned to his hotel. He found there a telegram awaiting him. It was from the housekeeper at home.

“Come home immediately. There is terrible news.”

Terrible news! Why are women so mysterious—why couldn't she explain!—he asked himself as he hurriedly made his preparations for departure.

Of course he connected this terrible news with Lil. There was no one else of importance to him in the world—except one, here, in Paris! What it could be, he could not

conjecture, except that she must be very ill.

All the way home he tortured himself with wondering how he could have been such a brute as to go to Paris instead of going to her when he knew she was ill. It gradually grew stronger in his mind, the idea that something very strange must have happened. It was so unlike her to stay away from home unexpectedly. And it was most extraordinary for Brough to leave his wife, and his work, in that way. Terrible news!—What could it be?

The rapid journey seemed interminable. But it came to an end at last, and he arrived at his own door.

There were three telegrams awaiting him. They were all from Brough Warrington. The first said "Come immediately. I have terrible news for you." Charlie flung that aside and snatched up another which he could scarcely read for agitation. "Come at once, Lil has been seized with a fatal attack. I fear you will be too late." Charlie stood with this open in his hands—it vanished from before his eyes. He was stupefied.

"There is another, sir," said a voice at his side. It was the housekeeper, who had been in the room all the time. She put the other into his hands.

After a moment the mist cleared from his eyes and he saw the words which were before him.

“You are too late to see her. But do come at once.”

“Too late to see her?” said Charlie to the woman who stood by him; “what does he mean?”

“I suppose, sir,” said the housekeeper, with the bated breath of awe and pleasure with which such people speak of horrors, “my poor lady has died, sudden-like. It seems wonderful sudden, but I know she did have spasms in her heart, and, poor lady, she has often looked strange lately.”

Charlie stared at the woman a moment, bewildered. Was this a fact that she was talking of? He snatched up his hat and was out of the house again in another moment.

Brough Warrington was spending this afternoon in idleness and deep dejection. He was left in a most forlorn position. Charlie did not come. He had promised Lil to stay till he did come. He expected Charlie's arrival momentarily, and he dreaded the interview to the last degree. He had abundance of leisure to reflect on the extraordinary folly of Lil's proceedings; and to wonder how she was bearing her loneliness and misery.

Charlie came at last hurrying in with the wildest look in his face, and the telegrams still in his hand. “Are these true?” he said, holding them up to Brough; “what do they mean?”

“True, yes! Thank the gods you have come; but you are too late.”

“Too late?—do you mean Lil is dead?”

“She is gone.” Brough had not invariably told the truth all his life, and he held that in some situations a lie was the better thing. Yet this deception, in which he had been compelled to take a part, cost him a good deal, and he walked away, that Charlie might not see his face. But Charlie was not in a condition to be observant. He felt as if the solid earth had suddenly fallen away from under his feet.

“Tell me something about it!” he exclaimed.

At that moment someone opened the door, and then paused on the threshold of the room. It was Dr. Swift. In reality he had come with a message from Lil to her father! Brough welcomed him, for the first time in their acquaintance, with absolute joy.

“This is Dr. Swift,” he exclaimed, “he was with Lil when—at the last. Most fortunately we met him when she was taken so ill. Dr. Swift, tell Mr. Newman about Lil’s illness. I cannot!”

How differently this was understood by the two men! Charlie saw in it the emotion which was natural; Dr. Swift merely thought Brough, like a coward, was backing out of a difficult part of the business. However, he rose to the occasion. He put on the peculiar air which doctors adopt in such a situation; in which they dexterously mingle professional interest and ordinary sympathy. He related

briefly how he met Lil; how she had been taken ill on the ship; how he had come with her to the hotel and done all in his power for her. He described her illness with so clever a veil of medical jargon that Brough could only listen in admiration.

He cleverly hid behind a safe fact. He said Lil had died of heart disease. The action of her heart was really feeble, and he knew that if she had been examined by any other doctor this fact would be known and his tale would be plausible and easily believed.

“No power on earth could have saved her,” he said. “In order to satisfy myself absolutely of that, I made a post-mortem examination.”

“And that is why we were obliged to hurry the funeral,” said Brough; “you see, my dear boy, we could not have kept the coffin open. It seems horrible to have you come down here and find nothing but a grave! but as you could not be found there was no other course to take.”

“Nothing but a grave!” repeated Charlie, in a tone which showed the others that these words had at last forced conviction upon his mind. Until then it had all seemed a dream — an impossible nightmare. These words made it suddenly a ghastly fact.

“I think I had better go, if I am not needed,” said Dr. Swift; “I have a great deal in hand, as my ship sails to-morrow.”

He bowed himself out of the room, but Charlie neither saw nor heard him. He was repeating to himself—

“Nothing but a grave! Nothing but a grave!” Sometimes the words seemed absolutely senseless—then they started into sudden and horrible meaning.

Dr. Swift gave Brough a look which made him follow him. Brough did so and went with him downstairs. But they did not venture to speak till they were out of the hotel—out in the road, with no one near.

“I have been to say good-bye to her,” said Dr. Swift, “and she wished me to tell you that she is quite well.”

“Do you say that, or is it only her message?”

“Oh, she is well now, and will be for a little while. But her nerves are utterly overstrained, and with her excitable temperament it will be a long time before this will wear off. I think her mind will go if she is alone much and with nothing to do. Occupation and society would keep her from going mad; nothing else, that I know of.”

“Good Heavens, what am I to do?”

“I don’t know. But I thought it right to tell you the truth. Save her if you can. Good-bye—I must go—I have used my last minute.”

He was gone. And Brough Warrington walked up and down the road a while, before

he could prevail upon himself to return to Charlie, cursing his fate in good set terms.

He was thus engaged when Charlie himself appeared at the door of the hotel. He looked haggard, half-a-dozen years older than he had looked an hour ago. He approached Brough slowly.

“Take me to this grave!” he said, in a low voice. Brough led the way without a word. They went to the churchyard, and there Brough pointed out a new made grave. Beneath that freshly-heaped mound, there was, as he knew, a coffin weighted with lead; while Charlie believed that there lay the body of his wife. Brough stood there, thinking over that scene in the bedroom at the hotel when Dr. Swift turned the undertakers out of the room and said he preferred to move the body himself, when he and Dr. Swift hastily put the weights in the coffin, and put in, too, a great roll of linen which they had arranged in the bed to look like a dead body. At this moment Charlie was reproaching himself wildly for his absence from that death-bed! He pictured it, too, in his mind—he knew that Lil’s faithful heart would yearn passionately for him at such a moment—he knew how she must have longed to have him beside her—and his grief had the sharp sting of self-reproach in it which makes grief so much keener. He stood a moment looking at the grave, thinking of this; and, suddenly, as he

realized how his love had gone from her, and how gentle and unrepublishing she had always been, he burst out into sobs and tears. Brough turned and fled ; the sight was more than he could endure ; he rushed, he knew not where, only he avoided the streets, for he felt as if he could not endure to meet people. At last he stopped, in a quiet corner, and drew breath.

“Good God !” he said to himself. “It is too ghastly.”



## CHAPTER XIV.

**W**HETHER a man can ever know the deep despair and horror which is contained, to a woman, in the word loneliness, it is difficult to guess. Women, naturally dependent in disposition, have this tendency increased and fostered by custom. To a woman it seems a hardship to stand alone in the world, even if she has no other trial in her lot. It is a matter of infinite difficulty to make her understand that she is an isolated individual, and that, in reality, it is nobody's business to love her, or make life easy for her. Being deficient in many solid qualities, she apparently endeavours to make up for this by a great deal of tendril growth. Even Lil, whose strong, innate tendency was towards independence, had allowed herself to become so absorbed in her husband, that without him she could not understand the fact of her own existence.

Yet here she was, alive, alone, with no companions but her own barren and heart-rending thoughts.

For the past was dead, and the remembrance of its buried joys cut her heart like a knife: the future was all bleak and overcast. It seemed

that she had to live on through some blackness, as of night. Yet, from where she sat, motionless, through the blank day, her eyes rested on stretches of wild and sunlit moorland, full of the natural beauties that she loved. Outside her window the birds sang all day long, and perched on her very window-sill, undisturbed by the silent figure within, for it seemed to them lifeless. The vitality was strong, the physical nature held its own, but in silence; for the spirit within was, at last, utterly crushed and broken. Like a statue, she sat through the long hours; her hands lay, white and motionless as dead lilies, on her knees; her brain was all one blank, with a few words of vivid fire written on it, which seemed to scorch and sear her soul, and made her writhe amid her stillness. But she had expended all her force upon the deed which made her this lonely, unknown, lost being that she was; and even when her heart leaped up hot within her at the remembrance of what she had done, yet she did not move; only sometimes she sighed. Save for this heavy sigh, that now and again burst from her, she might have been the seated Livia in her chair of stone.

At first, after she had escaped unseen from the hotel, and had reached this harbour of refuge, a quiet room in a remote farmhouse, which Brough had found and secured for her—at first, when she found herself alone here, and safe, the whole thing appeared to her as a

dream. The tension was gone—there was nothing for her to do—she was here, amid sunshine and sweet sounds of open-air life—the nightmare through which she had passed was surely over now, and she was beginning to live again. Sometimes she almost fancied Charlie was with her—in the room, or on the stairs, or at the garden-gate, coming to her. Surely, he would come, soon! Surely, it was time he should come?—he would not leave her alone for long? But, gradually, as the long hours passed by, she realised that there was no one to break her solitude any more. She had no husband, she could have no lover, henceforward! Over and over again, she pictured Charlie's arrival at the hotel—her father breaking the news to him—how would he bear it?—poor fellow! She knew, by the pain in her own heart, how he would grieve for her. But that was all over now—his first grief was passed; he had accepted, realised, the fact of her death. At some moments, it seemed monstrous, incredible that he could be induced to accept such an absolute fraud! Of course, his heart would tell him the truth, he would disbelieve it, and would find her out. O, God, how her whole being became, as it were, one flame of fire for a single instant at the thought! If he suspected the plot and made Brough tell the truth, why, he might be here now, coming into the house! What a wild thought of joy to fancy him coming to

her with the old look of love on his face!—and how much more natural it seemed than anything else! But, no; the flame died away and she was all stone again. The fraud was too clever! He had been successfully deceived. He believed her dead. Then, indeed, she was dead. There was no longer any Lil Newman in the world. There was only a weary heart-sick woman, who had no name, no home, no husband; who dared have neither past nor future; who, indeed, must have no past, and could have no future! So it seemed, to Lil, then. Her past must lie for ever hidden in her own breast—that she knew well; a blank wall must stand behind her. And, in her utter weariness, it seemed that a blank wall stood in front of her, too; that she was entombed indeed. This state of deep apathy was what had alarmed Dr. Swift; it was so foreign to the bright nature of the woman, that unless it were disturbed, he felt sure it must kill her mind. It was a terrible apathy—a dejection so deep that it appeared to herself like some vast weight which was upon her. She could not struggle against it—she might as well have tried to move a mountain. She was crushed and helpless.

It is strange how much of ourselves is made out of our surrounding circumstances. With most people their greater part would vanish if they lost their friends, their material belongings, the thousand and one things which are

attached to them. Their existence would shrink into a very slender fact if once all these were taken away. Lil thought her existence was no fact at all, now she had surrendered all that was hers as Lil Newman. What was left? A consciousness, which seemed to be, only in order to suffer. A physical frame, which must have food, though its animating spirit cared not to feed it. A sweet face, which none desired to look at. An aching void, where a full heart once had been.

Slowly these hard truths forced themselves in upon her ; heavily the time passed, and she knew that her plot had succeeded. Oh, how could he so easily believe her to be dead? Could she herself have been so deceived? she asked herself wildly one moment, and the next fell back into the apathy of despair. Such hours as these should count for years in a lifetime. These days that Lil lived alone in the silence of her quiet room, altered her more deeply than ten years of ordinary life. In this period of solitude, the struggle was between yielding to the agony of desolation, and so going mad ; or clutching tight hold of her own self, throwing aside all clinging affections, and standing upright in the strength of her own individuality. She could dimly see, herself, that her choice lay between these two paths, almost equal in their terribleness, to her as yet. But she could not guess which she would choose. She could not still herself sufficiently to look

her position in the face. She could only suffer blankly, helplessly. It appeared to herself as if she were all brain and nerves, and as if an undying fire were scorching both. Her body she was scarcely conscious of. It was exhausted. And thus it was that she sat so still that the birds were fearless of her.



## CHAPTER XV.

HARLIE NEWMAN went back to his home like a man broken in spirit. The blow had fallen so suddenly upon him that it took all other sensations from him, but those of grief and remorse. He realised how much Lil had been to him—how she had filled his life, and been, in herself, his home and happiness. He felt as if he had never loved any but Lil. And yet, underneath this, there was a miserable consciousness that this was not so—that he had loved someone else ; that he had probably failed to conceal it! He saw Lil now as she was before this money came and changed their lives ; he saw her in her bright, fearless patience, working as merrily as if her tasks had all been play. He saw that smile, which was Lil's sweetest charm, and which had always come into her eyes for him, even to the very last. How should a woman, so bright and joyous, die so young? Had he chilled her spirit by his changing mood? Now he recalled her stricken face as he had seen it when she leaned from her window in Siena. Why had she looked so white and wild? Because her pure sympathy had seen into his heart—

because his wandering fancy wounded her. Bitterly he remembered this, and it seemed to him he must have been mad to have given a look or a thought to any other woman than Lil. What strange infatuation had been on him, to make him so blind, so cruel, so base? He heaped reproaches on himself, and suffered torments from his self-inflicted punishment. Any on-looker who knew the story of this tragedy might well have felt that all Lil's sacrifice had been in vain! Even she herself might have had her conviction shaken of the rightness of her course, could she have heard and seen her husband's grief. Brough told her of it, hoping to rouse her from the stony state in which he found her, when he went secretly to see her. He went down, pretending to go in a totally different direction, with a feeling of strange and unnatural guilt. It was appalling to leave the husband, mad with grief, and to go to see the wife, whose death was so bitterly grieved over!

The farmhouse in which Lil was lodged was a long way from the town. Brough was a great walker and had chosen a place to which he could go, on his own feet, unobserved. It was a glorious walk, and, for a time, amid all this natural beauty, he almost fancied the horrid secret, in the midst of which he lived, was a mere nightmare. But, no; he had left a man half mad with grief in London. He doubted and wondered what he would find here. He did not know whether

Lil's natural elasticity of temperament would have come to her rescue yet ; or whether she, too, would be almost wild with her trouble. He found something worse than he expected—a woman as white and as still as if she were carved in marble. Her motionless state cast horror into his heart ; he had once seen such a statue-like figure in a madhouse, but never anywhere else. He resolved to tell her how Charlie was suffering—he determined to hurt her, if he could, with the picture of the grief she had caused—perhaps this would stir her ! The telling of it made his own eyes wet.

“I tell you, child, the poor fellow will never get over it,” he said.

“Do you think so ?” she answered, and fixed her eyes on him ; there was not a tear within their lids.

“I don't believe he will ; he adored you, that is the truth of it—worshipped you. I don't believe he cares, or ever did care, a straw for any other woman. It's all a ghastly mistake !”

“Wait and see,” said Lil. “Wait and see.” Her words were like ice. Brough felt afraid of his own child. He looked at this white, cold woman, and wondered if she were indeed Lil. He could not stay long, for his visit had to be absolutely secret, and he dared not let his wife suppose he had come out of town, or her curiosity would have been roused. The moments he could spend with Lil were num-

bered ; he had to catch a certain train back. They seemed to him wasted moments, for he could not approach her. He could do nothing to improve her position without first talking it over with her ; for action was so dangerous and secrecy so imperative. But it seemed an impossibility to talk anything over with this woman, whose whole being was wrapped in a cold cloud of pain. He went away more anxious, more unhappy, about her than he had been at any time throughout this unhappy history. Again and again came before him the memory of that statue-like figure in the madhouse ; and he saw Lil again, but one degree more sane, but one degree less stony, than that maniac, petrified by despair. What was to be done to save her ? How could he stay that awful petrification from taking hold of her ? All that night he spent locked in his study, professedly at work upon a heavy article which had already been too long on his hands. But work he could not with this terrible picture rising before his eyes ! He walked about the room beating his brains, which seemed to him more useless than they had ever been before, in vain for some plan by which he could help his unhappy child. But nothing suggested itself to him which it appeared in the least possible to carry out. His action was necessarily so limited by the necessity of secrecy.

The night passed, and he had no plan—the day passed and no idea came to him. The

days multiplied and flew by him and he knew that each of them was like a year of torment to Lil ; yet he could do nothing. He would not go near Charlie, though, at first, he was thoroughly sorry for him ; he could not help the feeling that this man was, after all, the cause of it all. But for him, Lil would be the bright and beautiful woman she should be. For him, she had made herself a living image of death. He kept out of Charlie's way, lest this feeling should, in some rash moment, make itself evident. Lady Warrington, at last, began to be aware that something was the matter with her husband. She had never seen him in such a state in all her knowledge of him. The gay Bohemian grew more spiritless and downcast day by day ; he began to look more haggard and distracted. Dinner became a matter of indifference to him. He would not take his dogs out ; and they found out long before his wife did that something ailed him, and would come and sit up by him, expressing their sympathy by many licks. His work was neglected more and more : Brough knew that unless something was done his career would come to a standstill. His wife suggested a holiday. Brough absolutely laughed, for the first time, for many days. A holiday ! Where could he go and escape from the memory of his unhappy child ?

He went to see her again as soon as he had a safe excuse for being away so long. He

found her the same ; as stony, even more silent, and with some new lines upon her face, which were terrible to see. She was perceptibly thinner, evidently weaker. He went home in a frenzy. What was to be done ?

He was glad Charlie made no effort to see him. He felt he could not now have endured it. His whole sympathy had gone to Lil. Charlie, indeed, saw no one. For a long time, Lil had been a sort of fetter upon him—release, so sudden, scared him. He forgot all this recent time when he had wearied of her ; he only remembered that his first love was dead, the love of his youth, the wife who had made his early life a time of delight. He grieved for her now as bitterly, as sincerely, as if he had lost her while his love for her was yet warm and living. And though his love had lost its passion, his care for her, his regard for her, his affection for her, had never grown less, for she had never forfeited them. Though she might not be his ideal now, might no longer call forth his passion, she had been always his best friend. He became aware of this when, by degrees, the first keen deceptive agony of loss was over, and he realised slowly the truth of his position. He had not lost the woman he loved—he had lost the woman he had once loved—slowly a dim, half-guilty consciousness of this crept into his mind. He was alone now, no longer bound by the many laws which encompass a man who owes duty to a

wife. The sense of this—the fact that no longer was Lil a fetter upon him—made his memory of her all the more tender ; and when his grief grew less, and he became used to the horrid fact of death, he found himself often wishing most passionately that she could be back again—as his friend ! He had never known such another friend—never learned to place such absolute faith in any man or woman as in Lil. His love for Adelaide was not of the same order—it had not the element of friendship in it. Her artistic, voluptuous temperament did not inspire him with the same friendly confidence as had Lil's clear, upright disposition. But he loved Adelaide—how vividly, he knew, when slowly her image took possession of his mind, and pushed away the grief, the regret, for the past, which, at first, had entirely absorbed him. Slowly, but surely, he turned his eyes from that past, it receded from his vision, and became but a sad and beautiful phantom, while he began to see before him the “all-hail hereafter.”

Through all the changes of his state, through his grief, his remorse, his regret, he had shut himself up, seen no one, opened no letters. What was there that could interest him ? No one could approach him that could break his solitude with any real sympathy, except, perhaps, Brough, and he did not come. After a little, Charlie felt glad he did not come. The stalwart figure of the cheery Bohemian seemed

to Charlie, in the mood that was growing upon him, a part of his past. He could but recall the vividness of a grief which was slowly relaxing its hold, and giving place to new life. Human nature is gloriously elastic when it has any hope to feed upon. Charlie had shed more tears over Lil's grave than most men would have done. Is it not Oliver Wendell Holmes who says, wittily, of such sorrow as this, "Wet weather is good for transplanting?" As his manhood and strength began to re-assert themselves, his appetite for fresh life and new excitement re-awakened. He did not forget Lil—he felt himself to be walking in the midst of a heavy grief. But he began to think he could no longer endure it alone—that to remain shut in the solitude of his house was too intolerable—that he must seek some comfort, some sympathy.

Where should he go for it?

At first, of course, it seemed to him that he had nowhere to go for it. But, gradually, as his mind settled into its healthy channel, he began to feel the power of that attraction which had changed all his life, and turned Lil's sunshine into darkness. Its power was strong as ever—even stronger for its temporary suppression. It leaped into force again and asserted itself, as being more powerful than even his own will. Now that there was nothing to check it, why should he struggle against it? From having looked like a crime, it would now

begin to look like a cheerful and brilliant possibility.

But this view of it came too suddenly—too soon. We cannot always shut away our dreams, even though we may desire to, even though they terrify us. But we can fly before them. So did Charlie. He was aghast when he realised his state—he started with horror. It seemed to him as though he had nearly approached some great crime. He had not killed his wife? No, no; but how nearly it seemed akin to the murderer's freedom, this looking for new love so soon. A feeling of guilt fell upon him, which he could not shake off. At least, he could leave this terrible solitude. In sudden haste, as though he had been scared by some ghastly phantom, he left home, and hurried away. He would not even pass through Paris; he did not care where he went, so long as he avoided that one city which, he believed, still contained the woman he loved. He took the boat to Antwerp, and, from there, went aimlessly wandering on, with but the one object of tiring himself out, so that neither hope or regret should be able to stir him too deeply.

But man was not made for solitude. This kind of solitary suffering can be endured but for a certain length of time. Then human nature gives out and man feels that he must find a friend—someone to share the trouble and to halve it. In Lil, Charlie had lost his

chief friend. In his present state, it appeared to him that there was no one in the world he cared to see or to speak to, except—

Adelaide.

He had come to this conclusion a great many times before his resolution gave way, and he turned his course to Paris. But, when he did turn, it was with an overpowering impulse like that of an arrow from a bow. Having once concluded that he must go, whether it was right or wrong, he had no idea, no thought, but to get there. Who can guess what sympathetic telegraphy surrounds this seemingly so common-place world? When Charlie, at the utmost speed which he could command, was hastening towards Paris, Jack Poynings was putting all the pressure he could upon Adelaide to get the date of their marriage fixed. At last, she raised her drooping head to agree to the day he wished. This was done—and Charlie was yet many miles from Paris!

The next afternoon, Charlie presented himself at that door, the one door he cared to enter in all Paris. They were still living there; they were both at home, mother and daughter. When he entered their room, there was such a strange expression on his face that Adelaide, who knew its every passing look, rose with a faint cry. She had never expected to see him again; to see him so suddenly, and with this strange look in his eyes, as if a subdued fire burned behind them, startled her inexpress-

sibly. Mrs. Mainwaring instantly rose, came in front of her daughter, and held out her hand to Charlie. This distracted him from Adelaide; and he then saw that his old acquaintance, Jack Poynings, was in the room.

“Awfully glad to see you,” said Jack, heartily. “I’ve been thinking of writing a line to tell you my good news. But I suppose you’ve heard all about it in London, and it’s as stale as good news can be. But, now, you must stay for the wedding!”

Everybody fancies the world knows all about his affairs. “What wedding?” said Charlie.

“Why, mine, of course,” replied Jack Poynings; “Miss Adelaide here has, at last, made up her mind to give up her liberty. I thought some of the fellows in town would have been sure to tell you; they all seem to think I’m the last man in the world to get married. They don’t know the inducement!”

“I’ve not been in London for some time,” said Charlie; he hardly knew what he said; but he felt bound to make some sort of answer. Congratulations were, indeed, beyond his power; he was staring at Adelaide, in bewilderment. She had fallen back into her chair, and turned her head away. He had exchanged no greeting with her. Was this, indeed, the meeting he had so yearned for?

Mrs. Mainwaring had listened with satisfac-

tion so far. She was delighted that Charlie should have it made distinctly clear to him, at once, that Adelaide was to be married—that her engaged lover was on the scene. To her understanding, this made Adelaide safe. Now that this was done, she hastened to interfere, and prevent Charlie's manner from being noticed.

“Is Mrs. Newman in Paris?” she said, coming forward. “Do sit down, and tell us how she is; it is so long since we have seen you——why, what's that?”

Charlie had put his hat on a table near, in moving to the chair she offered him. Her keen eyes instantly noticed the deep hatband; and being more familiar with the correct depths of outward mourning than with the ways of inner grief, she was thoroughly startled.

“Didn't you know?” said Charlie, in his turn.

“Know what?” asked Mrs. Mainwaring, looking at him. Then she stammered on——

“Not Mrs. Newman?——not——?”

“Yes,” he said, “I wear that for her; she is dead.”

Adelaide started up, came forward, and looked him in the face, as though to discover whether he was in earnest.

In her sympathy, she held out her hand to him. He took it and held it fast. On that one point they might surely meet! Both had

admired and loved Lil. But Charlie, holding Adelaide's tender hand in his, and gazing earnestly into her face, saw how she, too, had suffered. He guessed, out of his love for her, that mere indifference and despair had led her into giving her promise to Jack Poynings. But she had given it! At that thought he let her hand fall from his. God did not mean them for each other!

Adelaide, observing his face, saw that strange look come into his eyes again. Suddenly, she realised this news afresh. What did it mean? Not only that a fair woman was dead—not only that Charlie had suffered—it meant something else!—It meant he was free!

She shrank back a step from him, and her eyes wandered from him to Jack Poynings.

“Oh, how sad,” Mrs. Mainwaring was saying, when she saw her daughter's face. “Adelaide, are you going to faint?” she exclaimed. Jack Poynings quickly came to her, and put his arm round her. He thought she would faint where she stood, her face was so white.

“Don't touch me!” she cried out, and pushed him away from her. She spoke in such a tone that he stepped back amazed. She stood, upright as a dart, though trembling all over; and she raised her eyes again to Charlie's, with a strange meaning in her own glance.

“It is too much for her; it is so sudden, this

dreadful news," said Mrs Mainwaring. "Adelaide, don't be obstinate and stand there; you will fall down and frighten us all!"

Again Jack put his arm round her, and tried to lead her to a couch, which was but a few paces off. "Leave me alone," she said, furiously, and snatched herself, as it were, from him. Then, with a tremendous effort, she walked to the couch alone and fell upon it, unconscious. Both the men rushed to her. "Go, both of you," exclaimed Mrs. Mainwaring; "I know how to deal with her. Ring the bell for my maid, and go away."

Charlie snatched his hat and went on the instant, hurrying down the stairs, for he heard Jack Poynings following him, and he was exactly the last person in the world he wished to speak to at that moment. Bewildered and distracted, he went back to his hotel. After walking about his room a little, he decided on his right course, and very quickly acted on it—strapped his portmanteau, and went to the station. The next train should carry him away from Adelaide.

## CHAPTER XVI.

**B**ROUGH, meantime, staying quietly in London, heard this news for which Charlie had gone, ignorantly, to the very fountain-head. He was sufficiently startled by it. Adelaide Mainwaring was engaged to be married. What did this mean? A useless sacrifice. At first, he resolved Lil should never hear of it. A moment later, and it occurred to him that this, at least, might rouse her. Anything would be better than the apathy into which she had sunk.

He went to see her and found her lying on her bed. She was too tired to sit in a chair now. There was the look on her face of one who simply endures until death comes.

"This shall be stopped," thought Brough. He told her what he had heard; Lil's face hardly changed, and for a while she did not speak.

"She will not marry that other man when she hears I am dead," she said, at last; "I know her; and I know how strong love is." And so she laid down her head again.

Brough went home worse confounded than

ever. "That did not rouse her," he thought. "What will?"

He felt himself helpless, this broad-shouldered fellow, to move the mountain which oppressed Lil and, through her, overshadowed himself.

He had never before been entirely baffled by a set of circumstances, which would not be changed and could not be cheerful.

While he was harassing himself helplessly over this hopeless state of things, Adelaide was making such a struggle as she had never made in all her life. She was resolved, now that no law of man's making, or nature's creating, could call her love for Charlie wrong, that, at least, she would marry no one else. She told her mother this, speaking out at last. "You must save me," she said, "you forced me into this engagement; you must save me from the marriage."

"Not I," said Mrs. Mainwaring; "I will not use Jack so badly. Besides, how strange people would think it."

"What," answered Adelaide, "Is it not better to be honest and regain my freedom, than marry him and hate the very sight of him? as I do now."

"I do not understand your way of talking," was all Mrs. Mainwaring's reply, in a completely cold voice. At last Adelaide realised that her mother was immovable in the matter.

Then she became equally resolute. She would act for herself. She determined to face the very worst of it for the sake of her liberty, and appeal to Jack. He was empty-headed enough, but what there was of him was gentlemanly. Besides, he could not wish to marry her under the circumstances. The next time he called, Mrs. Mainwaring had gone out shopping. Adelaide saw her opportunity and steeled herself to her trial. He found her vibrating with excitement.

“What is the matter?” were his first words.

“Let me talk to you,” she said, and resolutely she began, holding her courage with both hands; did she wait a moment she feared being overcome by that peculiar feminine bashfulness, which would have prevented many women from making such a confession at all. But she conquered her smaller fears, and told her story. She kept her head turned away, and when she had done speaking did not look round. What would he say? what would he think of her? There was a little pause and then, with a sigh, he rose.

“Good-bye,” he said, quietly enough, “my romance is over. I always thought you’d escape me one way or another, after all. I am too prosaic a fellow to keep any hold on you. And now I shall carry away with me a doubly precious memory of you, as not only a perfectly charming, but a perfectly honest woman. Good-bye.”

And before she had time to realise that he actually meant it, he was gone. She started from her chair, but he was already in the street. She flew to the window, he was just going out of sight. She put her hands to her head like one distracted. "Free—am I free again? really free?" she kept saying to herself. A deep feeling of happiness settled upon her. Whether she ever saw Charlie again or no, she would always have this greatest satisfaction, she had not played him false. She was true to the unspoken vows, the invisible bond, the unwritten law of love, which united them. She saw now from what a horror she had escaped. Even if Lil had lived, and her liberty had continued to be valueless to her, it must have killed her to be Jack Poynings' wife. She had been mad, blinded by misery, when she allowed such a frightful thing to become possible. Well, she was free again, and all that day this one thought exhilarated her, and filled her with joyous life.

Her mother's consternation had no effect upon her; she did not listen to the reproaches, the storms of anger with which Mrs. Mainwaring overwhelmed her; they passed aside of her, all these bitter words; she had her own inner comfort which sustained her through them all.

Mrs. Mainwaring insisted upon leaving Paris, upon going away to some remote corner, where they would see none of their

acquaintance. "I shall be ashamed to meet people in the street," she said; "you have put yourself in the worst possible position a woman could put herself in. All I can do for you now is to let the affair attract as little notice as possible. People will forget us if they don't see us. God knows you have made a cheerful life for your mother. We will pack up and go and live in some detestable village, where no civilised being ever comes. That's all we can hope for now."

She carried out this plan immediately. She told her friends that Adelaide was ill, and they left Paris at once.

Very soon afterwards two ladies, of a style hitherto unseen in the locality, became familiar objects to the fishermen and their wives, resident in a small village on the Northern coast of Scotland. Mrs. Mainwaring made herself as comfortable as she could in the only lodgings the place afforded, settled down to a life of idleness brightened by French novels, and tried to subdue Adelaide by an existence of intolerable dulness, and her own cold contempt. But Adelaide was unsubdued. She believed herself to have acted rightly. She rejoiced in her freedom. She wandered about the sea-shore, silent and full of strange thoughts. She thought a great deal of Lil, that dead, fair woman, who had stood in her light and darkened her sky. She thought of her lovingly, with a heart full

of tender pain. She wondered about her death, and longed to know her story. But all this had to be hidden away in her own heart. Her confidences could be given to none but the sea and the sky. She lived alone, and grew stronger in mind by this healthy solitude, while her cheeks gathered a richness from the racy sea air, and her step gained every day new elasticity. She was taking the very opposite path from her rival, whose life in her solitude seemed to be steadily fading away.

But, after a while, a cold chill fell upon Adelaide's heart. She was very lonely. Was she to be always lonely? There was a terrible dreariness in the thought. It came to her one day, when she walking home. Her mother would not turn her head when she entered the room. She treated Adelaide like a tolerated criminal. Thrown on her own resources entirely, Adelaide was happy, but yet it was sad to one so rich in life, to look forward to this solitude. These two women, Lil and her rival, were each tasting the bitterest cup to a woman who is full of womanhood—isolation. But, as in everything else their paths were opposite, so in this. With every day Lil's life became more absolutely empty, while the love that had been hers was steadily finding its way to Adelaide.

The inevitable took place; in time Charlie heard of Jack Poynings as still unmarried;

discovered that in some mysterious way, which no one understood, the engagement had come to an end. Having heard this, to him, extraordinarily good piece of news from two or three different sources, Charlie began to believe it. And then he set to work to find Adelaide. He determined that if the fetters which so far had separated them were removed, nothing else should keep them apart. A lover has a glorious confidence in his own powers, or the powers of that emotion which is his inspiration for the time being. Charlie felt confident that he could find Adelaide, if she still lived.

It was no Herculean task. A little persistence in inquiries, and he had the name of the Scotch fishing village in his notebook.

And then there came a day which seemed to have a different colour in it from all other days. For on that day, beneath a tremulous blue sky, beside a wide, blue sea, two people met, free to speak out that love which had been so true and abiding, although so silent and unspoken.

Charlie had travelled straight to the village, and it seemed to him the most natural thing in the world, to see Adelaide's lovely face and form down by the sea-shore, before he entered any house or asked any question. It was what he had come for, it was there for him.

But to Adelaide it was a strange, wild, startling event to turn from the waves and suddenly find her lover at her side. Her soul leaped into her face—her whole figure was eloquent with welcome. Neither could have told whether any words were uttered between them, but, oh, how much was said in that rare moment!



## CHAPTER XVII.

**H**IL lay on her bed like a dead woman, and hardly seemed to breathe sometimes. She did but lift her eyelids, now, when her father came into the room. The people of the house told him, one day when he came down, that they believed she was dying. "What am I to do?" he said, and crept into her room.

She looked at him, but did not even raise her head. Something in his face seemed to attract her. She looked again.

"Have you any news for me?"

"Yes," he answered, "you are killing yourself."

"Oh," she answered, "that is no news. You have something else to tell me. What is it?"

"Nothing," he said, and looked away.

"Nonsense," she said, in a voice grown faint with weakness; "you can't deceive a woman in the state I am. There is something you are afraid to tell me. What is it?"

"Nothing," he answered again.

"Are they married?" she asked, in a sudden strong voice.

"Oh, no," he said, "not so quickly as all

that. But they are engaged to be married. It will be very soon."

She did not say anything for a little while. Brough was entirely at a loss how to act. He watched her for a minute. But seeing her still and silent he sat down near her and waited. There was a long, long pause. A pause long enough for a heart to break in. Then, suddenly, she sat up, slid off the bed and stood confronting him in her long white dressing-gown. She was like a pale ghost; yet there was something in her eyes more startling still than that ghostly look. It was as though she had seen a shape of horror—a thing too terrible to speak.

"Papa," she said, "do you know what I have done?"

"What do you mean, child?" he asked, scared by her face.

"Do you know," she went on, wildly, "that I have done an awful thing! Do you not see what I shall have made him?—a bigamist!—a criminal! Do you not see that I have betrayed her; she can never be his true wife! Oh, my God! what have I done!—led these two people blindly into this terrible position! and their sins are not theirs, but mine! I must suffer it all! I have to hold this awful secret while I live! Papa, papa, what will become of me?"

Watching her face he held his breath in fear, knowing not what to expect of her. Her

excitement was awful. It was too great to let her faint, although her physical frame all but gave way beneath it. He half expected, as he watched her wild expression, to hear a scream of madness come from her lips, and to see her before his very eyes enter upon that living death. Her brain was tottering—her mind reeled beneath the frenzy of feeling which swept over her. She raised her arms and wrung her hands wildly over her head. “I am lost,” she cried; “every day of my life will be as the tortures of lost souls. How can I live? Oh, God let me die—let me die! Are you so cruel as to compel me to live when my life is hateful to me, and the mere fact of my existence makes those two persons criminals! their love a sin, their life a lie! O, there is no mercy in Heaven, if I must live. I have no friend who will kill me—then I have no friend at all! I must—I will die! Papa, papa, what will become of me? Will you not be my friend? Will you not kill me? I am so cowardly, I cannot kill myself!”

“Because you do not really want to die,” said Brough.

“Do I not?—do I not?—ah, I am very young to die! But I am so wretched—so wretched—so wretched—so wretched—”

Three times she said this in a voice of stony despair—but, with the fourth time, something seemed suddenly unloosed within her, in an instant the tears rushed from her eyes in hot

streams that, before a moment had passed, had wetted her face and her clasped hands. She stood there blinded and helpless beneath the sudden paroxysm, making no effort to move, but letting the tears rain down her white cheeks. Great sobs came up from her heart as if they had been held in prison there and were at last set free.

Brough did not interfere for a few moments. But after a while he took out a big silk handkerchief, wiped away a mist which had come before his eyes, so that he should be able to see what he was doing, and then went to her. He took her in his arms and lifted her on to her bed. Then he dried her tears and held her vibrating form close to himself.

"Little girl," he said, "you are saved!"

She did not hear him. She was lost, drowned in a sea of sorrow.

An hour passed like this. When at last she was quiet, he got her some wine.

"Drink this," he said, "and talk to me."

She obeyed him. When she had swallowed the wine she held out her hand to him.

"Papa," she said, "I have been very wicked, lying here, wishing to die and letting myself be such a burden and trouble to you! I cannot stay here any longer. I am afraid to. No ghost could frighten me as my own thoughts will. I dare not live alone with them any

longer. I must go out somewhere into the world and find work."

"Quite right," said Brough, with a sigh of infinite relief.

"I must act at once!" she said, feverishly; "I am so frightened of myself. Take a lodging for me, somewhere in London, where the people live in crowds, and where no one we should know ever goes. I shall be safe there, and I will find work to do."

"What will you do?" asked Brough.

"O, anything—anything that is hard!—that will not let me think!" she answered. "I do not care what it is."

He left her somewhat pacified by his promise to do what she wanted. But still she was in a state of intense excitement. She was walking about the room when he left her, her hands marked by her own grasp. But this did not alarm him. Now that she had of herself entertained the idea of work, of going out into the world, he expected her to recover herself. It was that awful silence and stillness, so unlike Lil—that had been a horror to him. He returned to town thinking over all sorts of plans for her. It was evident that she must live alone with no one to comfort or help her, save himself in his brief visits. Her secret was now become too serious to be trusted to any but themselves. No suspicion must be roused about her; she herself had the idea, evidently, that she must go into

some poor part of London, full of bustling workers, and take up some every day drudgery. The plan was not bad; but Brough longed to think of something better, something more congenial to her temperament. Could her ambition but once be roused? Was it possible? How about that play she used to talk of? The stage—the drama—that used to call out all her enthusiasm. Could it be awakened in her again? If she could but disguise herself, why should she not go safely about the town, study the stage, and write for the stage. Even if Charlie were in London, he would be most unlikely to cross her track; besides, he had told Brough that he and Adelaide meant to live abroad and shut up the London house. The plan seemed best, even to Mrs. Mainwaring; a second marriage, arranged so quickly, made it appear better to live away from the home associated with a first wife. Adelaide was so accustomed to live abroad—when once they had settled themselves, it would be most unlikely that she would ever wish to live in London, thought Brough. And, even if they did come back, he argued, the danger was but slight; their tracks was utterly different—and, above all, Lil could disguise herself. He clung to this idea. He felt that if it were only possible for her to alter her appearance and so lose her terror of discovery, he might endeavour to make her

life contain once more something of variety and incident. He might be able to get her some dramatic criticism to do, which would compel her to take a little active and intelligent interest in the world about her. He might even venture to introduce her to his friend, Edmund Laurence, and, Laurence once interested in her, if she had any capacity for dramatic writing, she could get work. Laurence had more engagements than he could easily fulfil; he had often asked Brough to write with him; he would certainly give a trial to any one for whom Brough wished the favour. Brough went home full of these ideas. He determined to find her some lodging in Bloomsbury or near the Strand, where he would be able to have her within reach. He could easily visit her frequently if he could locate her amid his own haunts.

Lady Warrington was wearing very elegant mourning for Lil. She spoke of her now and then with the gentle pity which it is customary to feel for the dead. Lady Warrington grieved for Lil with all outward propriety. She had even exerted herself so far as to pay a visit of condolence to old Mrs. Warrington. Gran received her very stiffly. She had never forgiven this "frivolous person," as she called her, for marrying her son. He was going to the bad fast enough without her to help him. Lady Warrington was not in a hurry to repeat

the visit ; but, having paid it, she had the cheerful consciousness of a duty well performed.

She was thinking of laying aside her mourning now. It was high time, as she remarked, when Lil's husband was on the way to a second marriage. "*He* had got over the loss pretty easily, it seemed," was one of her frequent remarks. She could not forgive Brough for having, apparently, felt Lil's death so very deeply. He had never been the same man since the event. He was always in a state of absent-mindedness, he had lost his high spirits, he did not work properly, and constantly he did not hear when his wife spoke to him. Lady Warrington almost lost her temper under this treatment more than once. She had made allowances at first, of course ; but when Lil's husband had consoled himself with a new love, was it at all reasonable that her father should be just as distracted as at the very first ? Lady Warrington began to have a feeling that this was something hidden from her ; but she could not guess in the least what it was. She did not connect it with Lil, whom she supposed to be beneath the growing grass. But she was naturally jealous and exacting ; and she very readily suspected. Certainly Brough's condition might excite suspicion. It seemed hardly natural that his child's death, however much he had loved her, should so completely upset him, and for

so long. He appeared quite unable to recover himself.

So that he had learned lately not to be too sure how he would be welcomed by his butterfly tyrant when he returned home. But today he thought less about it than usual. His mind was full of Lil, and his new plans and hopes for her.

He found Lady Warrington in the most agreeable of moods. Edmund Laurence was waiting to see Brough, and had turned the time to account by propitiating Brough's wife. No one could resist Laurence when he chose to be charming. One of the most delightful writers of stage dialogue, he understood the art of conversation. Lady Warrington had kept him to dinner, as he was evidently anxious to see her husband.

"What's on your mind, old fellow?" asked Brough.

"I've got too much to do, and they want me to write them a new play at the 'Favourite.' Will you help me? I've got a capital plot."

"Wait till after dinner," said Brough, "and we'll talk about it. But I believe I also have too much to do."

"You're not yourself, Warrington," said Laurence, as Brough sat down wearily; "you look as if you had been carrying the world about on your shoulders for a day or two."

Brough groaned. "O Lord," he said, "that would be nothing to it."

“What is the matter, Brough?” asked Lady Warrington.

“Nothing, child, nothing,” said Brough, hastily, “only I want my dinner, I suppose. I’ve got a vacuum somewhere in the middle of me; when that is filled I shall be myself once more. You look jolly enough, Laurence, and as handsome as ever. What a confoundedly good looking fellow you are.”

“And so are you, my boy, only more so.”

“Well,” said Lady Warrington, “I never heard two men set to work to pay each other compliments in that style before. However, you are both quite right. Come, dinner is ready, and that will give you something else to think of.”

For the first time for a long while, Brough seemed to rise in his old fashion to the excitement of the dinner hour. Laurence’s presence appeared to him to be a good omen for Lil; perhaps he might get this work for her. And this new hope of seeing Lil once more alive and at work, re-activated him. After dinner they went to Brough’s study, where Laurence brought out the notes for his plot. Brough told him that he had not time to help him, but that he believed he knew some one who could. “You shall have an interview with her in a few days, if I can manage it,” he said.

“*Her*,” interrupted Laurence.

“Didn’t I tell you it was a woman?” said Brough. “Does that make any difference?”

“Oh, no,” said Laurence, “if she has brains. I am less likely to quarrel with her than with a man. Can she do the work, that’s the question?”

“She can, if she will,” said Brough.

“Then see me again about it, when you’ve seen her.”

“Will you let me have the notes of your plot?” said Brough. “Thanks; then I can talk it over with her.”

When Laurence was gone, Brough put aside the papers to take down to Lil. He was determined she should attempt the work. “She’d be compelled to study the stage,” he said to himself, “and that going out among people would save her.”

He went lodging-hunting for Lil in the morning of the next day, and engaged her some rooms; in the afternoon he went again to see her, and unfolded his various plans.

“You are mad, papa,” said she. “It is impossible. I cannot disguise myself sufficiently to go about the town except far away at the East-end, or in some place where no one ever goes. And I cannot write. My head is gone. My power of application is gone. No, I cannot write.”

Brough looked at her with such a face of disappointment that she made an effort and held out her hand for the papers.

“I will look at the plot,” she said. “Leave it with me, I will try to read it. And now

about this disguise. That idea is good in any case. I could turn my hair black."

"And it is so jolly with that golden streak in it," said Brough.

"That does not matter now," said Lil; "it makes no difference to me or any one else whether my hair is black or brown."

"Nonsense," said Brough. "And I will help you to find out how to disguise yourself. I'll get hints from some theatrical people. To please me, make up your mind to do what I want."

"Very well, papa," said Lil, languidly. She had at least consented, and that was everything. He knew she only did it to please him, but what of that, so long as she did it?

She was to read Laurence's plot, and, in a week, see him and take his directions, if she felt she could do his work. By that time she was to be settled in her lodgings in town, and have her disguise so far perfected that she might be seen in the streets in safety.

"And I must think of a name for you," said Brough, when he left her.

"How good he is," she cried, to herself, as she watched him walk away. "Oh, such a father as that is worth a hundred lovers. Why is it a man loves his child while she lives, and his wife only while his fancy lasts? There—I must not think—I will go and look at that plot."

She opened Laurence's papers and looked

languidly at them. There was the abstract of the play, broken here and there by pieces of vivid dialogue. By degrees Lil's interest became intensely excited.

“A wife neglected, yet too proud to show it when she suffers—a woman no longer loved, but too honest to her better nature to claim from her husband the maintenance of those established rights, which would only be given to her grudgingly—where did he find this character?” she said aloud, in her interest, after she had read it through. She read it again, and again, and almost forgot her own personal agony in the picture of another's.

“But I cannot write it!” she cried, at last, despondently; “I cannot write it!”

She told Brough all this when he came to fetch her away from her lonely home in the farm house. “It is wonderful,” she said, her eyes lit up by vivid feeling with something of their old brilliance, “he has dug deep into the heart of a proud woman who feels that the very laws of her country insult the purity of her love. But I cannot write it; it is useless for me to see him, papa.”

“Nonsense, child,” said Brough, who was reaping some reward for his exertions already in seeing the light in her eyes; “to please me see him, now that it is arranged. He will give you just the idea of how to do it; he is such a clever fellow. And you have the brains if you will only rouse yourself.”

Lil sighed, a sigh of complete hopelessness. She felt as if her sufferings had killed her brain. She had not the faintest gleam of hope for herself. But she would not oppose her one dear friend; she would not refuse to try and please him, even though she felt her effort would only end in disappointment.

Could she have looked forward, she would have refused to believe in what she saw!

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# IN THE FLOWER OF HER YOUTH.

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## CHAPTER I.

**E**DMUND LAURENCE, among his numerous avocations, was editor of a dramatic paper. He had a sanctum at the office where he transacted a great deal of his business, and where, as it was a very pleasant room, he often made appointments.

On a certain afternoon he sat here correcting proofs, and waiting for an expected visitor.

A knock came at the door. "Punctual, at all events," he said to himself.

His office boy appeared. "A lady, sir; says she has an appointment with you."

"Show her in," said Laurence, promptly, pushing his papers aside. A lady came into the room, very quietly, and stood beside his table. She had a roll of manuscript in her hand.

"Miss Winter, I suppose," said Laurence, looking keenly at her. He could not help being curious about this lady of whom Brough had spoken with so much interest.

“Yes,” was the reply, “I am Miss Winter, and have brought you the plot of your drama. I feel ashamed of having kept it so long, for I am afraid I can do nothing with it.”

“Mr. Warrington almost led me to expect you to say this,” said Laurence; “don’t give it up all at once. I really want some one to help me. And Mr. Warrington seems convinced you could be of great assistance to me if you would. You have often helped him?”

“Oh, yes; but I have recently been very ill, and, though I must obtain work in order to live, I feel that this work of yours is beyond me. It is a fine plot, and it requires admirable working out in all the details. I am not equal to it.”

“So you think it a good plot,” said Laurence, taking his manuscript tenderly into his hands and opening it.

“Oh, you know it is,” said Miss Winter, speaking with some animation; “and then that woman’s character, and the situations in which you place her!”

“Good, eh?” said Laurence, a faint smile of pleasure creeping over his face.

“But no one except yourself could write up to those scraps of dialogue,” said Miss Winter. “Look at the wonderful one between the woman and her husband—this one, I mean,” and she repeated from memory as much of it as Laurence had written. “No one could finish that but yourself.”

“And yet you enter into it so thoroughly,” said Laurence, regretfully.

“Ah, that is different!” said Miss Winter, “this woman’s character is enough to fire anyone. What a soliloquy that is you give her at the end of the first act.”

“Which one?” said Laurence, pretending he could not find it. Miss Winter watched him a minute, and then began to repeat it. As she spoke the words in a low voice of intense feeling, her eyes flashed brilliantly through the dark veil she wore.

Laurence leaned back in his chair.

“I should like to have you act in this,” he said.

“Like to have me—*what?*”

“Act—act in this. You understand that woman’s character so well, and there is hardly an actress on the boards who will not make her something different from what I intended. You say you must work; why not go on the stage?”

“Because it is impossible,” said Miss Winter, rising. She spoke very coldly, but there was a little tremble of excitement in her voice.

“Nothing is impossible,” said Laurence. “Are you going? and are you convinced you cannot undertake to help me in this play?”

“Yes, I am sure I could not satisfy you or myself.”

“Then think about what I say, and study for the stage. It is the best profession in the

world for a woman with talent. And I am sure you would do my heroine justice, for you utter her words as if they were your own."

"Oh," said Miss Winter, "that is because I know so well what she would feel and say!" and then she stopped herself quickly, said good-bye, and was gone.

"Know so well what she would feel and say," repeated Laurence. "By Jove, it's a queer thing if she does. My unfortunate heroine who rebels against the base protection of the laws is not so very common a character. Besides, her special red rag is marriage status, when separated from marriage love; can this brilliant-eyed young lady have fallen foul of the chains? I must ask Warrington. She interests me; there is something mysterious about her."

With which he plunged once more into his work and forgot Miss Winter for the time being. But he remembered her again, when, in the afternoon, he met Brough walking down the Strand.

"I say, Warrington," he exclaimed, all his curiosity re-awakening at the sight of the man who might gratify it, "tell me something about Miss Winter. She gives one a most mysterious feeling. Who is she? what's her story? for she has one I'm sure."

"Well, yes, she has," admitted Brough, reluctantly. "But—it's a secret, and I don't want her talked about. Would you mind not

saying anything about her, especially at my house?"

Laurence looked at him with an odd expression in his eyes, the meaning of which was very unmistakable.

"O, that's it, is it!" he said, and turned as if to go on; but Brough caught him, took his arm, and walked by his side.

"You're quite at sea, my dear boy; that isn't it, whatever it is that you're guessing at. Miss Winter's story is a strange one; one you would never guess. It is a secret which I cannot tell to you; but I can ask you, as a good fellow, to say as little about her as possible to anybody, and nothing at all to any of my friends."

"All right," said Laurence, "you may trust me. But I can't help her, unfortunately, because she won't work with me. Why don't you make her go on the stage? She spoke some of my lines magnificently."

"Go on the stage," repeated Brough, as if it were the most extraordinary idea that had ever been brought before his notice. And so it was, under the circumstances.

"She's got it in her," said Laurence; "that I'm sure of. At all events we might get a more experienced opinion than mine. But if she would go in for it, I would help her into an engagement when she is ready."

"You're a good fellow," said Warrington; "but I'm afraid it's impossible."

“Oh, nonsense,” said Laurence, who had a constitutional disbelief in impossibilities, “you talk to her, and think it over. She has interested me ; her appearance is fascinating with her pale face and brilliant eyes. I could help her better on the stage than anywhere else.”

“I must think about it,” said Brough, quite taken aback with this new idea.

“If you can persuade her into it,” said Laurence, “come to me ; I’ll tell you where she must go to study.”

“Thanks,” said Brough. “Good-bye, old fellow ; I have an appointment. I daresay I shall look in on you to-morrow.”

Having parted with Laurence, Brough turned back and went down Cecil Street, which they had just passed. He went to the very end of the street and then, with a covert glance back at the Strand to see that no one he knew was passing by, he knocked at a door.

At the top of this house, in two little rooms, lived Miss Winter. She was in of course ; she was doing nothing. She sat by the table, her head upon it, and her hands clasped tight over her head. Her figure was worthy of William Blake at the moment. She looked the picture of despair. Brough stood and observed her. Presently he touched her. She raised her head slowly and looked at him. She had not been crying. Her eyes were dry, her face was white and stony.

“My child,” he said, very seriously, “you will go mad if you do not work.”

“Let me go into a shop then !” she answered, “or out as a servant. I want to work, you know it, but I cannot write. When I sit down alone and quiet, I see nothing but my own despair.”

“You cannot go into a shop ;” he said, “you know they won’t take ladies who know nothing of the work. You would get no one to engage you as a servant ; you do not look like one.”

She sighed wearily ; she had forgotten she had any “looks.”

“You would be a stage waiting maid, in a cap and apron,” said Brough ; “no lady would dare to engage you. What do you think of Laurence’s idea, by the way.”

“What idea?”

“Why, the stage.”

“O, ridiculous. Surely you don’t entertain it for a moment. When I want to hide myself under the very earth, to go and exhibit myself to the public every night ! Ridiculous.”

“But,” said Brough, “there is something in this, that to go boldly forth is the very way to avoid being suspected. No one would dream that a person who desired to hide would go on the stage. I believe it would be a far safer plan than hiding. Remember Edgar Poe’s story of the Purloined Letter.”

Her only answer was an impatient movement and a sigh. But he went on.

"Remember too," he said, "the power of disguise you have there. You can make it a certainty that you will not be recognised. And it will appear the most natural thing in the world that you should make yourself up, even off the stage, for they all do it! Upon my word I believe this which seemed at first sight the most absurd thing imaginable is the most sensible. You must employ yourself; and you will not write. What will you do?"

"Anything, scrub floors, I want to tire myself out, to forget myself."

"Nonsense," said Brough impatiently, "that is not the way to do it for a creature made on the plan you are. You can't still your nerves by scrubbing. You want to use them, and then they'll be quiet. Come, now, couldn't you enter into Laurence's heroine?"

"Oh, yes," she said, raising her head quickly.

"And forget yourself in her?"

"Almost, yes."

"You only want to forget yourself in her entirely, and you will succeed. Come, you shall try this at all events. I will not have you going mad from idleness, when you are full of powers that only want exercise."

She sighed and submitted. That was all she could do in return for his love and infinite kindness.

“Laurence will tell me where you should go to study,” said Brough; “I will find out all about it to-morrow. You shall have the best lessons.”

“But that will cost money,” said she, “and I have cost you too much already.”

Brough pulled a wry face at first, but a moment after he cheered up. “Never mind,” he said, “I’ll get it somehow or other, even if I have to pawn myself. I’ll manage that, don’t bother yourself, but make up your mind to the attempt.”

“If it will please you, papa; but it seems to me the very last thing I should undertake.”

He left her, resolved to carry out his plan. “Scrub floors, indeed!” he growled to himself, as he walked back into the Strand. He came close behind Laurence who was on his way back to his editorial work. Brough touched him on the shoulder.

“I’ve been talking to Miss Winter since I saw you,” he said, “and I think I’ve persuaded her. You said you would tell me where she should study.”

“Do you want to know?” said Laurence, “really?”

“Yes, I’m in earnest.”

“Come with me then,” said Laurence. He turned and went back a short distance to the door of a dingy little tavern; he pushed it open and looked in. He soon saw the person he

wanted among the group of men drinking and laughing. Jack Percival was not easily overlooked in a crowd ; here he was the central figure, round whom the others clustered. His haunts were well known to all lovers of good stories, and his noticeable form was a sort of candle for listeners to gather round like moths. He worked harder than many young men, yet always had time to tell a witty story. He was tall, largely-formed, with a dignified bearing ; his perfectly gray hair showed his age, his face was strongly featured and powerful, very easily capable of expressing fury, but sometimes lit up by a wonderfully sweet smile.

He had just told a story, and, having delivered the point of it, raised his glass to his lips, while the men about him roared with laughter.

“By Gad, sir,” he said, putting his glass down, “that reminds me when I was travelling with Macready in America ; such a fearful thing happened ; you know his language was something tremendous when he was put out, though he did turn so religious before he died—Ah, Mr. Laurence, how do you do, sir. You gave me a good notice the other day.”

“You always earn good notices, Mr. Percival ; we’re obliged to give them to you. Are you very busy now, or can you take a new pupil?”

“Oh, I can take a new pupil ; I’ve got nearly as much as I can do ; I’m working too hard,

but I won't refuse any pupil you may bring me, Mr. Laurence."

"It's a lady; when shall she come to see you?"

"To-morrow, two sharp, at my rooms round the corner; you know them. Is she good looking?"

"That she certainly is," said Laurence; "you must find out if she has talent."

"That I'll do, sir; but mind ye, I can't put it in if it isn't there. Good-bye, won't you have anything? No? Yes, I'll have another glass. Well, as I was saying, when I was travelling with Macready in America——"

Those were the last words they heard as they came out of the tavern.

"That man," said Laurence, "is one of the best story tellers alive; and I doubt whether there's another man in England knows his Shakespeare as he does. Let her go to him. He'll bring her capacities out as no one else can. He's rough; she must be prepared for that; he comes of the old school of actors and actresses who lived a hard life. You must tell her not to mind being sworn at now and then."

"I don't think she'll mind that," said Brough, thinking to himself that Lil was hardly likely to complain of such a hardship. Those who have really suffered, learn to overlook trifling annoyances.

The next day Brough went down and told

Lil what she had to do. Without remonstrance she obeyed and presented herself at the house where Mr. Percival gave his lessons. He was waiting for her, and when she came quietly in, looked keenly at her from beneath his formidable eye-brows.

“Take off your veil,” he said, “let me have a look at ye. That’s an advantage we old men have; we may look at ye without offence. So you want to study for the stage, Miss Winter?”

“My friends want me to,” said Miss Winter, faintly.

“Your friends, humph. Well, you look as if you had something in you. Learn a part and then come to me again. What are you going in for, comedy I suppose?”

“I suppose so,” said Miss Winter, with the strangest feeling at her cold heart. Comedy!

“You don’t mean to go in for tragedy, I presume,” said he, knitting his fierce brows. “Lady Macbeth and that sort of thing. That wants force, you know, force, and plenty of it.”

“I don’t know that I have any,” was Miss Winter’s not very hopeful reply.

“Well, you can try comedy. Get *As You Like It*, and learn Rosalind. When you’re letter-perfect come to me again. Don’t come to me till you are. It makes me mad to have a woman coming here that doesn’t know her words.”

Miss Winter went back to her rooms, having bought the acting copy of *As You Like It*, on her way. She was anxious to do anything which would please her father; she realised more and more, as her mind re-awakened, how much he had done for her. Yet she would far rather have taken a floor to scrub than this delicious comedy to study. It seemed to her that the delicate love story, in its romantic setting, was so alien to any life possible to her, that its study could only be a torment. It was out of her power to imagine herself Rosalind, that gay, charming creature, whose every word is full of wit and wisdom. Nevertheless, she set herself to accomplish her task as speedily as might be; she could, at least, commit the words to memory. When Brough came in the next afternoon to have a brief look at her, he found her pacing the room, in the full tide of the dialogue with Orlando in the forest.

“Why, child, you look almost yourself again!” exclaimed Brough, in real surprise.

A faint smile came on her face.

“Yes, it has done me good, papa. I could never feel myself to be Rosalind now; I could never act it, but the words are so beautiful they do one good.”

“In fact you are taking a mental tonic. When will you have got the part by heart?”

“I will give myself two days more,” she said; “I will not go to Mr. Percival till I am

perfect." She spoke with an air of resolution such as she had not worn since the day when she had, as it were, passed through the grave into another life. Brough went out, hilarious; he blessed his stars for the happy thought with which Laurence had inspired him. The nightmare was lifting. He strode down the street rejoicing; and everyone who met him this day saw with delight that dear old Brough Warrington was getting over his fit of the blues, and was recovering his own riotous, genial humour.



## CHAPTER II.

**T**HE part of Rosalind really mastered, Miss Winter presented herself once more at Mr. Percival's rooms. The old actor was a thorough martinet, and simply would not attempt to teach an idle pupil. He took Miss Winter half through the play before he relaxed his severe aspect at all. "Come, come," he said, then, "you'll do. You know your words, and you've some idea of how to say them. That's more than most actresses have when they begin, I can tell you!"

This was all the encouragement she got that time; but she caught up what was, to her, quite a fresh and vivid idea of the action of the play. She went home and repeated a dozen times all the words she had gone through with her master, in order to engrave upon her memory the emphasis which he had taught her. She did this from interest in the beautiful language. She soon found she must do it, for Mr. Percival lost all patience if he had to tell her anything twice.

At her next lesson she half expected a

little praise for having remembered all she had been told, but she did not get it. Mr. Percival was too taken up with teaching her all the business of the play; and he expected so much of her that, in spite of herself, she was put upon her mettle. She actually forgot her miserable self in the novel sensations of this new work. When the lesson was over it was like a heavy cloud re-settling upon her, to remember that she was Miss Winter, and not Rosalind! Mr. Percival noticed the complete change in her face, but said nothing. He paid her a business-like compliment with the idea of raising her spirits.

“You’d look Lady Teazle to admiration,” he said, “with those fine eyes of yours!”

“Shall I learn it?” said Miss Winter. Compliment had no effect upon her now.

“Yes, do; you may as well see what you can make of it, but I doubt your doing the serious part in the screen scene. If you could manage that, you would look the character admirably.”

“Shall I study it for the next lesson?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Percival, “only, mind ye, don’t bring it unless you’re perfect.”

She bought the *School for Scandal* going home, and set herself down to it at once. A curious feeling came over her as of having tasted of new life. There was a peculiar pleasure in taking up a fresh part and picturing herself in a fresh character. There

was a certain sense of enjoyment in appropriating Sheridan's brilliant dialogue and making it her own. Nothing reveals the innate value of a writer so thoroughly as what actors call study. No reading equals it. It is almost impossible to deliver a speech properly unless you know its meaning; and in Shakespeare obscure meanings become clear when the words have become as familiar as though they were your own, and when you have begun to believe yourself the character which speaks them. And Shakespeare becomes infinitely more beautiful with familiarity; the perfection of his work then appears visible. For, when you have taken into yourself the whole of a part, you discover that the writing which appears so natural is like a perfect mosaic, the character is revealed in the first spoken sentence and developed with every line. The close study of Shakespeare is exhilarating; of a second-rate playwright it is deeply dispiriting, and, strange fact, the majestic verse of Shakespeare is not only easy to remember, but difficult to forget; whereas, second-rate twaddle, where the words are all limp and the sentences unstarched, evaporates from the memory as soon as something else is put there. Lil had not yet been tried with rubbish. Sheridan's brilliance sticks in the mind when once it has been well studied. She sat up through the night, patiently learning her words; put her

book under her pillow, and had it out as soon as she was awake in the morning. She did not put it out of her hand all that day, and by the evening she had almost conquered it. The screen scene filled her with anxiety, Mr. Percival having spoken of it as being beyond her powers. She determined to make the words her own, at all events; and, as a final resort, sat down and copied them out half-a-dozen times. Half that night she was awake recalling the acting of the piece as she had seen it performed. Her copy of the *School for Scandal* was quite worn when she came to Mr. Percival, a couple of days later, for her lesson. She began the dialogue briskly, proud of being perfect in it, and was stopped forthwith. "Too fast, too fast, my child—bring your words out half as quick—there, that's it. Keep at that pace and we may get through all right."

There is a great deal of "business" to learn in the *School for Scandal*; but Lil had seen it well done, and quickly took the hints given her. And so they came to the screen scene. At "Hear me, Sir Peter, I do not expect you to credit me," Mr. Percival took up his position grimly on the hearth-rug, and eyed his pupil with a terrible glance. He gave her no hint, or help, but waited to see what she could do; and so she simply followed her natural mode of delivering such a speech. That she could rise to

the excitement of an emotional speech she found plainly enough, for at her last word she sank into a chair trembling and overcome. Positively, she had fancied herself Lady Teazle for the moment. Poor child, it was her first effort of the kind, and she was startled by her own earnestness. Mr. Percival stood still a moment, the open book in his hand. Then he crossed the room to where she sat, before he spoke to her, and his voice was so gentle that it quite surprised her. It was the first time he had spoken gently to her.

“My child,” he said, “you can play a serious part; you spoke that beautifully. I couldn’t have told you how to say a word of it better. It was beautiful. Yes, yes, you can play a serious part. I didn’t think you had it in you.”

Quite excited and stirred by his discovery of an embryo tragedian, for he had the true actor’s contempt for comedy, the old man walked about the room without saying any more to her. During these few moments she awoke to reality. She remembered that she was Miss Winter, a woman without hope, without a place in the world. O, if she had been what she once was, how proud she would have been of this praise! Now it fell upon a cold heart. There was no one to tell it to—no one to be proud of her. Even Brough, her dear old boy, could only be glad

over any deed of hers in a sort of secret, guilty way. Still, he would be glad. But for him, and the wish to please him, she would never have carried her effort so far as this.

"Of course," she said, quietly, "I should far prefer tragedy, if I have the power for it."

"You would!" said Mr. Percival, wheeling round suddenly to have a good look at her, "why didn't you say so before?"

"I was afraid you would think me too ambitious," said she, adding with a sigh, "indeed, I am not that. I have no faith in myself. But, if I am to study, I would prefer tragedy."

"Why do you say 'if'?" he asked her, still studying her face and trying to understand it.

"Oh, because I do not see any future before me. I am not studying to please myself, but my friends."

"Well, I tell ye there is a future before you," said Mr. Percival, misunderstanding her meaning, "and, damn it, why can't you believe what I tell ye? There is the stuff in you. It will be your own fault if you don't take a high position. Now, what will you study?"

"Mr. Laurence has a character for me," said Lil; "but then, the play is not written yet."

“Then you can’t learn it yet. In the meantime—”

“I should like to study ‘Lady Macbeth,’” said Lil, summoning her courage.

“By Jove, yes!” exclaimed Mr. Percival; “study it, and let’s see what we can make of it. I have always maintained that ‘Lady Macbeth’ should be acted by a young woman—an old, grizzled virago would have no influence over the man—much he would care for her scolding. No, no, it should be a young woman, and a handsome one, too. Get it, my child, and if you feel it’s too much for you, we’ll read it through next time, before you say the part.”

Lil thought she knew “Macbeth,” that she had nothing to discover in that play, at least. She read it through as soon as she was back in her rooms, and saw at once that there was a whole world of sentiment and feeling in it, which she had hardly guessed at. She knew by experience now, that this would all gradually unfold itself to her as she learned the words; and so, with a sense almost of pleasure she turned back to Lady Macbeth’s entrance, and the strange words of Macbeth’s letter, which strike at once the keynote of the whole tragedy: “They met me in the day of success; and I have learned by the perfectest report, they have more in them than mortal knowledge.” She read on, aloud, to the end of Lady Macbeth’s grand invoca-

tion to the evil spirits ; and then she dropped the book upon her lap, and, for the first time, a faint feeling of ambition rose within her. Her own life was dead—destroyed by her own deed. Would it not be a new life to enter into the character of this fierce, ambitious woman, and repeat again and again this extraordinary tragedy, with its tremendous picture of the justice-dealing power of nature? She could sympathise with this woman, who, on the very threshold of her greatness, stood aghast at the vision of her coming deeds, and trembled in horror at her own thoughts, and who yet had vigour enough to silence her own conscience and that of her husband also. The fever of ambition, the lust of power, gives her an unnatural determination, a horrid fortitude, such as we all have faint inklings of when we are fighting for success and struggling to take a foremost place in the world.

Lil became so fascinated by this picture of a miserably proud woman, urged on to the destruction of all her peace and joy in life by these “metaphysical aids,” these personified temptations, which fill so strange a place in Macbeth’s tragedy, that she could not lay the book aside. She entered into the story as she had never done before ; she forgot everything else ; for the time being she hoped and feared, sinned and suffered with Lady Macbeth. It was late at night when she began

to study the sleep-walking scene. She lit all her candles and placed them by a long mirror which she had in her room, and then, watching herself as she spoke, endeavoured to realise this terrible scene and speak it in good earnest. O, how like it seemed to the agony of midnight hours which she herself had passed, when she had started from her sleep to find herself exhausted and worn out with re-enacting her own miserable tragedy! As this memory started up within her, and the remembrance of her own pain made her heart bleed afresh, the face she watched in the mirror before her grew wild and unnatural with a mad look upon it which Brough alone had ever seen there—the sigh she heaved over the visionary blood-stains came indeed from her heart. She saw reflected in the mirror a being whom she had never seen before—no longer Lil—no one she had ever known, but a woman driven wild by misery, changed by dread acquaintance with despair, whose fixed eyes looked wildly upon the ghost of her dead happiness. Terrified by her own impersonation, she rushed away from the glass and throwing herself upon her bed in a sudden panic of unaccountable terror, lay there trembling, her face hidden, lest, if she looked up, she should see her awful self again.

### CHAPTER III.

**B**ROUGH WARRINGTON was a great deal more like himself again ; but still he walked upon thorns.

Lady Warrington, immediately upon her marriage, had elected herself purse-bearer. She would stand no nonsense about money-matters for she found it required not only her own income, but all that Brough earned besides, to keep up the position and appearance which her heart was set upon.

Brough could never keep money in his pocket ; he was the most hopelessly extravagant fellow. He appeared to have no power of retaining gold and silver about his person ; it slid away invisibly, as though some malicious fairy had turned it into dried leaves. He was well aware of this strange inability of his to keep that which he had ; he knew he was incurable in the matter, for no past poverty had taught him any better. Something was lacking in his brain—he could not grasp the fact that individual coins were valuable and must be treasured, hard though he worked for them. He was delighted when anybody would take care of his money and

himself, and leave him free to write and think. He was charmed when he found his wife eager to undertake the responsibility so objectionable to himself. He gave her all the money he received, with alacrity, bargaining only that he should be supplied with pocket-money, half-a-crown at a time. He had never been more delighted in his life than when this arrangement was made, and Lady Warrington took upon herself all the management of his affairs; and he had never regretted it, for the money he earned was now really turned to some account. He would rattle a couple of shillings in his pocket with just as much pride and pleasure as he would have felt in handling a thousand pounds' worth of bank notes. Money had no innate value to him, as it has to most people. But now he found himself in an unexpected and disagreeable dilemma, and his path was decidedly thorny.

If Lil had been fit to write, he could have got her work at once, and she would have been able to do something towards her own support. But he saw it was impossible to compel her to undertake such work. It would be a cruelty, and one to which he could not bring himself. Her mind was too fevered, too entirely cut adrift from all safe moorings, for healthy creation to be possible to her.

He was intensely grateful to Laurence for having suggested this other career which

already had strengthened her by its absorbing interest. Too keenly strung and harassed in mind for it to be possible for her to create, the necessity for losing her own individuality in the creations of others, had saved her from madness.

So far, his hopes had been exceeded and the experiment had satisfied him to the full. But, in the meantime, Lil had to be kept, and her lessons paid for. And there was no one but himself to help her; no other creature would hold out a hand to keep her head above water or save her from any fate which might fall upon her.

He must devise some mode of deceiving the purse-bearer, that was clear; and the consideration of how to do this safely occupied his mind a great deal. When first he wanted to take Lil some money, he had simply given her a cheque which he received from one of the newspapers for which he wrote; and when Lady Warrington inquired after it he adopted a sorry shift which had served him on some former occasions, and said it had not been paid to him. This device was feeble enough, but he could hit upon no better one. He had very little of the true secretive faculty, although when in a dilemma his imaginative powers would come out strong; in other words he could tell a fib neatly. Lady Warrington took little or no interest in his work, but she knew all about its marketable

value, where it was sold, when it should be paid for, and, indeed, all that seemed to her of importance concerning it. Like a large well-trained dog, he dutifully brought her what she desired. If he had had the habit of secrecy so common with some ordinary types of men, he might very easily have done as he chose with his own. But, as it was, he found it no light task to hoodwink her about this regular drain upon his purse. Lil's own expenses were small enough; but her lessons cost more than she was aware of. Nevertheless she was not so much absorbed in her own despair as to forget these things.

One day he came straight into her rooms from a newspaper office, with a cheque in his hand. He put it down on the table.

"I don't want any money yet, papa," said she.

"Keep it," he said; "you will want it soon. And I would rather not take it home. Her ladyship would get it out of me."

("Her ladyship," was a sort of nickname between them for his wife.)

Lil did not reply immediately. She understood from the way he spoke that he was bothered. She knew every tone of his voice; she knew just the meaning of the queer sort of frown of disgust which he wore when life was troublesome, and "cakes and ale" insufficiently abundant.

"This must not go on, papa," said Lil, after

a silence, during which she had been looking at the cheque, and Brough had been walking about the room, with a frown on his forehead. "This must not go on, papa. If I am really to live, I must get work which will enable me to do so without worrying you like this. I wish I had never begun to study for the stage! It is perfect madness, when I desire above all things to hide myself, to train for the most public of all lives! I only did it to please you. Now, let me give it up and attempt something more reasonable."

"You like it—it interests you?" asked Brough, facing round upon her with a fiercer frown than ever.

"Yes," admitted Lil.

"Are you afraid of coming to grief—of failing in it?"

"No, strange to say, I am not much afraid of that. I shall never, I believe, be the actress I should like to be; but I fancy the excitement would carry me over without any failure. Strange! I could never have supposed excitement of any sort would affect me again!"

"What a little fool you are!" exclaimed Brough. "Here you have got the one thing that interests you—you feel you will succeed—Percival told Laurence the other day that you would succeed!—and yet you want to give it all up. What will you do instead?" he inquired, savagely. "Scrub floors or serve

behind a counter? I thought there was more of the artist in you!"

"Surely I have suffered enough to kill all the artist in me—to kill all but the capacity for suffering."

"Rubbish! an artist should have no feelings, except for his work. Come, child, you are strong enough to forget yourself and live in your ambition."

"Yes—yes—almost! But, papa, if it were anything but this. What madness to go upon a stage and show myself at large when I should be in my grave! I am a ghost. What business has a ghost to appear in the full light of public life?"

"You really run no risk," said Brough. "I do not believe he—anyone who had known you—would recognize you with that black hair and your altered face. I think you are handsomer than you used to be; but you are a changed woman. You must learn to make your face up well; acquire a perfect indifference as to any chance of being recognised; and I think you are safe. These people whom you most fear, talk, I heard the other day, of living altogether in Italy when—" He was on the verge of saying, "When they are married," but he could not. And Lil had risen and put out her hand as if to stay him from giving her some blow.

"But, papa," she said, "there are others who know me—who might suspect—who might betray—!"

“I have it!” exclaimed Brough; “I’ve got an idea. Come now, let us try the experiment on her ladyship!”

“What experiment?” asked Lil, with a face full of apprehension.

“Whether she knows you!”

“Oh, no, I dare not. I dare not! It is too terrible a risk.”

“Now, don’t be a little fool, but listen to me,” said Brough, holding up his forefinger with a dogmatic air of much wisdom which he sometimes assumed. You are making two great mistakes. You are supposing that the generality of men and women possess brains, which they don’t, and that they are always on the look-out for being taken in, which they are not. How would swindlers and card-sharpers exist if it were so? How should we have got so far in this gigantic fraud of yours, if it were so? Believe me, to deceive most people is as easy as lying. Then, too, there is a strong prejudice in favour of a person who has died and been buried, being dead and buried. If you wore your own bright hair, and if you looked the same woman that you used to look, you would probably frighten her ladyship into a fit if you walked into her bedroom at night; she would take you for a ghost: but meet her in broad sunlight and stare her in the face without flinching, and I’ll lay any odds she will only say, ‘What an extraordinary likeness!’

I should not wonder, altered as you are, that with the clear fact of your being quite a person of the past in her mind, she might not even notice the likeness. Come, risk it. Should she suspect, and you get frightened, I'll get you out of it—I'll swear you are as much like yourself as I am like—Othello. So come, trust to me and try it. You will have twice as much confidence afterwards, and by degrees you will become careless who you meet. It is hard to die; and it is hard to come to life again!"

"I tremble at the idea," said Lil, "so much is at stake. But if you feel sure you can silence her suspicions if they are aroused—"

"Trust me for that," cried Brough. "I was not born yesterday!"

"But how can we manage it?" asked Lil. "It must be done soon, if at all, or all my courage will go again!"

"Come up to Hyde Park to-morrow afternoon; I will get her to go out with me and we will meet you there. Take a book and sit reading on one of the chairs under the trees by Rotten Row. If she notices you and the game seems dangerous, we will go straight on; if I find it is safe, or if she has not observed you, we will sit down near you. Then you come and walk past us slowly. Will you be there at three?"

"Yes," said Lil, almost inaudibly. The thought of how great a risk she was about to

run took away her breath. But, recovering herself with an effort, she said: "Then, do you propose, if we find I am not recognized, that I should try to get some small part to play—in the country, perhaps? I have no pride left, I believe: I should resent nothing. I would be a walking lady, with pleasure, if walking ladies get enough to live upon!"

"I don't think they do," remarked Brough, drily; "at least not by their profession. No, my child, you won't do for a walking lady. You must fly higher."

"That is what Mr. Percival says," replied Lil, with a sigh; "but that means waiting a long time for an opportunity."

"Not necessarily," said Brough, cheerfully. "Laurence will help you when you are ready. He often asks how you are getting on, and I think he is quite set upon your acting his heroine if you are up to the mark when his play is written."

"Nevertheless," said Lil, resolutely, "I must try to get something in the meantime. Your having to bring me money is dangerous; it makes it harder to keep my secret."

"That's true," said Brough, ruefully, "and if her ladyship did get on the scent, she might take it into her head that it was a case for jealousy, and we should be up a tree then with a vengeance; we should have to let her suppose what she liked and pitch into me as much as she chose."

"Dear me," said Lil, "that is a nice prospect! Let us try this experiment, by all means, if, as it seems to be, it is the first step towards my having a chance of independence."

"Well, then, three o'clock to-morrow afternoon," said Brough. "I'm infernally glad you're going to try it, for you won't be such a little coward afterwards. Good-bye, baby."

"You dear old boy," exclaimed Lil, standing on tip-toe to kiss him. As he had been all her world, when she was a child—her guide, critic, friend—so he was now in her womanhood. This careless good-fellow—this Pagan without a creed—this lover of cakes and ale—this rebel against forms and conventionalities—was to her the one steady reality in her life, to which she might cling without fear.

All that night she dwelt with terror upon the dangerous experiment she was about to make. No budding actress ever thought more of a first appearance behind the footlights than did Lil of this meeting in Hyde Park. She dreaded it as a hunted animal might dread the moment when he should be brought to bay and stand "staring upon the hunters." There was no especial terror of Lady Warrington in her mind; but there was a very vivid terror of coming face to face with anyone belonging to her old life. She felt herself an outcast, a

wretch, with no world to live in. She was indeed, Lil, Charlie Newman's wife. Yet she was not. Lady Warrington had that which now seemed to Lil a greater, grander privilege than any other granted in the light of the sun!—She was herself, she owned to her own name, she was not ashamed of that which she was. Could it be that only a short time ago she, Lil Newman, was as free, as unconstrained, as innocent of secret or of fear as any other woman? No, no, it could not be. It must have been centuries ago, that she was free, happy, fearless, with a name and a right to live! She had left all that behind her so far that she could not recall it. Through all the night, whether she waked or slept, she enacted the scene of the morrow when she was to meet boldly one out of that century-past-life. Would Lady Warrington scream, cry, start, exclaim, "This is Lil—Lil is alive?" Would she gaze coldly at her and see nothing? Was it possible that a mere certificate of death could make an individuality unrecognisable?

The night passed, as we know the night will, though it appear an eternity of silent darkness. Lil looked at the sunshine in amazement. Was it possible that in this brightness and amid all this gaiety of sunlit air she was to experience so strange and ghostly a trial? She could not work all the morning; she was paralyzed by the one

thought that to-day she was going to peril her secret.

So the hour approached ; she scarcely could dress herself, she trembled so. Yet she persevered. She darkened her eyebrows, and put some faint delicate lines about her mouth to alter its expression ; she had ruthlessly stained her hair nearly black, and let it grow in thick curls low on her forehead.

“I shall understand ‘making up,’ when I want it!” she said to herself, with a kind of desperate humour, when she had done and stood surveying herself in the glass. She had a strange and terrible feeling upon her of not knowing herself—of becoming bewildered—of forgetting who she was, or what this woman might be who looked at her from the mirror. With this mood on her perhaps she might face Lady Warrington safely ! A wild influx of courage came into her heart, and with sudden resolution she started on her way. She took her play-book with her discreetly disguised in a demure green cover. It had become her companion, her friend, her one absorbing interest, and she could hardly imagine going out without it.

It was a lovely day, and a dim far-off sense of physical pleasure came upon her as she walked. But she could not shake off the fancy that the people who stared at her and sometimes turned to look after her did so because she was a ghost and had no right to

be out in the sunshine. Sometimes this feeling came upon her so suddenly and heavily that she stopped and hesitated as to whether she had not indeed best return and hide herself again.

But she could not disappoint Brough. A woman may break her promise to a lover and think little of it; but such a father as dear old Brough no woman with an atom of heart could be traitor to, even in a trifle.

And so she persevered, walking through the crowded streets, absolutely isolated; her interest in all bright and general life gone; her mind fixed on her ghastly fate, her strange future.

“In my life what comfort, when I am dead to my husband?” says Imogen, whose fate was less hard than Lil’s in that her husband still loved her. Love being the most living of all facts in this mortal world, leaves the keenest blank of all when it is given over to death.



## CHAPTER IV.

**T**HE air was fresh and sweet, even to Lil's weary sense ; for it was one of those racy days when the clouds seem to have holiday in the sky and the strong breeze is gay even in London. She walked slowly from Apsley House down the path at the side of the Row. She started at every figure on the horizon, and trembled at the mere thought of those familiar eyes she was so soon to meet. How unconscious, and ordinary, and collected all these people were whom she passed as she walked on ! Why should she alone be full of a sense of overpowering terror and guiltiness, while yet she was innocent as any of her fellow-creatures ? Was she innocent ? She had sinned against the laws, rather than sin against her own soul. At last she grew so nervous, so apprehensive, that she could walk no longer. She determined to wait for the ordeal, not go on to meet it. She sat down beneath a shady tree, and opening her book, fixed her eyes upon its pages. Could she but forget what she was here for ! Could she but occupy her mind with her work ; then her heart might

not beat so wildly, nor her whole frame tremble so with terror. It was impossible—the effort was beyond her. She read the words on the page before her over and over again, uselessly. She could attach no meaning to them. They stood there, mere arbitrary arrangements of letters, without thought or feeling conveyed in them; and this because her own fear, her own feeling of the moment was so vivid and overpowering that it paled all else.

She put down her book impatiently at last, and raised her eyes. They met Lady Warrington's gaze, full upon her face.

Among the passers-by, her father and his wife had approached her without her observing it. They must have been silent, or their familiar voices would have penetrated to her ear. Brough, as Lil could see without looking at him, was walking at Lady Warrington's side, his eyes steadily fixed upon the horizon. But Lady Warrington stared full in Lil's face, with a look of curiosity and polite interest. Lil, fascinated by the extraordinary situation, could not take away her own eyes, but returned the gaze with an amazement all her own. Was it possible that she was unrecognised, indeed?

Then she saw Lady Warrington touch Brough's arm, and speak to him. He turned and stared in an opposite direction quite away from Lil; but she knew that he had been told to look at her. For a moment she felt as if

her heart would stand still with terror. What had Lady Warrington said? Was she saying, "There is Lil!" But directly afterwards she saw there was no danger. Brough walked to a seat and sat down, and Lady Warrington followed him. That meant that she was to walk past them. Would her limbs bear her? Was it possible that she still had the strength to move? She resolutely made the effort, for she knew what Brough wanted her to do. Strange it seemed to her that by some mechanical process she found herself rising and walking into the very teeth of danger. There sat Lady Warrington; there must Lil go; walk up to the very mouth of discovery, and face it out. She did it. Walked quietly passed them as they sat, both now observing her. She could not look at them; her eyes seemed attached to the ground at her feet! but she moved quietly, determined to give Lady Warrington time to look at her. When she had passed them for a moment a panic fell upon her—a sick horror, that she would find Lady Warrington close beside her; that she would run after her, and cry, "Lil, Lil, it is you! you are not dead!" She dared not look behind her; she was terrified. She could only concentrate her mind upon the endeavour not to run away; not to stagger with nervousness; only to walk straight on, like any other woman.

It seemed to her that she had walked a long,

long way—in reality it was not many yards—when she heard a voice close beside her.

“It is Miss Winter? I have been wishing so much to see you and ask how you are getting on with your study?”

She stopped then, with a queer feeling that she might have gone on till she dropped if somebody had not stayed her, and looked up. It was Edmund Laurence.

She tried to speak, and could not. Her lips opened and shut, but her voice appeared to die away in her throat.

“You are tired,” he said, “I believe you have been working too hard. Forgive me, Miss Winter, but you positively must come and sit down here in the shade, you look as if you were going to faint.”

Lil knew he was right, so she quietly obeyed him. But she was petrified by terror; she was well aware that Lady Warrington knew Edmund Laurence. What would be the result of this unfortunate meeting? Why had she been so reckless as to run this risk? Laurence did not speak immediately, for he saw she was overcome by something, though he could not guess by what. At last she made an effort to see how great her danger was. She raised her eyes and looked back to where the Warringtons had been sitting. They were not there—she looked on—far away up the path she saw them, Brough walking off at no end of a pace and “her ladyship” doing her best to keep up

to him. He, too, had seen the danger and made all haste out of it. With a sigh of relief Lil leaned back in her chair. What would have become of her if her father had not saved her? Intimate as Laurence and Brough were, it would have puzzled Lady Warrington very much if they had not spoken. Lil did not know whether Laurence would have any idea of the difficulty of the situation—and she herself—she must have played her part well, indeed, to get through such a meeting safely. She felt that she did not know her part well enough, and that she was not actress enough to play it, yet!

At last she made an effort, and turned to Laurence. "How kind you are," she said, "to let me recover so quietly; I suppose the sun was too much for me. I have not been out in the sunshine for a long time. I suspect you are right; I have been working too hard."

"What are you learning?" he asked, with a curious glance at the book in her hand.

"Lady Macbeth," she answered. "I learned it, as it seems to me, a lone time ago; and I thought then that I could catch the spirit of it at once; and now, in despair, I have taken to reading it, in the hope of finding out what it all means!"

Edmund Laurence laughed with an air of great amusement. "You are an artist," he said. "Most actresses think Lady Macbeth is an elderly scold, and so disgust themselves

and everybody else with her. Even Mrs. Siddons did not grasp her at all points; her rendering was grand, but too stern. Lady Macbeth was many-sided, as Shakespeare's women and those of real life generally are. She was credulous and sceptical, stern and tender, a scold and a cajoler, a fury and a coward, all in a breath; conscience less yet conscience-stricken, a very lioness outside and a thorough chicken at heart. Is it not so?"

"Yes, yes," said Lil, half a smile stealing over her face, "and so I think I ought to understand her, for I can seldom guess what my mood will be the next moment; and when I determine to do anything I have to hold myself well in hand in order to do it. I waver a hundred times a day about this work of mine. I like it, I do not deny that it interests me; but it fills me with a humiliating sense of incapacity. I want to give it up now—to give it up altogether. I regret intensely having ever begun it."

"That is so like an artist," said Laurence, with his cool amused laugh, "to get disgusted and despondent just when beginning to be able to do a thing. In that mood the male artist perseveres all the more, the female artist gives in. That is why women, cram full of ability, sit about doing nothing."

Lil gave him a side-long, curious glance.

"I shan't sit about doing nothing!" she said.

"I never said you would," he answered,

quietly, "but you are very likely not to do the very thing you can do best, because you will give in to this mood of unbelief in yourself."

"You want to provoke me," she said, pausing a moment to wonder that anyone should care to talk to a ghost like this!—almost as if she were a real living woman and it mattered what she did!

"Of course I do," he answered, "to provoke you into doing your best. The stage sadly wants an artist upon it; you will be that artist if you will go on. We are eaten up with Russians and French women, who coolly come over and whistle Shakespeare at us, safe in the knowledge that there isn't an English actress on the boards who can speak her own language with half the intelligence they manifest. Come, there is a place for you; you must fill it!"

"Ah," said Lil, "if you knew ——" Her head was bent low; she did not look up, and left her sentence unfinished. It meant, "if you knew all my misery! If you knew the danger, the risk, the almost impossibility of such a career for me!"

Laurence understood it to mean something very different.

"Oh, I do know," he answered, "we all know something of it. There is always an ideal beyond us which we cannot reach; once take away that yearning and we become mere handicraftsmen. The artist's life is one of

progress : there is always a hill ahead of him which he wants to get over, but which it appears quite impossible for him even to climb. This naturally makes him feel unhappy and inclined to curse the fate that made him so. But it's a waste of breath ; better go on climbing the hills, one after another. I dare say when you began studying you had not dared to think of Lady Macbeth, and now you are disgusted because you can't do it all at once?"

"You are much too wise," said Lil, the half-smile coming back on her lips.

"I can guess at the meaning of your face, sometimes," he answered, "but there is a great deal there that I cannot read. You have a more mysterious expression than any woman I ever encountered."

Startled, Lil turned her face and looked at him. Was he trying to read her secret in her face? She felt as if a detective were at her side ready to seize her and bring her back to her old self. But his gaze disarmed her, softened her, startled her anew. He was looking at her very intently, with curiosity, perhaps ; with keen interest, certainly ; but, above all, and very positively, with a vivid and evident admiration.

"*What!*" exclaimed Lil, in her heart. "Is this thing possible? • That look ! the man is mad. I am dead—I am a ghost—I am a living lie. He is deceived by this sunshine and the

fresh air into fancying me something different from what I am !”

She shuddered, spite of the sunshine, as though she were indeed in the chill of the tomb.

“You are wonderful,” he said, in a low voice, almost as if he thought she did not hear him, and still intently watching her ; “you change so much ; you are a different woman at one moment from what you are the next ; you are so suggestive in your expression, as though you hid your thoughts instead of speaking them ; you look so much more than you say.”

Lil changed now, under his gaze ; a minute since she had been like one in a grave : now suddenly she grew hot and fierce. “Forgive me !” she exclaimed, “but I don’t want to be criticised just now, it is a waste of valuable matter ; keep it till I am on the stage and you can all say what you like of me in the newspapers.”

“You are not angry ?” he said ; “you change so quickly, I cannot follow your mood !”

“No, I am not angry,” she answered. His eyes were still on her ; their gaze did not hurt her. Lawrence had blue eyes, large and clear and honest, and much given to sturdy inspection of anything which interested him. There was a great charm in these blue eyes, for they could hold within them a smile. They did so now ; a smile which no woman could mistake.

It suddenly became plain to Lil that she was no ghost to this man, no dead woman without an individuality, but simply Miss Winter, a remarkable-looking girl, apparently quite alone in the world; the thought of it amazed her. She rose quickly.

“Good-bye,” she said, “I must make haste home. I did not mean to stay here so long.”

And Laurence, quite taken aback by this particularly abrupt change of mood, found himself staring after a slim-figured woman, who was walking very rapidly away from him.

“I should like to follow her and see where she lives,” said he to himself, “but it wouldn’t be fair. She is a lady, whatever else she is; and, if she doesn’t want me to know where she lives, I won’t go prying after her like a knight of the pavement.”

With which laudable resolution Lawrence turned in the other direction to keep an appointment for which he was now some half-an-hour late.



## CHAPTER V.

**H**IL awaited the postman's visit next morning, in a fever of anxiety. Brough had promised to write to her.

There was the big square envelope, with the quaint, familiar hand-writing, wonderfully small and delicate, as sometimes happens with men who write constantly, with an extraordinary clearness, acquired by frequently writing Greek, and with an occasional bit of *bizarre* extravagance in it, when native character asserted itself. As, for instance, the W, of Miss Winter was a thing to make one wonder, and the C, of Cecil Street embraced half the address.

“All right, baby, her ladyship didn't spot you, though she had two jolly good stares. She only said, when we had passed you, ‘That girl is like you, Brough, about the eyes.’ I thought, on that, I might venture to sit down, and let her look again. ‘There,’ “she said, as you went by us, ‘don't you see she is like you? and she walks like you, too.’ I was rather surprised at this, but you see it is all right. I made haste out of the way, when I saw that

fellow Laurence coming along. I expected he would stop you. He admires you very much, and is sure to help you on when there is a chance."

Lil sat thinking over this letter for some time. She thought about her position, and got herself into so unhappy a state, that she had forgotten it was the day for the lesson with Mr. Percival, until just the time. She started up and hurried away, resolved to ask him for some good advice. She was rather late, and consequently found him in an ill humour. Unless he were served with rather more exactness than if he had been the manager of a theatre and paid his pupils to come to him, he became ferocious, somewhat after the fashion of a surly lion. Lil saw it was no time to air any views of her own, they would have been quenched with great promptness. Therefore she set to work at once without any unnecessary delay, in the hope that she might bring back his good humour. But he was in one of his stern moods, when, perhaps, his pupils gained most from him. So far, he had seemed surprised at her success in *Lady Macbeth*. To-day he listened quietly, and only gave praise in this form ;

"Well, I can't understand how it is that you do some of it so well, and in other parts you seem quite out of it."

"This won't do," he said, throwing down

the book in disgust at the end of the banquet scene ; "I don't know what's the matter with you, but you're all unequal. Some speeches you say beautifully, and then every now and then, you go all to pieces, and don't seem to have any idea of what you're doing. Why is it? Can you tell me?"

"No," said Lil, who had sat down in an attitude of extreme dejection, which looked very like one of despair, "but I know that I am ready to give up these heavy parts which are so difficult. I shall never play them ; it is delightful work learning them, but it is unpractical. I must find a way to earn something. I do not care what I do! Let me study some waiting-maid's part, and try to get any small engagement."

Mr. Percival turned round upon her, with his thick brows knotted into a fierce frown. But it had no effect upon Lil. She was already too downcast to feel it.

"Oh," he said, "you'll be wanting me to teach you burlesque next. No, I don't teach waiting-maids. Now, look here, believe what I tell you, that you will succeed in these parts ; or else give it up and go to somebody you can believe in. I've done with ye, if you can't believe what I tell ye. You're all abroad with Lady Macbeth to-day, but that's no reason why you should play waiting-maid. At all events, I can't teach you that. I don't know why you don't get on with

Lady Macbeth ; you must give it up, if you can't do it."

He crossed the room and sat down in a chair at the other side with an air of indifference. It was no affectation ; he had, for the moment, lost his interest in her. If she was going to prove a failure, after all, she would become nobody to him, but would have to be buried away, among the many other failures he had encountered in the course of a long theatrical life. Lil saw this, and saw it was no good then to ask him for any help or advice.

She went home, sad indeed, and went to bed that night, with no result as far as rest was concerned. She could not sleep, she only lay still, with wide eyes, thinking and thinking about Lady Macbeth, and wondering where she had failed. A dozen times she went over the play, word by word, endeavouring to understand why she had pleased in one place and not in another. She saw the thing at last ; it came to her all in a moment. Her delivery of every word of the soliloquies absolutely satisfied Mr. Percival ; the moment Macbeth was "on," she came to grief altogether, and every word was a difficulty.

"The fact is," said Lil, to herself, "I can recite very nicely ; but I don't know how to act !"

Having made this discovery, and satisfied

herself of its truth, by going through the play in her mind once again, she lay more still than ever, feeling as if she would never rise from her bed. Had she so studied and hoped, all for this? Why had he not told her she could not act before?

"I suppose," thought she, "he expects something more of me, now he knows I can deliver the words; I have to take a new step, if I am to go on, and begin to act. But what a cruel thing, instead of telling me what I lacked, to leave me to find it out, all by myself like this! But I'll be revenged on him! I'll astonish him next time. I can do it, if I try; I'm certain I can!"

Roused and stung into action, she started from her bed without caring whether it was time to rise or no, and began her studies. She soon found out that Macbeth's entrance invariably changed his wife's mood; from a woman afraid of herself, her deed, her ill conscience, she became a fury, confident, indomitable. She knew that she dared never falter or hesitate, before this man, "too full o' the milk of human kindness," or, if she did, all would be lost.

She hardly knew how the time passed until her next lesson. The dramatic fever had seized her. She had discovered what was required of her and she was resolved to rise to it. The real power which Mr. Percival had over her, showed itself in the fact that

she looked forward with as great an inward trembling, yet exultation, to showing him what she could do, as though he were a theatre full of critics.

At last, with eyes more aflame than Miss Winter's had as yet ever been, she went to her appointment, her tattered copy of Macbeth in her hand. Mr. Percival did not appear very glad to see her; he was not in the best of humours.

"Well," he said, taking her book from her, "have you found out what was wrong last time? You were all abroad, you know."

"I think so," said she, "I have thought of nothing else, ever since."

"Come on then, let's hear it," said Mr. Percival. "I'll sit down to-day, my child, and just give you the cues. I'm tired."

"Very well," said Lil, and began. Mr. Percival sat grimly eyeing her as she spoke; at last something began to light in his face. There was an earnestness about her to-day which roused him; he forgot he was tired, and before Lady Macbeth's soliloquy was finished, Lil saw him fling down the book and rise from his chair. This gave her new courage; she had already succeeded so far, that she had interested him into acting with her, instead of merely listening to her words.

The first scene over, Mr. Percival sat down, apparently for the purpose of staring at her.

"My God," he said, "and you talked about

playing waiting-maids, last time. You need only study and think, use your brains, as you have used them now, and you will step into a high position."

"But," said Lil, very softly—she was wondering at a sudden sense of pleasure that these words gave her—"I shall have to work a very long time before I can get any tragedy to play; I have so much to learn."

"Of course you have," interrupted Mr. Percival; "I know that, but you won't learn it by playing chamber-maids."

"No, no," said Lil, "I don't suppose I should, but I don't think you understand that I am very, very poor; as poor as anyone can be who has nothing."

Mr. Percival had many expressions, and his features, fine and very flexible, were almost transformed by their changes. When Lil had first come in he was cross, he had had a stupid pupil with him for an hour, and he was utterly out of sorts with everything. The expression he wore made him seem nothing but an old man, tired of the world, weary of life, lacking interest in everything. Then Lil's real acting had stirred him, roused him as the sounds of war rouse an old war-horse, and he entered into Macbeth. When he spoke to her about herself, there had come upon his face a smile, which he only wore in his best moments, which made his face wonderfully handsome, and full of fine meaning. Then he was the

actor, living in the art he loved, full of keen appreciation. Posterity can never guess how handsome such a man is, for these expressions defy photography, and, as a rule, evade portrait painters.

Now, as Lil spoke, the smile faded from his face, and an earnestness half kind, half weary, came into it instead. He had seen this struggle, before now, in the course of his long life. It was no new story to him.

"Well, well, my child," he said, "I can't give you up, you are getting on too well for me to let you go. Never mind about the lessons; if that troubles you, you must get into my debt."

Lil crossed the room to him and held out her hand. He understood and accepted her dumb thanks. Then she sat down near him and began to speak again, her eyes on the ground.

"It is not only that, Mr. Percival," she said, "it is so difficult to explain to you a position so difficult as mine! I must indeed get some work to live upon. I—I am living now, really it is no better, on charity. I ought not to take what I do. I am ashamed to. Oh, I must find some work!" she added, almost vehemently. As a rule she was so cold, so quiet, that this manner startled her hearer.

"Women are always so infernally impatient!" he said, rubbing his brow in a perplexed way.

"I do not think I am impatient," said Lil, quietly; "I do not desire to make any high flight. I want only some simple work, something to do which will enable me to live."

"Then don't let it be on the stage," said Mr. Percival, very decidedly; "you will get discouraged, and never take the high place which you will reach if you aim for that alone."

Lil saw there was nothing more to be obtained from him; he would not help her. She rose, with a sigh, put on her bonnet and went away. He watched her as she left him, the absorbed, far-away, habitual look having returned to her face.

"No," he said to himself, "I can't make her out; I've had a pretty large experience of women in my time, and I've met a good many queer ones, but this is a new sort."

With which he walked off to solace himself at a familiar haunt, where certain boon companions welcomed him with glee. He was soon lost in some rattling good story of the past, and in the memories of Macready and Fechter, soon forgot the mystery of his strange pupil.

And she, Lil, went to her lodging, very hopeless, very tired at heart. She dreaded, more and more, every day, bringing her father into some trouble. She could see plainly that it was getting more and more difficult for him to supply her with funds. She could not endure the thought of being a distress to

the one person who had been her constant real friend. "If I am doomed to bring him into trouble," said she, to herself, "my fate is set upon making a fool of me! But I will not endure it. I will not always be a trial to those I love. I will take fortune by the throat."

So saying, she fell into a fit of hard thinking; she was abstracted, and walked about the room. She looked at herself in the glass, pushed the black hair off her forehead, and gazed at her face. Had she still got good looks? Dared she take her fortune boldly by the hand? She stared at her face but saw no beauty in it, yet others appeared to find something either of beauty or of interest there. "If so, then, perhaps, she might venture. And how?"

She thought over all the theatres and the managers that she knew anything about. One manager she remembered to have seen. Brough had pointed him out to her. She thought he looked a gentleman. She had heard of his having country theatres as well as the one he had in town. "Should she try him first? Yes. And how?"

Why, go and see him of course.

She knew he would be at the theatre in the evening. He acted in the first piece, and would, she imagined, be free after that was over. She had acquired an unconscious, mechanical habit, of reading play-bills, when

she passed them, and of noting what the actors were doing. She waited, sitting with her hands folded in her lap, and an overpowering sense of timidity and fear upon her, until it was late enough to start. Then she quickly dressed and walked away through the crowded streets. She had to be quick, for did she pause or linger, she would infallibly turn back and give up her expedition, out of sheer cowardice.

She went straight to the stage door of the theatre in question. A friendly looking man was standing at it; this doorkeeper did not alarm her, as did a very golden-haired young lady, who stood behind him, and who was talking, with the most vulgar accent imaginable, to a man lounging and smoking a cigar, in the street outside. With her heart in her mouth, Lil, looking as cool as possible, went up to the doorkeeper and asked, "If it was possible to see Mr. Dare."

"I don't think it at all likely that you can, Miss," said the man, civilly enough, "but if you wish it, I'll send in and ask. Who shall I say?"

"Oh, he wouldn't know," said Lil, conscious of the curious, insolent stare of the golden-haired young lady; "only say a lady wants to see him, just for a moment."

"Step inside, Miss," said the man taking her to a little wooden place about six feet square, which appeared to be his sanctum. He then

went through a door which slammed behind him, leaving Lil defenceless before the inquisitive glances of the young woman, who appeared to belong to the place, and yet to have nothing to do. But in a moment, the amiable door-keeper returned. "I've sent in," he said, re-assuringly to Lil. There was nowhere to sit down in the little, wooden room, so Lil stood there with a sensation as if she were standing on a volcano. If Mr. Dare was a rough man, he might tell her she was ridiculous, to come there wasting his time, a mere novice, with no experience, no recommendation. She wondered whether she dared mention Mr. Percival, or whether he would be angry with her if she did, when he so strongly disapproved of her beginning too soon? She hoped Mr. Dare would be kind; he had looked so; and then perhaps she need not run the risk of annoying Mr. Percival. Oh, if he would only come, so that she might get it over. How long would it be possible for her to stand there waiting?

At last some one came through the door, which again slammed noisily. Some one came to the little room where Lil stood, and looked in. Her heart appeared to stand still, but she found strength to look up. It was not Mr. Dare, it was a stout, florid man, with a look as of much drinking and smoking being habitual with him; he wore long, fierce, black moustachios, he had one hand full of papers, which somehow gave him an air of

being busy and in a hurry; he sturdily kept his hat on, as though there could be no possibility of encountering ladies at a stage door. He eyed Lil all over, and made her feel about half her usual size.

“Was it you that wished to see Mr. Dare?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied Lil.

“Can you tell me your business?” he said, with an air which said, if you do so, you must do it quickly. Lil looked at him and made up her mind.

“No,” she said, “I am sorry, but I cannot.”

“Well,” said the man of the moustachios, with quiet insolence, “you can’t expect to see Mr. Dare without you have an appointment with him and he knows who you are. You must understand, of course, that he has a great many persons wishing to see him,” he added, with a twinkle in his eye, which showed that he could guess very well what she had come about. An acting manager knows the look of one who wants to get on the boards, as a publisher’s clerk is acquainted with the ‘paper-stainer,’ and the picture dealer’s man with the dauber of canvas. And these underlings of the middle men have a magnificent manner, all their own, of treating aspiring artists.

Lil felt that she was looked through and through, and mentally ticketed by the man of the black moustachios, “novice, no ex-

perience." She was resolved not to confide in him; he was just a degree too practical.

"Thank you," she said, "good-night, I am sorry to have troubled you."

She walked quietly out and away through the streets with a heart so heavy she scarcely knew how to carry it.

These first, ignorant struggles are so hard and so dispiriting.



## CHAPTER VI.

**L**IL found herself unable to study next morning for thinking of her adventure. Evidently that was not the way to go to work. If only Brough would help her, he could give her introductions. If only Laurence would help her, he could do it at once. But these two, like Percival, were set upon her waiting and working. Brough and herself alone knew what this meant ; she appreciated to the utmost his efforts to help her. But she feared that his cheery good nature and sanguine temperament led him to under-rate the increasing difficulty of keeping up her supplies. He always refused, partly on principle and partly from disposition, to look into the future or apprehend any troubles. He insisted upon letting the future take care of itself, while he enjoyed himself as well as he could in the present. Lil had seen him get into trouble many a time through this too easy disposition. And even he had evidently regarded the prospect with some dismay, should Lady Warrington get a clue to his secret. Lil became the more rest-

less, the more she thought of it. She must help herself; there was no one to help her. She must find out the right way of doing it. She remembered a theatrical "agency," which she had noticed in a street not very far from her lodgings. She would go there and see if they understood how to get at managers. She had just started up to go on her errand when she heard a familiar, heavy step on the stairs, and Brough pushed open the door and came in. She saw in a moment that he had something on his mind. He laughed, and greeted her in his usual boisterous fashion; but he was never a good hand at making believe to be jolly when he was not. There was a tameness and artificiality about it. Besides, that frown of annoyance was on his forehead.

"What is it, papa?" she inquired.

"What is what?" he asked, rather savagely.

"Why, I don't know; but you look disgusted."

"Do I?" and he walked to the glass over the mantel-shelf and inspected himself. "I think I look charming," he said, after a moment, turning round to her. He had made a considerable attempt to smooth out his forehead.

"So do I," said Lil; "but tell me what is the matter? You know, papa, it's no

good trying to make up a face for me ; you never could take me in. Have you some bad news?"

"No, baby, I don't think I have."

"You don't know if the news is good or bad? you are doubtful what I shall think of it? Then I know; they are married."

Brough looked hard at her as she spoke. Where had she found all this extraordinary strength of hers?

"Yes," he said, "you are right."

"How—how long is it since—since I died!" she said, with a sort of hysterical laugh, which seemed to catch her suddenly.

"For God's sake, don't laugh, child!" exclaimed Brough, quickly. "Six months—it is six months."

"What," she said, looking at him strangely; "not six ages, not six whole eternities, only six months! And do you mean to say," she went on, with a sudden change of manner, "that I have borne this for six long months, and in silence! Well, it is over now. The last cut of the knife has been given. I am, indeed, dead!"

She stood perfectly still for a little while, and neither spoke. Brough tipped his chair back reflectively and watched her, waiting to see how her mood would change. He knew of nothing to say. He had no consolation to offer her. The position in which she was placed was one quite out of any

experience of his, and he had learned to follow her moods and simply do his best to prevent their injuring her, rather than to lead her in any way. He had felt of late, more than ever, that women are unintelligible beings.

At last she spoke again, and now very quietly, very earnestly.

“Papa, this is terribly serious now. You must forget me. I must forget myself. Do not call me by the old names any longer. Remember we shall stand momentarily in danger of something too ghastly to be thought of! It is terrible to realise the power that lies between us, to know what a heavy secret ours is. Think of what he is doing, of what I have made him do! Think of her! oh, papa, she is so good, she is so innocent. She is pure as snow. She is like an angel. What have I done? I dare not think! But it is done. It is too late, it is all over. And now I have but one career, to forget, to die, indeed, to the past. I am no longer your child, I am no longer Lil, I am Miss Winter only. Remember that, help me to remember that!”

She went away from him, and sat down, her face hidden. He began to wonder whether she was ever going to speak again. It was worse than wild words, this silence. He knew what she was about when she was talking, though she talked ever so

madly. But silence leaves too much room for the imagination's play. At last he rose and went to her. He touched her.

"Child," he said, "shake this off. You have only to persevere and your future lies before you, a great future; Percival says so. Laurence says so. Forget the past, as you say; live for your new work."

"Where are they going to live, do you know?" she asked, without turning her head.

"Of course I know. I have found that out. I was not born yesterday. They are going to live at Florence for some time, then, I believe, at Genoa; at all events they intend to find a villa somewhere in Italy, probably in Tuscany, where they will settle down; the house in London is to be let. They are gone already."

"Thank God," said Lil, "I can breathe more freely. Yes, I will work, believe me. And I will live. I must, you know. It is evidently hard to kill me, or I should surely have died before this!"

"I want you to let Laurence come and see you," said Brough. He wants to talk to you a little about this play of his. Let him come. He will be sure to help you; he is the best fellow in the world."

Lil said nothing. She only thought of Laurence, at the moment, as one of those who would help her, perhaps, but only in

the future. She wanted real work, at the moment. Perhaps she was impatient. In truth she was thirsting for something to fill all her time and thoughts, which would leave her no chance to think of that past, that secret, which now she dared hardly name to herself.

“I will do as you like, papa, in anything that will please you. I wish I could learn not to call you that! I am terrified that the very walls will hear us. We two have such a horrible responsibility.”

“Call me, ‘old boy,’ as you used to do when you were a baby,” said Brough, cheerfully; “I rather prefer it. That will be quite safe. And what will you be called?”

“‘Something that hath a reference to my state!’ Call me *Aliena*.”

“*Aliena Winter* does not sound very well,” remarked Brough.

“What does that matter?” she answered.

“It will matter very much when you come out,” said Brough.

“‘Come out,’” echoed Lil. “What an idea; I—that am a ghost! Do not talk of it like that. I can just picture myself personating a murderess, a miserable woman, a wretched outcast, but I cannot imagine myself as a new actress, making a first appearance! No, don’t talk of it like that, and *Aliena* will do. Now, go away and forget me; I must work. I must work and

forget myself, or my thoughts will drive me mad."

"And what are you going to do?" asked Brough.

"Oh, I hardly know," she answered, "but I must lose myself in one of these plays." She took up some of a small collection of play-books which lay together, and threw them down one after the other.

"I don't think I can endure any one of them, to-day!" she said. "My own tragedy is so terrible that it sickens me for these. But don't look like that at me, dear old boy! I will go out and get some air, only I must not go with you, so good-bye."

He took his hat and walked off rather dolefully. He did not understand this new mood at all. She took the thing in a different way from what he expected. Had she something in her mind that she would not tell him? He had only one anxiety, one suspicion that haunted him sometimes, and that was, that even now she might destroy herself if her solitude and her memories became unbearable. He determined to go back again later in the afternoon and take Laurence with him; between them they might cheer her up. Sincerely, at this moment, he wished Charlie Newman and Adelaide anywhere out of the way. But in the way they must ever remain, while they continued to be in the world. Occupying the same planet

with them, Lil could never again be herself. This fact had to be faced very clearly, and Brough resolved it should also be braved out as cheerfully as might be. So he went walking away down the Strand with his long stride, challenging the notice of passers-by, through his sheer length and breadth and his natural happy aggressiveness. And Lil, at the same time, was walking quickly in the other direction determined to regard herself as Miss Winter, pure and simple: a woman alone in the world, wanting work. What else was she, indeed? nothing. She walked in at the doorway of the theatrical "agency," and went up the broad stone stairs to the office. It all seemed very cold and hard and dirty. The office itself was a degree less dispiriting. It was comfortable enough, and the walls were covered and made gay by photographs of innumerable actors and actresses. The play bills of country theatres fluttered here and there, showing how such a notable actor from a certain theatre in London was performing a new and original play, supported by a "powerful company." Lil read some of these as she stood there; for a clerk who was writing at the desk only looked at her and then went on with his work. In a moment, however, a man came out of an inner room and stared at her interrogatively. She saw that to him she was to address herself.

So she explained her business in as few words as possible. "Oh, I see," he said, interrupting her, "you want to put your name down in our books. Just read this paper, and you will see what our terms are." So saying, he handed her a printed slip, and walked away. The purport of the printed slip was that the fee for putting an aspirant's name on the books was five shillings, that an engagement was not guaranteed, and that, if one was obtained, Mr. Young, the agent, claimed the first week's salary as his commission. All this interested Lil very much, and it seemed to her sufficiently reasonable. She had long ago discovered that nothing is to be got in this world without paying for it. And five shillings, which she had often paid at a servant's registry office in order to get a cook or a housemaid, seemed little enough to pay in order to get an engagement for herself! So she followed the man who had given her the paper, and told him she would like to put her name on the books. He took up a form and looked inquiringly at her.

"What style of thing do you go in for? Comedy?"

"I suppose so," said Lil, feeling it very difficult to appraise herself. To talk of the tragic parts she had studied would have been impossible with this man's eyes upon

her. Why, she could not have said, though she guessed the reason when she had seen Mr. Young on one or two other occasions. He was small, dark haired, with large dark eyes capable, apparently, of but one expression; complete and absolute boredom and indifference. The man, though well-mannered enough, had no pretensions to be a gentleman; he was inferior to many who came to him in search of work. But he had seen life for so many years from his one standpoint, that he seemed to have become incapable of any other view than that which he had from his desk. His name appeared to be a sort of sarcasm; he was young in years, and in name; but his expression and manner were those of an ancient, world-weary cynic, who for the last hundred years had been engaged in valuing persons of artistic and ambitious temperament, at "thirty shillings a week," or "two guineas a week, and pay your own travelling expenses," or "two and a half guineas a week, and dress yourself." He looked sadly at Lil when she made this doubtful answer, and said:

"What experience have you had?"

"None," replied Lil, boldly.

"None? ah, I see, a novice!" and he proceeded to write this down.

"I want to get my experience," remarked Lil.

“Yes, exactly,” said Mr. Young, in the tone of a man who had been bored with some two thousand novices who wanted to get their experience.

“Do you want to go into the country?” he asked. “Most of the companies going out now were made up two or three months ago.”

“I should prefer the country,” said Lil; “at least, I think so; but what I most want is to get something immediately.”

“Ah, I see. Well, if you are ready to go on in a small part, perhaps, without having anything to say there might be an opening.

“Oh, certainly,” said Lil; “I wish to begin in something very small.”

“Well that is to your advantage,” said Mr. Young, with languid approval; “all the ladies who come here want to play leading parts; and, really, you know that is impossible. And, as a rule, they are not at all nice looking; your appearance is in your favour, and, if you are willing to take something small, I have no doubt we can find you an engagement.”

“Oh, yes;” said Lil, a little amused now by his dry manner; “I am not at all proud!”

“Proud!” repeated Mr. Young, and he gave a strange sort of little contemptuous laugh. “No. There’s not much pride about this profession! Miss Aliena Winter, novice,

comedy. Should you object to going to an East End theatre? No. Would you go on in burlesque? Don't think you'd do for it? That's all, I think, thank you."

The last words applied to the five shillings which he took and dropped into a till. Miss Winter saw she was disposed of. She wished Mr. Young good afternoon, and received a somewhat absent-minded nod in reply. This young man, in the course of his professional career, appeared to have out-grown all the ordinary sentiments of the human breast. When he saw a really handsome woman, it was not with the eyes of admiration, but he ticketed her mentally as being worth so much more a week; and, as a rule, he informed her with smileless stolidity that she was decidedly superior to the general run of young women in the profession. He had ticketed Miss Winter; she was done with; so he gave her a nod, and proceeded to read aloud a letter which he had held in his hand all the time, and which he wanted the clerk to explain to him. It contained the descriptions of various ladies. Lil hurried away, and when she got out into the air felt as if she had escaped from some terrible place. Mr. Young, without making any effort, or being in the smallest degree rude or disagreeable, had the most remarkable power of "flattening"

any enthusiasm that might be lurking in the dramatic breast. He viewed it all from one stand-point, that of mere business ; and he imparted a sense of desolation to any one who was disposed to regard the profession as something artistic and interesting. Lil felt herself to be so very much in need of air after this little experience, that she went down on to the embankment and walked up and down by the dusky river. She had one remarkable quality ; the more circumstances suppressed her, the more she rose against them and rebelled. In prosperity she was capable of being a very idle, perhaps a positively indolent, woman. Adversity, disappointment, misery, these things roused the force and the fierceness of her character. The fact that she found herself ranged among the most unimportant dregs of her new profession stirred in her a passionate desire to rise to the surface by her own strength. At last, when her restless walk had converted an irritability, which was painful, into a resolution which gave her courage, she turned back to go to her lodgings. She meant to cheer herself by going over all her most ambitious parts.

As she turned down Cecil Street, she met her father and Edmund Laurence.

“ We have been down to see you,” said Brough. “ Have you been for a walk ? ”

“ May I come another day ? ” asked Laurence ; “ I want to know how you are getting on . ”

“ Not very fast , ” said Lil ; she was tired, and felt, indeed, as if she were getting on very slowly. “ And you ? That play is not written ? ”

Laurence laughed.

“ No, it is not written, it has got no farther than when you saw it. Do you think I am idle ? No. I am overworked, you know. I wanted you to help me write it, because I was too busy to do it myself. Never mind, it will be ready when you are ready to play the heroine. I promise you, no one else shall have that part while there is a chance of your taking it.”

“ Thank you , ” said Lil, rather absently. She had lost the elasticity which is a part of youth, and which enables one to believe in the future, to wait for it, to long for it. She had courage, resolution, power. But she wanted to work now ! She could not wait.



## CHAPTER VII.

**H**IL worked on, week after week, trying to keep her courage alive. She had to take her father's money; she half-starved herself in the endeavour to use as little of it as possible. Semi-starvation is not a good thing to work on. But she managed to do it and to work well. Only she longed to hear from the "Agency" of something which she might do.

She had got quite a number of parts in her head now. Even Mr. Percival was secretly a little surprised at the rapidity with which she learned; she was what he would have described as an "extraordinary quick study." The truth was she never dared stay to think: she snatched up her book the moment her thoughts wandered away. It was madness to look back—worse still for one instant to let her mind look towards the man she still loved; and towards the woman who now held her place, to whom indeed she had given it, and given it unlawfully.

But the tension was awful, and sometimes she would break down and sob wildly for a while, quite suddenly and seemingly without

provocation. But not often—for she fought against these fits of grief and passion with all her strength. They exhausted her too terribly; they were too expensive. But this was, altogether, a period as difficult to endure as any she had lived through. Mr. Percival began to see, as the weeks went on, that she was growing more haggard, more spiritless.

“Do not work too hard,” he said, one day, to her. No pupil had ever heard such words from him before!

“I cannot help it,” she said; “I cannot stop; I dare not.”

At last, after exercising her patience to the utmost, she determined to go and see the dry and arid Mr. Young once more. He welcomed her in a characteristic manner.

“Ah, Miss Winter—I think you’re on our books. I suppose you’ve come with the idea of giving us a good blowing up? We’re accustomed to that. But you know it’s no good—we can’t do anything if you don’t ever come here and show yourself. Appearance is everything.”

“I only came in to see if you had anything for me,” said Lil, meekly.

“Well,” he said, “I think perhaps we have. Just come into the inner room.”

“Was it possible! Lil felt a momentary thrill of excitement. What joy it would be to have some real work and no longer be a burden to her dear old boy! She followed

Mr. Young into another room ; here he hunted about among some letters until at last he found what he wanted.

"Here," he said, "is a letter from a manager, Mr. Allen, who wants a leading lady. He has bought the right to play certain high-class modern comedies in the small towns of England. He is coming here to-morrow ; and, as yet, I have no ladies to meet him. I think you would be very likely to suit him. Of course he would only pay a small salary."

"What do you call a small salary ?" asked Lil.

"Oh, two guineas a week. He won't give more than that, I feel sure."

"I will come to meet him," said Lil, "if you think he would take a novice."

"Oh, he's obliged to sometimes," said Mr. Young, who evidently thought as little of managers as of actors. "Of course you would have to go down for a week's rehearsals before you began to play. Will you be here at eleven to-morrow to meet him ?"

"Yes," said Lil. "Could I get the plays at French's to look at ?"

"No, you can't ; they are reserved. We can lend them to you, but not unless you are engaged to play in them."

"That is rather hard," said Lil, "for I cannot guess what parts I should be wanted to play."

“Oh, you can do them,” said Mr. Young, with an air of consummate information, “they are heavy parts, but if you are a quick study, as you say you are, that is no trouble. You have the appearance, and that is the great point.”

Mr. Percival had been telling Lil a story, but the day before, illustrative of how even a positively ugly woman may hold her own upon the stage by force of genius. She found it impossible to reconcile these two views, so gave it up and went away.

The next morning, punctual to her hour, she re-appeared at Mr. Young's office. The manager had not arrived, so she sat down and looked at the photographs and the play-bills. In a few minutes a cheerful looking young man came in—not the manager; no, evidently on the same errand as herself. Presently came another, and the two eyed each other askance. Then came a third; a very cheerful one, plainly under the impression that he had the “fatal gift of beauty,” and was bound to get on in consequence thereof. Then came a shabby, shabby, seedy old man. The young ones greeted the agent with a slightly nervous audacity, as if they were quite sure of good engagements and he knew it; they all said “How d'ye do, Young. Nice morning, isn't it?” But the seedy old man seemed too low down in the world to have the courage for this pretence. He stood

humbly in the middle of the room, apparently so convinced of his unimportance that he did not think it worth while to take his hat off, as did the others when they saw Lil. She sat watching this poor, dirty old fellow. He interested her. Another lady came in now, and sat down; and then two more young men. All these were evidently expected. But the shabby old man was not, and presently Mr. Young went and spoke to him. It turned out that he wanted to put his name down on the books. He was plainly afraid of Mr. Young.

This indeed was the dregs of the profession! Small wonder, if Mr. Young saw many such specimens as this, that he despised it!

While the old man was paying his five shillings, in walked a tolerably gentlemanly looking man, who wore quite a different air in entering the room from all the others; he nodded to Mr. Young and went straight in to the inner sanctum—the manager, clearly. All the young actors looked admirably indifferent. Mr. Young handed the shabby old fellow over to the clerk and took Lil into the inner room. She wondered much why she was taken first, but was silently grateful. The truth was that Mr. Young, despite his cool contempt for managers and actors, had a kind of dim idea that he had encountered something to be treated with a little consideration when, as but very rarely happened to him, he met with a lady.

The manager looked hard at Lil as only managers can look. Even an insignificant unheard-of country manager looks at a woman in a way that belongs to his business and to none other.

“You’ve come for an engagement?” he said slowly and reflectively, “and you are a novice—never been on the boards at all?”

“I have been studying for a long time under Mr. Percival.”

“Ah,” said the manager, “theatrical tuition is a mere waste of time. What you want is experience.”

“Just so,” said Mr. Young, drily, “these theatrical masters pocket a lot of your money, and what can they do for it afterwards? Get you one engagement, perhaps.”

It struck Lil, who was listening very quietly, that the fact that the master could get a pupil an engagement at all was the very reason why Mr. Young disapproved of him. But the manager puzzled her a good deal more. She looked from Mr. Young to him and found he was regarding her earnestly.

“Of course,” said Mr. Allen, “if Mr. Percival had brought you out at a *matinée*, for instance, and could say you had been successful, I could make a different offer for you. As it is, your experience has to be gained.”

“Just so,” said Lil; “and I should prefer to gain it in the country before Mr. Percival

brings me out. I suppose all novices suffer stage-fright, and I would rather go through that where a mistake would be least noticed."

"Oh, I can promise you, no one will know what mistakes you may make, except the manager—myself in fact," said Mr. Allen, with a laugh of contempt which included all his audiences. Lil began to feel as if this public career must have something strange about it to produce so much cynicism.

"Well, I should like you to come," said Mr. Allen; "you have the appearance and height for Pamela, the character which I want you to take. You will also have to play an old lady. You won't object to that, I suppose?"

"Not at all," said Lil, apparently much to his surprise and a little to his relief. He was accustomed to deal with young women who demanded before all things that they should always have a chance of looking pretty.

"Pamela is a heavy part," said Mr. Allen, "and a showy one; you will want very handsome dresses for it. The old lady also requires good dressing. I shall want you to join me at Chester; you must give a month's rehearsals without pay, of course; and after that you will have thirty shillings a week and your travelling expenses."

"During this month," said Lil, "I shall only be expected to rehearse?"

"Oh, I may put you on sometimes," said

Mr. Allen, as if he was conferring a great favour.

“You will, then, have the lady with you who plays Pamela for you, now?”

“N—no,” admitted Mr. Allen, somewhat reluctantly. Lil looked at Mr. Young and saw a smile in his eyes. She understood then that she would have to play during this month for nothing. However, it was clear that as a novice, she could not expect to be paid immediately.

“Can I give you my answer to-morrow?” said Lil; “I must think about it.”

“Certainly,” said Mr. Allen. And so the interview ended. Lil went away, determined to go, but resolved, first of all, to ask some advice. She had a kind of trembling fear, despite all she had gone through, at the thought of leaving the few who knew her. Misfortune had not hardened her. She dreaded going among a set of people who would regard her merely as “a novice—at thirty shillings a week.” This, however, she resolved to keep to herself. She determined to go and ask Mr. Percival’s advice. To-morrow, at a certain hour in the morning, she knew she might catch him; she decided to be guided by what he should say.

She passed a restless night, wondering whether she had the courage to go through her noviciate, despising herself because she

feared it, yet longing, as all people of excitable temperament do, to take work at once and face its difficulties. Her two great terrors were stage-fright, and the personal curiosity about herself of the other actors and actresses. In small country towns, she thought, surely the audience would not terrify her much; and as to the people with whom she would have to associate, she must simply seclude herself from them, if that were possible. The idea of having real work to do—something which would give her a place in the world, however unimportant a one, delighted her. She had begun, as a natural result of the long strain of waiting and studying in solitude, to have a morbid idea that she was veritably an outcast from life and altogether useless.

In the morning she received a letter in a writing unfamiliar to her. She soon discovered it was from Mr. Allen. He evidently wanted her to join his company. This pleased her. It was so new an idea to her, now, that anybody should really want her for her value!

“Theatre Royal, Littletown.

“DEAR MADAM,

“I think you would be better pleased if you got your dresses in London. Being modern, they are left to the idea and taste of the actress. I will give you an idea of the

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kind of things you require. For the old lady, rich black silk or velvet with white lace, etc., bonnet with white feathers, lace, etc. ; third act, deep mourning. For Pamela, in the first act, morning dress of the most fashionable style, hat and sunshade ; second act, evening dress, striking and rich ; third act, another morning dress of an effective kind. You will see by my letter of agreement that I require you to *play or to understudy* for one month gratis and that I shall ask you, if I think fit, to sign an engagement with me as soon as I can see what you can do, so that it will be easy for me to see other ladies and rehearse them before your month expires. Please send me a copy of agreement in your own handwriting.

“Yours, A. ALLEN.”

“Letter of agreement between A. Allen and Miss Winter. A. Allen engages you, Miss Winter, as a member of my company to play or to understudy the Dowager and Pamela, for one month beginning immediately ; after that month to receive thirty shillings a week, should arrangements be come to. To find your own dresses, which are to be in keeping with the characters you represent. I, for my part, undertaking to rehearse, and teach you the business required and to pay your railway fares from place to place.

“P.S.—You may be required to play at

once—that is, after one or two rehearsals, so please be letter perfect in both pieces. It is most important that the words are at your fingers' ends."

Lil read this letter over several times, with a sense of satisfaction. It seemed to her real business. She longed to get her new parts and begin to study them at once. But still she determined to see what Mr. Percival thought of it. She took the letter with her and went round to the street which had now become so familiar to her that it was as much like home as any place she knew. Mr. Percival was there, having a brief interval of relaxation, enlivened by a cigar and some raw whiskey. He welcomed Miss Winter very heartily. Notwithstanding her strange reserve, her lack of joyousness, her uniform quietness of manner, she was a favourite of his. She had a smack of the real capacity in her which delighted him.

"I have come for some advice, Mr. Percival," said Lil.

"Well, my dear, what is it? I'll sit down and smoke my cigar, if you've no objection, while you tell me. Now then?"

Lil told her tale and read him the letter.

"No, my dear, it's not good enough. You get no real experience in those small country towns. If it were Birmingham or Liverpool it would be another thing. But at these little

places you have no proper stage management, no properties; the other actors are utterly inferior, and, in fact, it isn't acting at all. You would come back as bad as you are—or worse—and have spent a lot of money on it. It would cost you forty or fifty pounds to knock about with him for a month. And then your salary—when you get it; do you suppose that will cover your expenses? Not a bit of it! Even if he pays you at all, which is very doubtful.”

“But,” said Lil, “surely forty or fifty pounds!—not so much as that! I should live very cheaply.”

“My dear child,” said Mr. Percival, “you don't know what it means. You can't live cheaply when you are doing this sort of thing. You will travel all day and get in late; you must go to the first hotel you come to and pay them anything they ask you. If you can get yourself some food and get dressed in time for the performance, you have done well. You can't go about finding cheap places to lodge in. No, no; you must make up your mind to spend money, if you go, there's no doubt about that. Then you will learn nothing; you will have to act with a rowdy set of men and you will probably get thoroughly disgusted with the profession.”

Lil sat sorrowfully regarding the letter in her hand. “I don't mind all that,” she said; “that is nothing to me, because all I want

is work and to get my independence. But if you really think it would cost me so much!"

"Think," echoed Mr. Percival, "I know it. And don't you imagine you could live on thirty shillings a week, even if you could feel sure that Allen would pay it you."

"Oh, Mr. Percival," said Lil, "how hard it is to make a beginning—how hard it is to get anything to do!"

"You are in such a hurry, my dear," said Mr. Percival, "go on working; you are worth more than this."

Lil rose with a sigh. "Thank you," she said. "I will tell Mr. Allen I have given up the idea."

"Well, I think you'd be throwing money and time away to go. Then, you need quite a wardrobe for it. There's an expense to start with!"

"Good-bye," said Lil, with a sigh, and went dolefully down stairs and through the streets, hardly seeing where she went. Her eyes were full, not of actual tears, but of a dimness. How difficult it is to make a commencement in any career without someone to "back you up," only those who, like Lil, have tried it, can tell.

She went home and wrote to Mr. Allen that she could not accept his proposal. She went out and posted the letter, to get it off her mind; and then she sat down in her room in a fit of hopelessness. What was she to do?

Go on working at her new studies, as if she were sixteen and it was her father's duty to educate her? Oh, impossible. She began to walk restlessly about, in a mood of wild impatience. Just then the maid came to the door of her room and said Mr. Laurence wished to see her. "Show him up," said Lil, and then stood for a moment, wondering—should she ask him to help her now, give her an introduction, assist her to some small engagement? While she wondered, he entered the room, and she met his straight-gazing blue eyes. Yes, she would ask him. He inspired her with confidence.

"I am so glad to see you," she said, "I want so much to speak to you."

A vivid smile came upon his face.

"That is charming of you," he said. "What is it? Tell me; is it something I can do?"

"It is something I am going to ask you to do," she said, "because I know you have influence at some of the theatres. Mr. Laurence, I cannot wait for an opportunity to come out in tragedy, nor can I even wait until your play is written! I am living on money which is almost charity—it is given me by one who can ill afford to spare it. I have been trying to get an engagement in the country; I asked Mr. Percival's advice before deciding, and he assured me I could not live on the salary, and in fact that I should have to spend quite a great deal of money! So I have

just written and refused to go. This has made me wretched, because I thought I had found an opening. Mr. Percival says I am in too great a hurry; from his point of view, as a master, I know he is right; I am no actress yet. But I shall go mad if I am to be fevered by this delay; I want a small engagement which will enable me to just live and be independent while I study. Tell me, is it possible to get such a thing in London—to go on as a waiting-maid, or something of that sort. There, I have poured my troubles at your feet. Do not blame me—you looked so kind, I could not help it.”

Laurence sat still a moment or two, looking at her. She puzzled him beyond words. Here was a young and handsome woman, apparently quite alone in the world, living in lodgings, on what she called charity, studying for the stage, with seemingly no one who even knew her but Brough Warrington, not the least fast of Bohemians. Yet this woman had a something about her, a natural dignity in the midst of her humiliating confessions, which shewed her to be a lady, and that she had no idea but that she would be treated as such, just as much as though she spoke in her own drawing-room. This fascinated Laurence. It seemed to him extraordinary that a woman could preserve such a manner, keep such an atmosphere about her, while situated as was Miss Winter.

“Blame you,” he said, at last, “you honour me by speaking to me like this. It is easy enough for me to get you some very small part; the only difficulty is that you are too distinguished-looking for a waiting-maid. You would find it very difficult to make up for one; and the leading actress would infallibly be jealous of your appearance.”

Lil looked at him in gentle surprise. “My appearance!” she repeated, in a low voice, and sighed. It was a mystery to her how she could have any appearance left. She felt herself to be such a ghost that she fancied people would scarcely see her. She felt faded—worn out—a thing of the past. But, suddenly, she again encountered Laurence’s eyes with that look in them which had startled her when they met in the park. Evidently, to him, she was not a thing of the past! She recovered herself, with an effort.

“Indeed,” she said, “you don’t do me justice. Let me but have the chance, and I could make up into a very decent waiting-maid. Or I should delight in playing an old lady—that is what I should really like.”

“Dear me,” said Lawrence, “you love art for art’s sake, even more than I supposed. But, seriously, Miss Winter, I will speak to some of the managers I know, and see what openings they have.”

“Oh, thank you—thank you,” said Lil.

“How I shall bless you if you can find me some work.”

“Shall you?” said Lawrence, and the smile came upon his face again. Then he began to talk to her about her work, about his unwritten play; and, when he left her, she had a new feeling of hope. The kindly smile of those blue eyes seemed to linger with her and cheer her.



## CHAPTER VIII.

**L**AURENCE devoted a good deal of his valuable time (already too full of engagements) to walking about among his friends the managers during the next few days. All he could hear of, for some time, was that at one theatre they wanted a number of attendants—speechless walking ladies, that is. They were paid little, indeed; but their dresses would be provided. He did not care to go to Miss Winter with nothing better than this. At last he discovered just the thing she had talked about, “second waiting-maid” wanted, in an old English comedy, played by a bright little company. It seemed to him ludicrous for Miss Winter, who looked Lady Macbeth or Imogen, to take such a place upon a stage! but he knew the thing would please her, so he took it to her.

She was overjoyed.

“Oh, Mr. Lawrence,” she said, “you are indeed a friend; you cannot guess how happy it will make me to have something to do in good earnest. Am I to go and see if the manager thinks I shall do?”

“Yes, to-morrow, at twelve. He is a good fellow, fortunately, and a gentleman. I am glad you should be with him, as he is to have my play when it is written. But, Miss Winter, if you take this engagement you must keep it dark; old Percival won't like one of his pet pupils to play this sort of thing.”

“I shall tell him, and get him to teach me the business of the part.”

Laurence laughed aloud. “Fancy Jack Percival teaching a waiting-maid! Well, I dare say he'll do it for you. He certainly wouldn't for anyone else. Now, Miss Winter, do you mind going to see this manager? Shall I—” he was about to say shall I go with you, when it occurred to him that she might not think that any advantage.

“Mind going?” said she, with a look almost of amusement, “I have outlived that sort of thing. But I am infinitely obliged to you for giving me the opportunity.”

Laurence found that she grew, apparently without being aware of it, uneasy if he stayed long with her. The truth was that the interest with which his eyes dwelled upon her face affected her as something unnatural and altogether misplaced. She was glad to see him, yet she very soon wished him away. He felt this, and made his visits very brief. But he was glad indeed when he could find an excuse to make one. He came the next

afternoon to hear how she had succeeded with the manager.

“Oh, well!” cried she, as delighted as if she had an offer to play a leading part at fifty pounds a night; “he has actually engaged me, and I am to go to rehearsal to-morrow. Oh, I am so glad. I began to think a beginning was the very thing one could never, never get! Oh, you may laugh at me, Mr. Laurence. I have told you before to make up your mind that I am not a real artist. I have no true ambition—I might have had, but it lies dead within me!—what I do desire is to earn my living. A guinea a week is not much, but it is something to be thankful for, when just now I had nothing.”

“I am glad, if you are glad,” said Laurence. “After all, it is a good thing for you to get used to the stage and the foot-lights and the look of the house, before you make a big attempt. You will overcome stage-fright, which is a thing to be dreaded. I’ll set to work and get this play written. You shall act that heroine of mine; I wouldn’t let them have the play for that woman who is playing lead with them now.”

“Miss Chichester? why not?”

“Oh, she hasn’t an atom of sympathy. She is effective, but without variety. She laughs and makes play with her eyes just the same in all her characters. I liked her when she

first came out, but now I am tired of her. She has no depth."

"As you will be tired of me when I have been 'on' a little while."

"Oh, no, you are all depth. There is no sounding you; deeps lie below, however far one touches. That is a fascination which never palls. And so you go to rehearsal to-morrow?" he said, hastily changing his subject, for he saw a look of reserve and surprise coming into her face. "Well, you will soon find out what Miss Chichester is like. She has a sweet temper, and she doesn't think any living woman but herself should be good looking. Her jealousy is the worst thing at that theatre."

"I shall not arouse it," answered Lil, with the quietness of conviction. Laurence did not answer her with words, but he looked the more.

To-morrow came, and Lil went to her first rehearsal.

The Favourite theatre, one of the prettiest and most comfortable in the "front," is very ugly and uncomfortable "behind." Once in at the stage door you seem to have engaged upon an undertaking in which you are doomed to lose life or limb. Up and down small and perilous flights of stairs, through unexpected doorways, past precipitous descents, into gloomy recesses stowed full of stage furniture, the way wanders on in most

bewildering fashion. Lil followed the door-keeper, who condescended to guide her for this first time; and she felt afraid continually of losing him and then herself. But suddenly and unexpectedly she was on the stage. The door-keeper deserted her, and Lil found herself standing alone, and very bewildered in the midst of a scene quite strange to her. The theatre looked extremely dark and dismal; stalls and dress circle were all encased in brown holland pinafores. One great flaring jet of gas took the place of the footlights, and threw a strong, rather uncomfortable light upon the stage. Lil saw at once that she was unnoticed; she was among a group of others, all of whom seemed as vague as herself. There was another group at the opposite wings. The stage was at present given up to two persons; a lady sitting on a broken chair, wrapped in a fur cloak and looking very cold and unhappy; and a gentleman who appeared to be talking to her rather inaudibly. Lil at last caught a few words he was saying. She turned then to a girl who stood near. "This is not the *Interloper* being rehearsed, is it?" she asked.

"No," said the girl, "it is *Romeo and Juliet*. Don't you know the governor has engaged Madame Alandine for an afternoon performance?"

"Oh, yes, I saw that," said Lil, "but I

thought the *Interloper* was to be rehearsed now."

"So it is; but they haven't got through *Romeo and Juliet* yet; and they must get that done first. Mr. Bellair is being such a bother; he keeps wanting the scenes altered for him. They've had the carpenter on four times. Alandine doesn't look much in love, does she! and yet Romeo is being as affectionate as he can. This is the balcony scene, you know—that broken chair has to do for the balcony!"

Lil looked on with fresh interest. Alandine was one of the few actresses whom she admired with enthusiasm. And so this was Alandine in the morning! Small, pale, with an expression of discomfort on her face, she nursed herself, rocking backwards and forwards on her broken chair, and mumbling out her words. But every now and then she would wake up and speak a few lines with sudden fire and amazing vigour. Romeo, with his hat on the back of his head, his trousers turned up as he had worn them in the muddy streets, making ardent love, looked as funny as can well be imagined. To Lil he seemed vulgar, exaggerated, too pronounced in his style. She found afterwards that this was the result of the absence of the proper surroundings. When she saw him again with his beautiful dress, with the scenery, the footlights, the audience, the exaggeration

became only just proportion. And this little lesson in acting she never forgot. Alandine did not trouble herself to do more than say the words, except just now and then; and Lil was amazed to find that she did not know her lines. She herself would never have dared to say a part so imperfectly to Mr. Percival as Alandine was now saying Juliet, only two days before it was to be given! But, when the poison scene came, Alandine stepped out on to the stage and gave the whole thing in all the power of her voice. It was strange to see her there, with the empty theatre, going through this great scene with scarcely a listener; for most of the others were whispering and laughing together, not noticing anything until it came to their own business; and even the wonderful shriek which Alandine gave at "Stay, Tybalt, stay!" failed to startle or rouse any one but Lil.

At last *Romeo and Juliet* was done with; Juliet put on her hat and went off arm-in-arm with Romeo. The calls were now for the characters in the *Interloper*; the stage manager, his hat very much on the back of his head, and an air of distraction on his face, took up his place by the flaring gas jet by the side of the prompter. None appeared to know their parts; everybody carried a book of the play, and read his or her lines therefrom; so Lil did not feel ashamed to carry

hers and consult it. Now appeared Miss Chichester, wrapped in majestic furs, and with an air of great hauteur about her. She had been smoking cigarettes in her dressing-room, and abusing Alandine to a sympathetic friend. Miss Chichester could not speak two lines of Juliet, and knew it; therefore, with great fervour, she hated Alandine, who had an abundance of what actors call "force."

Lil got through her little part in the *Interloper* very well. She had not above a dozen lines to say. Still, there was a certain excitement to her in speaking these in their proper places. She summoned all her courage, and remembered all she had learned from Mr. Percival, and so got over her business without giving any trouble to the stage-manager. Miss Chichester patronised her, called her "my dear," offered her gratuitous information as to her "business," whenever they had anything to do together; but this only amused Lil; she accepted it with all politeness. She was well aware that a waiting-maid must expect to be patronised by the leading lady.

The next day she had to tell Mr. Percival. "Well, my dear," said he, "of course if you are driven to it, you must do it. Only, don't get discouraged; there's nothing so disheartening as doing inferior work on the stage. Remember there's good stuff in you. But remember,

too, an actress must be what she acts. Forget all your good style now, and make yourself into a pert waiting-maid. Even the smallest part may be played properly. I shan't come to see you in this; it's not worthy of you, and you'll do me no credit. When you come out properly, though, I will."

"This will cure me of one thing, won't it, Mr. Percival?" said Lil; "when you do bring me out I shan't be too frightened to speak—which I really believe I might be, otherwise. I cannot tell you how often I have wakened myself at night with a horrible dream of walking on to a stage and just uttering Lady Macbeth's first three or four words, "They met me in the day of success," and then my breath going away from fear. Fancy, standing there before the house, speechless!"

"Oh, you'd go on if you'd once begun," said Mr. Percival. "I brought out a woman once who did stand speechless; but then she never got a word out. She'd been studying with me a long time; she got on very well, but she always said she would be nervous. But I thought nothing of it; I can't see how anyone should be afraid of an audience—it seems to me the public is made up of fools. Well, I brought her out in the country, in *Othello*. I shall never forget it. You know when Brabantio appeals to the duke in the court, Othello sends for Desdemona. Well, we got to it: 'Enter Desdemona.' We

waited a bit—at last she came on. I gave her her cue—“Do you perceive in all this noble company, where most you owe obedience?” She opened her mouth, but no sound came out. I went over to her and gave her her words; I thought perhaps she’d forgotten them. She went on opening and shutting her mouth, but never a sound did she make. This went on for some minutes. It was perfectly awful. We had to let the curtain down and give the people back their money. She was simply speechless from fright.”

“What became of her?” asked Lil.

“Oh, she never came out. She died soon afterwards.”

“What a dreadful story!” exclaimed Lil. “I shall think of that when I have to go on—I hope I shan’t be as nervous as that!”

“You’re not nervous in that sort of way, my child. Now, I’ll tell you about another woman, a Spaniard, whom I taught; she came out with some amateurs. It is ruin to begin with amateurs; enough to discourage any actor, for they never know their business properly. She also came out in *Desdemona*. I knew she wasn’t afraid, so I didn’t go to the hall where they were acting till late in the evening, when I just went in to see how they were getting on. They had got to the last act, and *Desdemona* was lying in her bed, and *Othello* was talking of killing—of course, like a fool and an amateur, to the

audience, instead of to Desdemona. When I came to the wings he was standing with his back turned to her; and never shall I forget what I heard her say: 'I fear you, for you are fatal, when your eyes roll so; at least, I should if I could see them. I suppose they are rolling, but of course I can't tell when you turn your back to me.' Lord! Lord! what a noise there was. The audience hissed him off, and applauded her to the echo; oh, they appreciated it. That was nerve, not nervousness, eh?"

"I'm afraid I haven't that sort of nerve," said Lil. "But I couldn't stand speechless, either, it would feel so absurd. I think I should walk off."

"What! like Miss N—. When she came out she really was scared, for she had never had the chance of even rehearsing on a stage; she had only just learned her part in this room with me. She actually did turn round and walk off. She tried it on several times; but I stood in the wings and shook my fists at her. It was just which she was most afraid of—me or the audience. I won—she was afraid to pass me—she dared not; indeed, I believe I should have murdered her if she'd really tried to—so she went back and spoke her part!"

"You are terrifying me!" said Lil, "I declare I shall be afraid to go on even in my little waiting-maid part."

“Nonsense—what have you got to say when you come on—‘Madame, Lord Peter is at the door.’ When you’ve once said that you’ll never feel afraid again. You will find the glare of the footlights prevents your seeing the people in the stalls—the back of the house is just a mass of faces—and when you are once used to the look of it you’ll never think much about it again, I assure you. What is there to be afraid of? The public! Why, probably there’s not a person in the house knows half as much as you do. And certainly there’s not likely to be one who knows as well as you how your part should be acted.”

Mr. Percival’s contempt for the public was something prodigious. It amused Lil, and gave her courage, though she did not sympathise with it. Mr. Percival sometimes made her laugh now with one of his witty stories. He was an inexhaustible mine of good things and queer anecdotes, and had so much humour in him that he re-awakened the sense in her. Brimful of strange tales, and with a wonderful gift of telling them, Mr. Percival was the idol of green-room gatherings. He was irrepressible, and would sometimes tax the powers of younger actors by finishing a funny story at the very moment when the curtain was about to rise upon a tragic scene, or even telling one upon the very stage itself, in an inaudible aside, at some

moment when to seem to be talking would be appropriate. This manner, as if the stage was no more terrible a place to strut on than one's own hearthrug, and the public a mere body of unimportant puppets, seemed very strange to an absolute novice like Lil. But it gave her courage. Another thing which gave her courage, too, was the sense of loneliness she had upon her. No one would know her; no one would think much about it if she did fail. If she stood speechless, some other small actress would be put in her place. As to the audience, if Brough were not there, they were no more to her than a body of people from another planet. She was no one to them. She had no friends, no acquaintances, no relations, enemies, or lovers to laugh or cry at her failure. The thought of this settled in upon her mind and gave her a strange hard sort of courage, born of misery.

Brough was evidently pleased at what she had done; and this was a great relief to her. The truth was, though he did not tell her so, he was most thankful to see her do something herself, take a step in her own career without urging. He thought it showed that her mind was recovering its balance.

She took great pains with her dress, and one day made herself up for Brough's edification, to see if her disguise was good.

"Oh, you are safe, child!" he exclaimed,

when she came in. "Those black eyebrows make a regular little virago of you; your own mother wouldn't know you. There's no fear—you are as completely hidden in that dress and make up as if you were buried several times over."

That's all right!" said Lil, thankfully. "But promise not to come to the theatre, papa. It will frighten me to see you. I shall feel better if there is no one who knows me as anything but Miss Winter. You know the consciousness of my secret gives me a nervousness which is worse than stage-fright; and sometimes the sight of your familiar face, with the look of recognition in it, terrifies me. I am scared if I see you in the street. I fancy people must know who I am, if they know you!"

"What an absurd child you are," growled Brough. "Well, if I mayn't come, I suppose I mayn't." But he mentally resolved to go all the same, and look at her without her seeing him. He saw that it would unnerve her if she felt his presence.

He did go, on the evening when she entered upon her new life. From the back of a box he looked on, in wonder, whenever a certain black-haired, rosy-cheeked, brisk little waiting-woman appeared upon the scene. Lil had indeed buried herself in her character.

He waited for her at the stage door to tell

her so ; he would not go into the green-room for fear of frightening her. He did startle her as it was, for when she came quickly out intent upon getting home unnoticed, she was seized upon tempestuously by a big, unexpected man. But she recognised his hug immediately. "By Jove, baby, I'm proud of you," said he. "It takes a decent actress to be so absolutely unlike herself as you were to-night. Bravo! there are great things before you."

For a moment a flicker of real fiery enthusiasm and ambition arose within her. But it died away all too soon, and left in her heart only the deathly sickness of despair which had grown so cruelly familiar there. What use was a hope—a future—success—to a woman alone for ever in the world, isolated and shut away into her own narrow being?"

"Oh, papa," she exclaimed, "but for you I should die. Your sympathy is all I live on, I verily believe. I am so glad when I please you!"

"Well, you have pleased me to-night," said he, taking no notice of the first part of her speech.



## CHAPTER IX.

LIL'S life became now so full of work that she could almost entirely prevent herself from thinking. She had sufficiently recovered to be aware that this was her only chance. The keenness of her suffering was no less; only she had strength enough now to hold it at bay, to refuse to face it, to pass by it continually with shut eyes. It is strange to have an ever-present place in your life that you dare not look at, dare not even remember, except to avoid it. So it was now with her. As the weeks lengthened into months, and the months passed by, she grew to dread, more intensely than ever, the merest thought or remembrance of those two in Italy. Amid the loveliest scenery in the world, their loves had become one—had, by now, become accustomed, domestic. The idea was madness to Lil. She knew of it, knew it was in her mind, as we know of the horrors of a nightmare; but she never opened her eyes upon it for one instant. She wondered that the human being can suffer so long; that her pain should thus have gathered greater strength, instead of wearing itself out; and she turned

herself wildly away from herself. She worked incessantly; as some drink to drown their thoughts, so she worked. At the Favourite Theatre she was now regarded as a regular member of the company; she filled one small part after another. She never worried the manager to give her a better part; she always knew her business, and did it well. And she was thoroughly grateful for a small salary, so that she held her place very quietly. Miss Chichester would have been amazed, indeed, had she heard that Miss Winter was studying heavy parts, and intending to make her appearance in them. However, Miss Winter never talked about herself, so no one knew of her private dreams and ambitions. For, slowly and surely, the fever of ambition, which was indeed a part of her temperament, arose within her. As she grew accustomed to the stage and its "business" and learned to measure her own powers, she became possessed of a burning desire to produce an electric effect, to thrill the hearts of an audience and make them vibrate to her touch. She went on studying under Mr. Percival; and she worked so hard, she put her brains so into the work, that he told her one day it was a real pleasure to him to teach her. One after another she took up the standard heavy parts of the stage, and conquered them. She lived in them, thought of them, dreamed of them at night, and so succeeded in almost completely forgetting

herself and that agony which lay hidden away at her heart.

Laurence met Jack Percival sometimes, in certain haunts which they both frequented, and he always asked him how was Miss Winter getting on? "I tell you, sir," Percival would say, "she's the very thing we want, and have not got, a tragic actress. She'll be *the* tragic actress when she's on. She has the power, the intensity, the fire; and the dramatic instinct is strong in her. She will live to bless the day you sent her to me."

Then Laurence would go in to see Miss Winter for a few minutes, and tell her this. He loved to repeat Percival's praise to her; nothing else ever brought the colour into her face, but this did. For Percival seldom said anything encouraging to her now; she only guessed what he thought of her powers, by the parts he chose for her. He was always a rough master, and no respecter of persons; she knew very well that, did she fail or break down, he would throw her over at once. This made her value his approval the more. And then, too, his judgment was different from that of the public. Every part he gave her to study he had seen played by the best actresses during his career. He knew just how every speech had been delivered, and every point made by actresses of unforgotten genius. He measured her against her peers, not merely as does the public, and as too often

do the critics, by personal like or dislike. Perhaps, after all, the audience, as a mass, deserved Mr. Percival's vast contempt. He would always say he never looked at the house except to count it, and practice had taught him to do that in a very few minutes.

Brough was delighted with her industry, and his boyish spirits came back in full force. He thought that now, at last, Lil was fairly launched on a new career, which, after all, might be a comparatively happy one. He forgot one thing, which men do very often forget—women cannot find all their life and satisfaction in brain work. It may interest them, fire them, but it cannot feed them. A woman must have love, or she must die. Perhaps this is the reason why women cannot really do as much brain work as men, though sometimes gifted with great ability; it is an absolute necessity of their being to give a great part of their life to loving and being loved. They have a different, a greater capacity in this way; a husband and half-a-dozen children seem hardly enough sometimes to satisfy a very ordinary woman. And, in Lil, all this power and passion was shut up within herself, caged, put by, never again to be looked at. Only in her brain work might she live henceforward. Brough, seeing her always busy, often cheerful, certainly now never wild or desperate, forgot that to keep herself on this level, under such unnatural

conditions, was a heavy, an incessant, a terrible strain. She, herself, scarcely realised how great the tension was upon her. But sometimes, she would wake in the night, and in that solitary, unexpected moment, in the darkness, she would start up with always the same cry—

“Can I go on living?”



## CHAPTER X.

**U**NIL hardly realised at the time, grateful though she was for what he had done for her, how much trouble Edmund Laurence had taken to obtain her engagement. She was so intensely desirous of getting some work, that she had appealed to him and taken his help, with the feeling upon her that she could not afford to throw away any opportunity or chance of aid. When she was settled into her work and had grown intimate with the daily life of the stage, she saw how hard, how desperately hard, was the struggle for a first opportunity. And then she saw, too, how quietly, and with how much good feeling, Laurence had helped her over this most difficult step. He had secured her engagement simply by the exertion of his own influence. She found herself always raised a step in the estimation of those about her, by the invariable courtesy and respect with which Laurence treated her. As he had got her the engagement by which she lived, he might very easily have thought himself justified in patronising her. The fact that he did not, that he considered her in a thousand ways,

and made her difficult position easier for her, that he had apparently forgotten all he did for her as soon as it was done ; these things filled Lil with gratitude whenever she thought of them. Laurence had been to her a true friend, had helped her into the path which she desired to enter, and had smoothed its rough places for her. Only a woman, in as lonely, desolate, and despairing a position as Lil's, could understand how sweet, how delicious, was the sense of such real kindness as this. What to one, in a safe and secure place in life, is mere ordinary politeness, seems to one, isolated and outcast, like a taste of divine love. But Laurence's had been more than ordinary politeness ; it was consistent, genuine, unobtrusive good feeling. In truth, Miss Winter was to him a lovely, mysterious enigma, the more fascinating by reason of this mysteriousness. He saw in her many qualities which attracted him and which claimed his respect. He could not but treat her with all the gentleness of his nature, for she, by her mere presence, called it forth. Her situation, alone, apparently friendless, was an endless source of perplexity to him, yet he had never shown, in the remotest manner, any curiosity or desire to probe her mystery. This gave her a sense of security in his society, a sense which was to her most comforting. She dreaded intensely the cross-examination to which idly inquisitive people would sometimes

subject her; it made her feel like a hunted thing.

She had fancied that she could never have any friend again, except her father, that she could desire none other. But, by degrees, Laurence crept into a place very near Brough's; and Lil had two friends. At the theatre she dared make none; she hardly made acquaintances. She did her utmost to carry out Laurence's advice, and to make no enemies by being "stand-off-ish." But beyond that she could not go. Prudence and inclination for once sided together. The young women who form the second rank of the theatrical profession, may be charming creatures enough, but they cannot be called, as a rule, very ladylike; even Miss Chichester, clever actress as she was, did not take the trouble to hide her feelings in private life, as a lady would. Thus Lil found no temptations to form friendships, and her extreme timidity at the idea of anyone knowing her well enough to be curious or ask questions, prevented her from trying to overlook the defects in her acquaintances. But, with every day that passed, she appreciated more Edmund Laurence's real kindness and the gentlemanliness which made him avoid showing the faintest desire to know, what did indeed puzzle him so much, the reason of her strange isolation, and the true connection which existed between her and Brough Warrington.

It became very clear to him, notwithstanding the anxious care taken by both, that something more than ordinary friendship united these two. There was an indescribable change of voice, when either spoke of the other, a tenderness which came into it, not as of love only, but of intense respect and passionate devotion. It was evident that Brough thought Miss Winter unlike all other women in the world, and that Lil regarded him as a man alone, one whose individuality could never be approached in strength or charm, by any other. To a keen observer, such as Laurence, this became very perplexing. He hesitated for a little while on the brink of that conclusion which Brough had once said Lady Warrington would come to—that it was a love affair. But he never really accepted it, and eventually he put it aside altogether. There was something in the way the two met, touched hands, and smiled in each other's eyes, such as he had never seen before; it baffled him, and he put it down as part of the general mysteriousness which surrounded Miss Winter. He recognised her as a lady, and one not isolated by reason of any shame of her own. He was certain of this, he told himself; he was too good a judge of character to be mistaken.

She was very much harassed by a new anxiety about her father. She saw a change in him, which, apparently, no one else saw.

He got more easily tired by exercise of any sort ; he seemed to suffer, though he said nothing about it. She could not guess what was the matter with him ; but she often noticed that he came up the stairs to her rooms with quite a different step from that which had so cheered her when she first went to live there alone. He did not appear to lose his breath, but he seemed exhausted, and would sit down directly he reached the room. But, in another moment, he had risen and gone to the window for air. He always did this now, and Lil watched him most anxiously. She wondered, many a time, whether Lady Warrington observed the change in him. But he seemed to work just as hard as ever, to go about just as much. Indeed, he was still a young man, not yet fifty, and so full of self-assertive vigour, that no one would think of his being ill unless he complained. And that he never did. He hated being ill, and tried to ignore anything that was the matter with him, as long as possible ; when he had to break down, he grumbled enough for two or three people. He had scarcely ever had any illness, and patience was a quality left out of his composition. Some years before this he had had rheumatic fever and Lady Warrington never forgot what a trouble he was to nurse. He rebelled so much against losing his strength all at once, and being dependent on other people, that it was difficult indeed to

manage him. Now it appeared to be going slowly, almost imperceptibly; at least, so Lil thought, and it filled her with anxiety.

"Papa," she would often say, "how do you feel? Are you quite well?"

"Never was better in my life," was Brough's invariable off-hand answer. He always regarded it as a sort of insult to be asked how he was. Of course he was quite well; who should be, if he wasn't?

This went on for some time, and Lil grew more and more anxious. The symptoms of lack of strength, which she had noticed, did not go away, but seemed slowly to increase. She wished, intensely, that she could discover any way of finding out whether Lady Warrington had noticed it, whether she was taking care of him. It seemed to Lil that he was working harder than he ought. She saw his clever bits of gay verse in the comic and society papers every week; she knew he still wrote leading articles for the dailies; and, worse, that these things were thrown off at spare moments, while his day and most of his night was devoted to heavy literary work. Surely, he could be spared some of this, if any one with the right to interfere noticed his condition. Should she write an anonymous letter to Lady Warrington? No, it would probably lead to trouble between her and Brough, for she might well be puzzled at anybody, with so much interest in Brough's wel-

fare, finding it necessary to use the screen of an anonymous letter. She turned over many useless plans in her mind, before she thought of what appeared, at once, to be the right way out of the difficulty. It seemed as if Laurence was always the one able to help her. He knew Lady Warrington, he visited at the house. Of course he could find out for her what she desired to know.

He sometimes came into the green-room of the theatre. To-night, Lil spent all her spare moments in that room looking for him. It was not a very attractive place, being furnished in a rather shabby fashion. Its principal feature was a large, full-length mirror with lights on each side of it. To this mirror, walked straight every actor or actress who entered the room; and no one smiled, as would have been the case anywhere else, at what would seem like very candid and open vanity. It was a matter of mere ordinary business to put the last finishing touches to the neck-tie, or wig, in this big mirror, to take a look all over, and see that the dresser had done his or her duty properly.

Lil sat down in a corner, during all her "waits," determined to lose no chance of seeing Laurence. At last she heard Miss Chichester, coming off the stage, burst out into her mechanically merry laugh, as she approached the door of the green-room. "Always paying compliments," she

said, and entered, in her bewitchingly pretty dress, a smile on her scarlet lips, her dark eyes darker and bigger than in the daylight, throwing back seductive glances from below the light flossy fringe of her flaxen wig. It was Laurence who followed her close, for she carried her train on her arm. All the actresses made eyes at Laurence, for he was a powerful dramatic critic, as well as a playwright. Lil marvelled as she heard Miss Chichester speak—"always paying compliments"—she had never heard him pay one, and then she recalled herself to herself. Of course she, a ghost, a dead, blighted woman, would never see him in the mood which a gay, brilliant creature, like Miss Chichester could call forth. She rose from her seat and advanced a step that he might see her. She saw him look inquiringly all round the room. The moment his eye rested on her, he turned from Miss Chichester with some light remark, and came across. A thunder-cloud descended on Miss Chichester's face, and she bit her lips as fiercely as she dared, with the fact before her that she had to go on the stage again. It always made her furious to see the way in which "that Miss Winter, a mere walking lady, playing chamber-maids," commanded a respect which she could not obtain herself, though she was leading lady and a beauty. She was shrewd enough to see it; though Miss Winter did not gather to herself many

admirers, yet the men, one and all, treated her with the courtesy which a lady can always call forth wherever she goes. Sometimes Miss Chichester suspected, in her heart of hearts, that the men, who surrounded her, laughed at her for her ignorance and despised her for her temper. But she was too lazy to remedy the first defect, and she knew of no way of holding her own save by indulging in the second. She indulged in it now, and snapped up the next person who was unfortunate enough to speak to her soon after Laurence had walked away to Lil.

Lil's face was full of earnestness. He saw in a moment she had something to say to him. They drew back and sat down on a little cushioned seat in a corner.

"What is it, Miss Winter?" he asked. "There is something that troubles you."

"Yes," said Lil. "It has troubled me for some time, but only to-day did I think of asking you to help me. You have always been so kind, I thought I might venture, though it seems a strange request, but I am sure you are fond of Mr. Warrington, too, as indeed everyone must be."

"Is it about him?" asked Laurence.

"Yes," said Lil. "Have you not noticed, lately, how ill he has looked? and, when I look back, it is not only quite lately; I should have noticed it before, but that I was too absorbed; I had other things to think of."

“Poor old Warrington. But what can I do?”

“Well, Mr. Laurence, my trouble is this; he is working, I can see, as hard as ever; indeed, I sometimes think harder. I don't know why he should, it hardly seems necessary, but, of course, I do not know his affairs. What I really fear is that this weakness has grown upon him so imperceptibly that those in his home have not observed it. I—I do not visit Lady Warrington; I do not know anyone who does, but you; do you think, Mr. Laurence, you could find out whether she has noticed the difference in him? she is—she may be selfish, or unobservant: oh, I want so much to know whether he is taken care of!”

The pleading in her face was even greater than in her words, for, as Laurence had told her, she always looked more that she spoke. Now gazing into her eyes, he wondered more than ever what bond existed between these two. It was romantic, it was passionate, it was fixed as the stars in heaven; there was about it none of that ephemeral character which attaches to most love-affairs; it was all deep earnest devotion. It baffled him as completely as ever.

“He will tell me nothing, you know,” went on Lil; “he never would; his invariable answer is, ‘Never was better in my life,’ and he scorns the idea of being taken care of.

But, oh, I can see how much he needs it."

"I will call on Lady Warrington to-morrow," said Laurence, "and will find out all I can for you."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" exclaimed Lil; "you cannot imagine how anxious I am about him. Why, he does not walk one bit as he used to, he gets tired, and coming up-stairs seems to exhaust him; why, I can remember——"

She stopped and flushed a little. She often found herself on the verge of betraying something to Laurence; he inspired her with such entire confidence. But her secret was one which must be guarded on every side, which could never be hinted at to any one, and this, not for her own sake, but for the sake of those others! The thought of this always started up before her in time, and saved her from revealing any part of that past which was dead to her, and must be dead also to everyone else.

"You know, Mr. Laurence," she said, quickly, "he has told me that he had an attack of rheumatic fever about two years ago. I fancy, from what he says, that he has never been quite the same since."

"I will find out all Lady Warrington knows," said Laurence. "Poor old boy, I hope there's nothing much the matter with him. I don't know what we should do without him, if he

were to fall ill. Shall I come to you or meet you here to-morrow night?"

"I shall be here, of course," said Lil, "but do as you like." By which he understood he was not to come to her. She had grown a little more shy of his visits of late, though she leaned upon him so. Indeed, she was afraid of becoming too intimate even with him in whom she had such confidence, afraid, for her secret's sake—afraid of revealing something if she spoke to anyone too often.



## CHAPTER XI.

**L**AURENCE had found out a great deal by the next evening. He wondered as he came into the green-room of the theatre how much to tell Lil. All the little things which he had gathered from Lady Warrington and from Brough himself grouped themselves under two broad facts: that, undoubtedly, Lady Warrington had seen Brough's weakness; but that it was most necessary that he should work hard, for they had got behind hand in their affairs. Laurence began by not telling Lil this latter part of his information; but she saw he had got more to tell her, and succeeded in getting it out of him. When she had heard all, she sat for a long time silent, her hands in her lap, her eyes on the ground. Laurence watched her face, wondering what she was thinking. At last she looked up at him.

“Mr. Laurence,” she said, “are you working at your play? I do so long to get on!—to have a chance.”

This quite took him aback. It was so little what he expected from her. It was so strange to him that from her anxiety about Brough

she should suddenly drop into this seemingly selfish thought. He had no clue to the track her mind had followed. The idea that Brough was in want of money cut her to the heart. How much she had taken from him!—and even now he still helped her. The thought was dreadful. Surely she should be able to earn her entire independence, even if it was hopeless, yet, to think of restoring to him any of what she had had. This thought was what prompted her to speak as she did.

“Well,” said Laurence, “I don’t fancy it will come on, till next season, even if I got it ready. When Harmer asked me for it he wanted Miss Chichester to play in it; but that I will not have, and her engagement is made now until next season.”

“Every thing takes so long!” said Lil, sorrowfully; “what a weary world this is, where one has to climb so slowly!”

“I think, Miss Winter, you have got on very fast. Most actresses would think it so, at all events.”

“Perhaps,” said Lil; “but then you see I began so much older than most do, and I have so strong a reason for desiring to get on. I am altogether dependent on myself, and—well, I may as well tell you the truth, Mr. Laurence,” she said, suddenly meeting the puzzled gaze of his smiling blue eyes; “the fact is Mr. Warrington has been very kind, and has lent me money when it was a great

help to me. He has been, oh! so good to me; and you must understand what you tell me makes me very sad that I cannot get on faster."

"I am sorry I told you," said Laurence, ruefully, yet at the same time with a look of relief on his face. He had begun to think he had been mistaken after all in his analysis of this character which so interested him; but now he found it intelligible again.

"No, no," said Lil, feverishly, "it is good for me, it has been good for me all the time, nothing else would make me work!"

"What!" exclaimed Laurence, in real surprise, "not work! with your talent, and your power of work?"

"Oh, one must have a purpose to work for, as well as ability," said Lil. "One must be young, to feel real ambition. Do not look at me like that, I know I am not old, except—except in heart! and in heart I am worn out—dead—broken. The little ambition that sometimes arises in me dies out almost as soon as born. Don't look so puzzled, Mr. Laurence, don't wonder what I mean! It is not worth knowing. I am foolish to talk about myself. Only you must not be surprised if I am inconsistent. I cannot rouse myself to true ambition, and yet I am so anxious to get on. I wonder whether Mr. Harmer would give me a larger part now, for he seems satisfied with me; or whether I had better try at another theatre?"

“I think Harmer will do his best for you if you stick to him,” said Laurence; “you know there is always a long hill to climb in every profession. Shall I speak to him for you?”

“Oh, Mr. Laurence, I cannot let you do so much for me,” said Lil, “you will grow weary of heaping kindnesses.”

“I cannot grow weary of anything where you are concerned,” said Laurence, hastily; “you repay me all I do very easily, by merely letting me talk to you sometimes.”

“I begin to understand now what Miss Chichester said the other day—‘always paying compliments.’ I had never heard you pay them then. I do not like them.”

“I will do nothing you do not like,” said Laurence, remorsefully, “but there is Harmer, I will go and catch him, and ask him about you.”

It was impossible for her to resent anything from a man who made himself so noble a slave as Laurence did, especially when she was in so much need of help. And Laurence’s offences never exceeded such a remark as that which he had just made. Sometimes when he said these things, Lil grew uneasy and wondered if such a strange thing could happen, as for a living man to really admire a dead woman!—but she shut her eyes to the possibility, and relied upon Laurence’s good taste and good feeling, whatever might happen. She could not afford to cast away such a friend as this.

He caught Harmer and button-holed him. A manager is a terrible person at all times; not to be approached on a first night of a performance; on an ordinary night irascible. But every one smiled on Lawrence; and even Harmer submitted with a good grace to be button-holed.

Laurence came back to Lil with no very cheerful expression of face.

“Harmer can do nothing for you at present,” he said, “though he is very well satisfied with you. When Miss Creswick’s engagement is over, in about two months, you may try to take her parts. If you succeed at rehearsal you would be engaged in her place. I daresay he would like you to understudy her soon.”

“Two months,” said Lil, “that is reasonable enough, but it is a long time under the circumstances, isn’t it, Mr. Laurence? But I suppose you would advise me to stay here?”

“I really do not think you would get anything better at another theatre, until you have been longer on the stage, or have made a hit in some leading part. Miss Creswick is third lead here, and her parts will give you the chance of distinguishing yourself. If you—and I think you easily will—if you should manage to outshine the leading lady, your position is made.”

“I will follow your advice,” said Lil; “I will do as you tell me. Indeed, I have no one else to advise me, except Mr. Warrington, and

I am very anxious not to worry him just now. It is cruel—cruel! that he should have to work as he does. Oh, it is heart-rending. I think I could steal money to-night, if I were tempted! that I might pay him back my debt, at least!”

“Let me lend you some,” said Laurence, quickly; “you can easily repay me when you are in a good position on the stage.”

“No, no!” said Lil, “that is too much. No, don’t say another word about it. I have said more than I should, that is evident. Thank you a thousand times, but don’t say any more to me!”

“I think,” said Laurence, “I might ease matters a little on our paper for Warrington. He is very highly valued there, and I think they would give him a holiday and go on paying his salary for a time. They would not know how to get on if he fell ill, so that the suggestion of such a calamity would probably make them generous. I will speak to the chief about it.”

At this moment a group of laughing, chattering actors and actresses came into the room. Laurence stopped speaking, but he did not leave Lil’s side. He considered it better for her sake to make no secret of his friendship with her; it looked less like an intrigue. They sat silent a few minutes, while Lil thought of what he had said, and wondered if there could be another man in the world so full of

delicate kindness! The room got crowded now, as it would, quickly, every now and then during the waits; it was full of noise and nonsense. Laurence got up.

"I must go;" he said, "I have already over stayed an engagement."

Lil held out her hand to him saying only "I thank you." But the eyes she raised to his were so tender, so full of feeling, that he carried that look away with him, and it was a sweet memory in his mind for days.

Lil, meantime, full of trouble at her heart, went on with her work, miserable and distressed; but she had the true gift of the actress; she could go on and laugh, make her jokes for the fiftieth time as freshly as the first, and please the house as well as though she were the most light-hearted thing alive. She always got good notices, in her small parts; sometimes she had a speech long enough to attract the house, and give her a chance of a round of applause. And she always got it. But the manager dared not give her too many of these opportunities while she was only a *soubrette*, or the leading ladies would have been jealous, and have made his life miserable.

She was very wretched to-night about her position and its consequences. Those she had desired to benefit had reaped the benefit to the full. So long as her secret was safe between her and Brough, she had no fear for them. But she felt keenly how helpless she

was with regard to her own people. For a long time her old grandmother, who lived on in spite of age and infirmities, had been suffering a great deal. She had gathered this from what Brough had told her. He went sometimes at long intervals to see the old lady; she had no one but servants to attend upon her, and Lil who had learned now what loneliness meant, felt very sorry that she must not go near her. But that was bearable, though, had it been possible, she would have gone and nursed her Granny; still, she was not sure that she might not unintentionally make the narrow-minded old lady angry even on her death-bed.

But that Brough, her dear old boy, who had been father and mother to her, who had proved himself more faithful than husband, truer than any friend—that he should suffer and be ill, and she not dare to do anything for him! it was intolerable. And, above all, that she should have been so heavy a trial, so great an anxiety to him, when his strength was failing; that she should have thrown herself upon him and let him do so much for her, when his own affairs were proving too much for him; this was terrible! She suffered keenly all that night; when she went home from the theatre, she could neither eat nor sleep. In the morning she slept a little and woke to a sense of misfortune which weighed upon her so heavily that she could not shake

it off. She could not take up her studies, or apply herself to anything; the morning hours passed over her, and she sat in her room looking out at the dark heavily-rolling river. As a rule she dared not yield herself to idleness like this, but resolutely kept herself at her work. To-day, she was so puzzled, so wretched, that she was obliged to give way. Never, until now, had she realised how painful might be some consequences of her desperate act. At last she snatched up "Cymbeline." She was studying Imogen, and she resolved to launch herself upon the extraordinarily difficult speeches of this character and so forget herself. She was walking up and down her little room, book in hand, and in the full tide of eloquence, when she heard footsteps on the stairs. Was it her dear Brough? Was it Laurence? Which was it? One of the two it must be, for she had no other visitors. But it was early in the day for Brough. Instantly she wondered, was anything the matter with him; was he feeling worse? There came a tap at the door—then it was not Brough, for he never tapped at doors. The door opened, and the landlady put her head in.

"A gentleman, Miss Winter, wishes to see you."

"A strange gentleman?" asked Lil, her heart beginning to beat furiously with apprehension. "What is his name?"

But the landlady disappeared, apparently

to give way to someone behind her. A tall, broad-shouldered man had pushed her aside and now entered the room.

“Dr. Swift!” exclaimed Lil, turning perfectly white; “I did not expect to see *you!*”

“And you do not appear very glad to see me,” said Dr. Swift, with his rough, easy manner. “I am not a ghost, that you should turn white as a winding sheet at sight of me. Honour bright, I’m flesh and blood. Had you heard I was drowned, that you stare at me so?”

“I did not think you could be home so soon,” stammered Lil.

“Oh, I’ve left the service. It was such cursed slow work on that ship. And I wanted to see you again. I can’t live away from you, Lil, I’ve tried it now, fairly.”

“Don’t call me that!” cried Lil, with a horror-struck face.

“I forgot—you are Miss Winter now. You have turned spinster again. Well, that’s the right thing to do, I suppose, for the stage. But what is your new Christian name?”

“How do you come to know all about me?” asked Lil, with feelings half made up of fear, half of indignation.

“Easily enough. Your father—or I suppose I should say your friend, Mr. Warrington, hesitated a good deal about giving me the opportunity of claiming the rights of old acquaintance with you, but when I gently

indicated that I intended to find you out, and that he might as well make it easy for me instead of driving me into making a fuss and running the risk of letting the cat out of the bag—why, he gave in elegantly. Like a true man of the world, he offered me the hand of good fellowship.”

“Which means,” thought Lil, “that I had better do the same.” But she stood silent a moment regarding this man with an unconquerable loathing and fear. She hated him; she had always hated him. And yet it seemed as if all her life he had had some hold over her, some power of compelling her to treat him well. Now, she knew, she was at his mercy. His power over her was absolute. He had her secret. But, at the same time—and a creeping hope of freedom came into her heart—the secret was as important, in another way, to him, as to herself.

“You would never do that,” she said, “you would not risk your reputation by telling what you did!”

Dr. Swift laughed.

“That depends,” said he, coolly, “upon what I might expect to get by it, and whether I had a reputation to risk. I will see how I get on. If I get tired of London, as I do of most places; if I find nothing which makes it worth my while to keep silent, I might be tempted to blab; there’s somebody who would be glad enough to pay my passage out, as

hush-money ; and perhaps a trifle over for odd expenses."

"For God's sake, Dr. Swift, don't talk like that!" Lil's words were so full of agony that she startled him. She was standing perfectly still, where she stood when he had entered; her hands were clasped tight over the book which she had been studying; her head was thrown forward in an attitude of extreme fear, and her dilated eyes were fixed on him as though he were some thing of horror. She was a strange contrast to this physically-cheerful, bronzed, hearty-looking man.

"All right," said he "I won't if you don't like it. And remember, *you* can easily buy my silence; you have only to be kind to me. Don't welcome me like a tragedy-queen. You have not reached that eminence yet, though I hear you are being very successful, and will soon enter the first rank."

Lil sat down, and tried to recover herself. But every word of his fell like a weight of lead upon her heart. Had she, indeed, no means of ridding herself of this man, whose presence was so horrible to her? None. She was powerless. She sat silent, dumb with apprehension. Dr. Swift, meantime, talked on, easily enough, about all sorts of things. He, at least, suffered from no embarrassment. Lil succeeded at last, in forcing a few words out. She saw that she must be civil. She tried to be, and partially succeeded. At last he rose

to go, and told her that her dark hair became her wonderfully.

“You are very much altered,” he said, regarding her thoughtfully. “I should not have known you had I met you in the street. But I knew your voice when you spoke, and your eyes cannot change. I must say, though, that, altered as you are, you are handsomer than ever, you belong to that splendid type of womanhood that gains instead of losing, with growing to maturity.”

Lil resented this sort of speech intensely. He adopted a way of speaking as if she were his property in some sense or other, and he had a right to criticise her as freely as he chose. She looked away, out of the window, at the sullen river, and made no answer. At last, to her relief he was gone.

“Oh, what shall I do!” she cried, aloud. “How am I to escape? I cannot endure it, if this man is to come here and terrify me! Oh, what must I do?”

She sat still and silent, after this, thinking. She did not resume her work. She had a feeling that her sense of misfortune had been prophetic—that this man’s appearance was a real and terrible calamity to her. Brough came in later in the afternoon, and found her like this.

“Papa!” she said, “I am terrified. I am indeed! That man has been here—Dr. Swift. Could you not have refused to tell him where I was.”

“It would have been madness to run such a risk,” said Brough. “The fellow is a scoundrel. That is how he gets the whip-hand of us. If he had a position in London, or a reputation to lose, he would be safe as the grave; but, unless something good turns up for him which will make him want to stay here, he will not care a jot. No, baby, you have put your foot in it; there’s no making out that you haven’t. What you must do is to keep Swift in a good temper; and I must see if I can use any influence to help him on. What I fear is his making up his mind to go to the Colonies; he likes rough life.”

“Why do you fear that?” asked Lil; “that would release us.”

“Yes, but if he does that, he may go to Charlie Newman first, and get hush-money out of him.”

Lil shrieked—the name cut her heart like a knife—it had never been mentioned in her hearing since the day when she gave up her own name; she gasped, and turned white to her lips.

“Are you going to faint,” cried Brough, coming over to her in a hurry; “I beg your pardon, child, but I was obliged to tell you what I see before us. You have so difficult a course to steer; I could not let you go on without warning you. Don’t faint, baby, that’s a good child!”

“No—no—no—I’m not going to faint,”

gasped Lil, "but, oh, how awful. Oh, papa, how awful."

After a little while she spoke again, and now she had almost recovered herself.

"What must we do to silence this man?"

"God knows," said Brough, with the frown of worry down his forehead. "I don't. We can pay him, bribe him, be on as good terms as we can with him."

Lil flung herself down and clung to her father's knees in a perfect passion of tears.

"Pay him! bribe him!" she cried. "Oh, papa, I am helpless—and you—oh, you are overworking yourself already I know. My God, how I wish I was in that grave! why did I not die! I have no right to live, to be a burden, an anxiety to you who are so good, who have too much to do without me. Oh, papa, why did I not die——?"

"Child," he said, interrupting her outburst, "all this is bad, but there is worse. It is evident that this fellow has conceived one of those deep-rooted passions for you which are sometimes to be met with in a harsh nature like his. I suspected it before; I am certain of it now. How you are to meet this, I do not know."

Lil rose from her knees and looked at him.

"What can I do?" she cried.

"We must wait and see," said Brough, with a manner strangely grave for him, "but I know you have deep waters to wade through."

## CHAPTER XII.

**H**IL went to her work that evening in a pitiable frame of mind. Her anxiety for Brough was almost forced out of her mind by her fear of Dr. Swift. She knew not what she had to look forward to. Her heart trembled with apprehension. She thought over every word Brough had said. It was so seldom he spoke in that way; as a rule he made light of all difficulties, and refused to regard them seriously. But now he seemed to be really afraid for her. Yet all the counsel he could give her was: "Do not offend Dr. Swift."

Not offend him! This might prove a harder task than it seemed at first sight.

She had never found it so difficult to dress as on this evening. She was thoroughly unnerved. Her fingers trembled, her heart shivered within her. Sometimes she paused in front of her glass and leaned her head on her hands, wondering whether, after all, she had not better take the means, perhaps, she should have taken before. Yet "gainst self-slaughter,

"There is a prohibition so divine  
As cravens my weak hand."

And even amid trouble and pain it is hard for the young and strong to die. And now it would grieve Brough if she should grow desperate like that, after all he had done for her! No—she could not so disturb and distress him. She must fight it out, whatever might come to her.

It was harder work than usual to go through her part successfully. She had a miserable feeling, that among that blur of faces behind the foot lights was probably the one face from which she shrank. Every now and then the thought of this almost took her speech away. But she saw no one whom she recognised, she had no real reason to believe that Dr. Swift was in the theatre, and so she succeeded in quieting herself sufficiently to accomplish her tasks. But it was not easy, she was so filled with apprehension.

When she went off the second time and looked into the green-room, Laurence was there. He was speaking to no one, but standing alone, looking about him rather moodily. His face brightened all over when he saw her. He came to meet her.

“I began to think you were not coming in here, to-night,” he said, “and I always fear you are ill, when you go straight to your dressing-room.”

“No,” she said, “but sometimes I cannot bear all the nonsense that goes on in this room. At other times it amuses me.” She entered as

she spoke, and sat down on a divan. Laurence took his seat beside her.

“I think I have arranged that matter for Warrington at the office,” he said. “Even the chief thought he had been looking ill lately.”

“Does every one notice it?” exclaimed Lil, in a low voice. “Oh, what shall I do if he gets worse!”

Laurence looked at her with eyes full of tenderness; he was longing to say something, to offer her some comfort. But he positively dared not. He kept it back. She was a mystery too great for him.

“I thought he looked better to-day,” he said, after a moment.

“Oh, did you?” said Lil, “I am so glad if you did. But I also saw him to-day—well, perhaps, I did not notice, though that seems strange. But we had so many things to talk of. How thankful I should be if he did indeed get better. Oh, how can I talk like that? He must, he will, of course. He is young yet, and so strong.”

“Certainly,” said Laurence, “there is little reason to fear for him, in any ordinary illness, because he is enormously strong, and of such active habits.”

“You told me,” said Lil, “that Lady Warrington had got him to see a doctor, but you did not tell me who he was, or what he had said.”

“He is a man I know slightly; I will meet him soon, and find out from him all I can about our friend, and what he thinks ails him. A good holiday might save him from an illness.”

The room contained several groups of talkers, most of them in costume for the stage, but some few gentlemen were visitors; there were constantly people passing in and out, so that Lil had no reason to look up, when, just then, another gentleman, in ordinary evening dress, entered. But she did—and once her eyes were upon him, they remained fixed, while her colour vanished altogether, leaving her parted lips white. Laurence observed this change with some amazement; and following the direction of her eyes observed a tall, rather handsome, florid man making his way through the scattered talkers. He came towards the divan upon which Lil was seated. He approached close to her, and Laurence, looking back at her, saw that she had shrunk up into herself as it were. She seemed to have grown smaller in the last moment, and to have set her face as if to endure some unbearable thing as stoically as might be.

“I could not help coming behind to find you out and congratulate you, Miss Winter,” said Dr. Swift, in his easy manner. “I think your performance to-night was admirable. You ought soon to have a leading part. You will excuse an old friend for offering these humble criticisms.”

This last was for Laurence's benefit; that gentleman evidently regarding the new-comer with very doubtful favour.

"I am glad you were pleased," said Lil, making a resolute effort to conquer herself and be polite. "Do you like this theatre? It has a very small green-room, unfortunately."

Laurence rose, and with a bow, as low as though Lil had been a duchess in her own drawing-room, moved away a little. He began to talk to an actor who was inspecting his ruffles and patches in the long mirror; and in this mirror he could watch Lil's face and that of her companion.

"How she fears that man!" said Laurence, to himself. "She looked, when he came to her, as if she expected him to strike her. What can her mystery be? He is in it, at all events. She is cruelly afraid of him. And what a brute he is. He loves his power over her."

Swift, seated at Lil's side, looked up several times at Laurence's handsome figure. He put him down at once as a lover. People can but judge according to their lights; he argued that, because he himself was made of certain stuff, everybody else, including Lil, was made of the same. He was pleased that he had surprised this fellow at her side; he imagined that now he understood her game, as he called it to himself.

Presently, Laurence came across to say a

parting word to Lil; he had to go away, yet somehow he hated to leave her with this "old friend." At all events, he must say one more word to her. Lil gave him her hand in farewell, with a trembling look of trust. She gathered confidence from only looking into his eyes. How kind they were! Dr. Swift rose and stood on the other side of her, staring at Laurence, who, having said his good-bye, turned and faced him. In that moment they took each other's measure and contracted a fierce dislike. Though no words had passed between them, those men could never meet on any terms of friendliness.



## CHAPTER XIII.

“**I**s he going to follow me to the theatre? Is he going to haunt me? What shall I do? How shall I escape?”

All the night, and for many nights to come, these questions filled Lil's mind. But there was no escape; and her anxiety about Brough gradually re-asserted itself, and came uppermost in her mind. She saw plainly that his weakness was increasing, and the thought of this almost stifled other fears. She redoubled her industry. She had given up her lessons with Mr. Percival, but he promised to coach her whenever she had an important part to play, whether he was busy or no. She was glad to feel herself a favourite with him. She continued, nevertheless, to study serious parts as steadily as though she were working for him; and she also understudied Miss Creswick in all her parts, so as to be ready whenever she should be called to rehearsal. She did all she could in order to be ready for any opportunity which might come to her. Real need now made her entertain hopes—which, not long since, would have seemed to her like madness—that if she cultivated herself to the

utmost, she might find an opportunity for seizing upon the public favour. Oh, if she could do this in time to be able, perhaps, to help Brough if, as she began to fear in her heart, his health was indeed failing, and his work becoming too heavy for him! She positively refused now to take a farthing from him, but resolutely lived and dressed herself on her salary. This is never an easy task for young actresses, and often drives them to accept help which they might otherwise refuse. Brough had saved her from a very difficult position so far. Now she resolved to face her situation unaided. It was the easier that she was not now paying for lessons, and that she had a good many stage dresses. But still it was no light task to live and dress decently in London on what she earned. Dr. Swift soon saw what her struggle was, for he peered into every bit of her life. He called on her at all hours; met her in the street, and walked with her to the theatre; he came to talk to her in the green-room; he seemed to fill the very atmosphere: wherever she went, there was Swift. To all this she submitted as patiently as she could. Only one thing she would not allow—he should not go home with her from the theatre. She said so, decidedly, one night when he waited for her; and he wished her good-bye, and left her so quietly, that she was surprised at the effect of her words. She did not know, she did not, at any

time, realise, how immense her influence over him was. Had it not been so strong, he would never have developed the passion for her which made him love her and torment her at once. Her strength attracted him. When she spoke seriously, as she did now, and the fire rose up in her eyes, he obeyed without hesitation. Had she but known this, she need not have feared him as she did; though, doubtless, if she had asserted her power over him, his native meanness would have led him to get the whip-hand of her again by the force of the secret he kept. As it was, he terrified her, and realised his power every hour of the day; while she had but to speak resolutely about some matter and he gave in.

But this seldom happened—she feared him too much. It was necessary to really rouse her before she dared defy him. Laurence soon saw plainly that she was being persecuted. His blood boiled at the thought of it. But he was powerless. He was outside her secret. This man was evidently in it. It was maddening to him to see Swift coolly take possession of the field. It made his own position much harder to bear; for he could see, by a thousand signs, how Lil suffered. It made him furious. Dr. Swift loved to stroll in by her side, when she came to rehearsal, or in the evening, with the easy smile on his mouth of the man who is in his right; he liked everybody to see him with

her. Lil endured a martyrdom from this incessant companionship; but she dared not rebel against it.

For some time past, Swift had been in a good humour; he did not threaten her now; he was looking about for a practice in London; he talked of buying one in a pleasant part of the town, and settling down. Lil listened to his plans with a quaking heart.

Brough sometimes dropped into the theatre of an evening, but not very often. Lil was always nervous when he spoke to her among other people, lest some tenderness or familiarity of speech should escape them; so that, as a rule, he avoided the green-room. But, one evening, when he was in the front, he thought her gaiety less natural than usual. He went round to see her when the act was over. As he entered the green-room, he saw her standing between Laurence and Swift. Both men looked murderous. Evidently, she had a more difficult part to play off the stage than on it. Brough went up to her.

“Good evening, Miss Winter,” he said, holding out his hand to her. She put hers into it, and felt a strange sense of happiness from that tender contact. She prevented herself with difficulty from flinging herself into his arms, and sobbing out all her sorrows there, as though she were a child again. But she had learned to act; and no one could have

divined that such an impulse had arisen in her breast, as she stood quietly amid the three men. Brough greeted the other two in very different fashions. He treated Dr. Swift with studied politeness. Laurence noted this with wonder. He could not treat Swift politely, try how he might. Having spoken a few words to both of them, Brough drew her away from them into a quiet corner.

“Baby,” he said, very seriously, looking into her eyes, “how long can you bear this? Shall I shoot that man Swift before he kills you?”

Lil began to tremble, and she clung to Brough’s arm.

“Don’t talk like that,” she said; “I can bear it—I can bear anything while I have you. It is hard, indeed, to endure his persecution, his attentions—the whole thing is terrible—but, papa, I can bear it. Don’t fret about me. Do take a holiday, and forget me; you look tired.”

“Yes, baby, I am tired. I begin to think my time’s about up. Don’t be frightened, little woman; but I fancy I shall ‘kick the bucket’ before very long. I can’t leave you at the mercy of that scoundrel. I feel I ought to shoot him while I have the chance. But I suppose I had better not. At all events, remember this, child—trust Laurence; he is a gentleman, and will help you, whatever happens. Go to him, if ever I am out of the way.”

“ Ah ! don't talk like this ! ” cried Lil, great sobs beginning to rise in her breast. “ I cannot bear it ! What makes you think like this ? It is all wrong—you are quite young—you are so strong—you have your best work yet to do. Oh, I have to go on again ; I dare not cry ! Help me, help me to control myself ! Hold my wrists tight ; do something for me ! ”

“ Poor baby, I had forgotten you have to go on again. A nice sort of fellow I am ! Laurence, go and get some wine for Miss Winter, there's a dear boy. ”

Laurence had been watching the talk between them—had seen Lil's agitation—had crossed the room to them. He hurried away now as quickly as possible, while Lil sat down in a chair, with her back to the others. “ For God's sake, don't let them think I am ill—Dr. Swift, above all, ” whispered Lil. Dr. Swift was at the other side of the room flirting with Miss Chichester. Laurence hurried away, and it was not long before he returned with some wine for Lil. Lil gave him a look of intense gratitude. She felt, to her very soul, all the unobtrusive reality of his kindness. He, for his part, was scared by the pain in her face. He felt that there was trouble, of which he knew nothing, and he turned away and left them.

“ Do you think, ” said Lil, “ you could come home with me to-night ; or would you come early to-morrow ? I feel as if I could give

anything to have an hour or two—not a minute or two—all alone with you.”

“I will come to-morrow, then, child; I have promised to be home in good time to-night.”

“And Lady Warrington would be anxious; for she knows you feel ill. No; I will not ask you to stay to-night. Good-bye, darling; there is my call.”

She went on, feeling hardly able to speak. But necessity is a powerful stimulant. In her small part she got, as usual, some applause. What a strange, dreamlike scene it was to her, all this outward gaiety of speech and manner; the house rippling with laughter at her own and the other actors' funny speeches, while, within, her heart seemed to be breaking.

When she came off the stage, she sank on to a chair in the green-room, perfectly exhausted. Laurence was gone; Swift was still there. Laurence carefully avoided annoying her by his love of her society. Even though he had been so much to her, and when he was doing his utmost to aid her, he would manage so that their friendship seemed the most natural and easy thing in the world, born of mere green-room meetings. He had never met her in the street, or offered to accompany her anywhere, so that she was never seen alone with him; and at the theatre, though he would often have a long talk with her, he contrived to do so generally when the room

was full, and he did not wait till she came off again, as though it were she he came to see. For all this consideration Lil was grateful beyond words. Dr. Swift adopted exactly the opposite course. He admired her; he was proud of his power over her; above all, he loved her with all the coarse fierceness of his nature. He liked everyone to see that she did not reject his attentions. He constantly accompanied her in the streets; he hung about the green-room of an evening, openly, for the purpose of talking to her in her waits, and glaring at anybody else who ventured to address her. Fortunately, there were not many; for most of the men were afraid of Lil. If she had had any admirers less considerate than Laurence, Dr. Swift would have found an opportunity for picking a quarrel with them. But Laurence did his best not to provoke him, simply for Lil's sake. He had gone away to-night with a miserable feeling that Swift meant to wait for her; as, indeed, he did. He came and sat by her when she sank wearily down.

“You are tired to-night,” said Swift; “I believe your friend, Mr. Warrington, has been frightening you. I think he's afraid I shall blab. I know he hates me; but I'll be silent as the grave while you are kind to me. Only I wish you'd be a little kinder still.”

Lil became dimly aware that Swift spoke rather differently from usual; and, gradually,

it dawned upon her that he had decidedly too much to drink.

"You're awfully tired," he said; "too tired to speak to a fellow."

"Don't talk so loud," said Lil, entreatingly.

"All right," he said complaisantly enough; "but I don't like to see you like this, you know. It's nice to see you on the stage; but you're too devilish fine a woman to go on working so hard. You know your virtue's a regular sham; you don't believe the marriage law righteous; no more do I. Chuck it over then; come and live with me. I'm a clever fellow; I can make lots of money if I've anyone to work for."

"Spare me," said Lil; "here, at least." She was too worn out to do more than pray for mercy.

"Come," he went on; "give up your nonsense; you always were so devilish stuck-up. I believe I like it in you, too. But it's time all that should be over now. Every actress has her lover, as a matter of course; why not you?"

"Excuse me," said Lil, very quietly; "that is not true. It is an old-fashioned idea that actresses are all alike. There are ladies on the stage as well as off it."

"Bless me," said Swift, with a somewhat stupid stare of admiration; "you always had a capacity for putting a fellow down; and it's grown bigger than ever. Curse me," he went

on, in a sudden change of mood, "I believe this is all play-acting, and that fellow Laurence is your lover after all. I've watched you like a spy, to try and find out. I began to think it was all a mistake, and that you were only playing with him as you play with me. But I can't trust my own eyes with you; you're such a damned clever little actress. Look here, Miss Winter; I was your first lover—I mean to be your last. If you are deceiving me, and favouring Laurence, I'll find it out yet; and, by heaven, I'll not spare you one moment longer."

All this was said in a very low voice, with the intensely earnest manner of semi-drunkenness. No one could hear what he was saying, Lil felt sure; and yet many inquiring glances were thrown towards them. Her white face, and his flushed one, formed a sufficient contrast in themselves to attract attention. Lil felt that this must not go on a moment longer.

"I must go home, Dr. Swift," she said. "I am worn out. If you want to talk like this, you must do it at some other time, when I am better able to bear it. Good night." She rose and went away to her dressing-room. Desperation had made her adopt the decisive manner which always had an effect upon Swift. He did not attempt to prevent her leaving him. He sullenly picked up his hat and left the green-room, stumbling down the dangerous passages to the stage-door of the theatre.

## CHAPTER XIV.

LIL had scarcely finished her breakfast the next morning, "Cymbeline" propped up against the coffee-pot as companion, when she heard a familiar step on the stairs. It used to be light and quick ; now it was slow and heavy. She ran to the door and opened it. Yes, indeed it was Brough.

"Kept my promise, little girl, haven't I?" he said. Lil put her biggest chair by the window for him, and let in all the air she could ; that was what he always needed now. There was a faint shade of blue upon his face this morning that alarmed her more than ever. He leaned upon the left arm of his chair and seemed to find difficulty in breathing.

"How do you feel, papa," she said, anxiously, "what is it, where is it?"

"Here," he said, putting his hand on his heart, "something seems to stop. But never mind, baby. Whatever happens, all's well. I believe I've seen about the best of this world. I am ready for a ramble in a new place, a 'walk among the back stars,' as I heard a clever fellow say the other day. Ah, but there'll be some grand strolls to take on

beyond. I almost think, baby, that I feel about ready for it, though I might have expected a score more years on this delightful planet."

"But, papa," said Lil, "why do you talk as if you were really ill? What do the doctors say?"

"Oh, hang the doctors," said Brough, with a touch of his old cheerful irascibility. "They don't know anything. There's a whole region of heaven and earth that they can't reach with their science. They say that infernal rheumatic fever has left a weakness which is increasing. But I should get over that if the Creator meant me to go on living here. He doesn't; he's told me so. He's got something for me to do somewhere else. Only I shall stipulate for a good long walk through the universe before I begin. I feel as if I wanted a little more air than we've got in this world."

"But, papa," said Lil, "your book; there is so much you should do, you have not reached your prime, you have not begun your best work."

"My dear infant, work doesn't amount to anything; I am convinced its principal result is in the development of the author thereof. My books have done more for me than for anybody else; and, when I look at works of art, they appear to me more like footprints, steps by which the artists raised themselves, than any realised result for the world. Without work

we should turn dizzy, and lose ourselves; we should be appalled by the weight of our own individuality, without something to wreak it upon. It is an awful fact, you know, baby, that one is oneself; and it would crush us, if we were not too busy climbing up the divine staircase of accomplishment to think overmuch about it. My ambition is stronger than ever, I believe that I shall carry it with me and by its power begin upon the level which I have attained here."

Lil's heart stood still within her. She could not shed any tears to relieve it, she could only listen silently. It was strangely solemn to hear him talk in this easy, cheerful way of the unknown future.

"Papa," she said at last, "don't die; I cannot bear it!"

"Why, baby," he said, "what nonsense. If I do kick the bucket, yours is only a very little pail to upset; you will soon come after me." He put his arms round her as he spoke, and, as he did so, out of the pocket of his loose velvet coat, dropped the *Times* rolled up tight. He took his arm away from her and stooped hastily to pick it up.

"Won't you leave it for me, papa, if you have read it," asked Lil.

One of Brough's morning duties was reading the *Times* and one or two other papers right through from end to end. A journalist must know everything. Lil knew his habit, and

often begged a paper when he had one with him ; she knew he had done reading them by the time he came to see her. And she had no stray coppers to spend upon news.

“Not to-day, baby,” said Brough. “I want to keep it myself; I meant to leave it at home.”

He put it back in his pocket and then leaned heavily over on the left arm of his chair. Talking evidently tired him. Lil sat down on the ground and put her head against his knees.

“Papa,” she said, “let us imagine it is old times, and that I am sixteen again. We are down by the river with the dogs. I need only shut my eyes, and I am back there. And yet, no, I am not. That is a dream, a picture ; I cannot forget what has happened since. I can never feel young any more. Do you expect to feel young again in the beyond ?”

“Youth is divine,” said Brough, “therefore God has it in his gift. ‘Whom the gods love die young.’ It is impossible to grow old if we are climbing up into stronger life and stronger light. Age is decay. You are not old within, or you would have committed suicide before now. Instead of that you determined to live, spite of all that distressed you. Your body is perhaps wearied too early, its nerve-life has been over-taxed. But you will fling it aside, as I shall, and find you are in possession of your internal youth. The gods love those who have power

and gifts. Men and women of brains and nerve force never really grow old ; even if they live on to old age in this world, they are always charming and young. But you and I, baby, are not of the sort that live to old age. We live fast, take up our experiences rapidly. We soon run through the life of this planet."

"Thank heaven for that," said Lil ; "I will fight on here, while I must, but I think I am ready for 'a walk among the back stars' too."

"We shall meet there, you may be sure, baby, in some nice little corner where cakes and ale are kept for lazy fellows like you and me, who want to look round and think about things a bit. There are many little matters I am anxious to inquire into, that no one understands here. But, baby, beware of that fellow Swift, when I'm out of the way ; I wish to heaven you had never put yourself in his power."

"I am not afraid," said Lil, quietly. "Remember, only a man such as he is would have done what I wanted. I suppose he looked forward to the power it would give him in the future. We must not regret it now. I acted with my eyes open. Sometimes I am very much afraid of him ; but, I believe, if I give my mind to it I can just keep him in good humour ; I am hoping he will buy a practice and settle down."

While they were speaking, there were steps up the stairs, and now came a tap at the door.

A moment, and the door opened, admitting Dr. Swift in person. He looked wonderfully bright and well-contented with himself this morning. He had not drunk too much, according to his ideas of right quantity, last night; only enough to be well slept off.

Brough was civilly polite to him. After a few common-place remarks had been exchanged between these three who held among them the secret of Lil's life, Brough grew restless. He got up and walked about the room, and looked out of the window. He was sorry to leave Lil alone in this man's society, yet he always found it a hard task to remain in the same room with him; he did so long to kick him down stairs. While he was standing gazing out of the window at the river, Swift drew a folded *Times* from his pocket and handed it to Lil. It was folded so that the births, marriages and deaths came uppermost; and there was a pencil mark at one of the births. Lil took it mechanically and glanced at the announcement which was marked. Her eyes became riveted. Brough was startled, an instant later, by an inarticulate cry as of one in physical pain. He turned round and saw the position in a moment. He snatched the paper from Lil; but she had seen enough.

"You brute," he said, to Swift, "you cowardly hound, to hurt her like this. My God, I should like to shake the soul out of your body. Miserable cur!"

Swift knew of no such thing as fear ; he was one of those men who are hard as nails all over, and afraid of nothing. But he stepped back before Brough's wrath, it was so tremendous. Lil had but twice in her life seen her father in a rage before. It was terrible then, now it was really awful. All his hatred and contempt for Swift flew into his face and eyes ; he rose to his full height and looked gigantic ; his hands quivered with the longing to seize upon the man before him ; his very lips were white with passion. Lil conquered her own emotion, and, rising, came between them.

"Don't, papa!" she said, "don't notice him. I must have known it, I must have heard of it. And it is right I should, for this must make us all feel that it is a sacred duty to that boy who is born to them to carry my secret to the grave, without one whisper of suggestion or of doubt. Remember that!" she said, and turned from Brough, to face Dr. Swift.

"Oh, hang sacred duties," said he, "what do I care about the brat? But I tell you what, this will make our friend much more anxious to have this blessed secret of yours kept safe, if he ever does get an inkling of it."

Lil was about to reply, and angrily too, for she was roused to furious indignation, when her attention was attracted by Brough. He slipped

back and sank into a chair. His face had changed. The blue shade had crept over it again, and he leaned heavily over on his left side.

"Baby," he said, "will you get a cab for me? I must go home, I must go at once, or I may be too ill to get away from here, and that would never do."

"Oh, papa, papa!" cried Lil, in terror and apprehension, "stay here, let me nurse you."

"Child," he said, speaking with an effort, "you know that is a risk we must not run. How could you prevent Lady Warrington coming here? how could you baffle all her inquiries; nonsense, send for a cab."

Lil obeyed silently. When it was ready, Brough took her arm and leaned heavily on it down the stairs.

"Good-bye, little woman," he said, as he got into the cab, "take care of yourself, and don't lose your head, whatever happens. Good-bye."

The cab drove away up the street and Lil turned back and climbed the stairs to her room. Dr. Swift was looking out, and drumming on the window panes.

"Will you kindly leave me for a little while, Dr. Swift," said Lil, with her quiet dignity. "This scene has exhausted me, and I have a rehearsal this afternoon."

He took up his hat and went obediently.

Lil watched with anxiety to see if he was going to take his *Times* with him. No ; he left it. The instant he was gone she snatched it up and read over again a dozen times the announcement of "Adelaide, wife of Charles Newman, of a son, at Genoa."



## CHAPTER XV.

**L**IL did not see her father for two or three days. She became miserably anxious about him. She began to realise more fully than ever the difficulty and painfulness of her false position. She dared not send to the house in any way to ask for him. She had no means of discovering how he was, except through Laurence. But Laurence came less often to the theatre since Swift's presence had become so incessant; and she did not see him, though she stayed in the green-room all through her waits, in the hope that he would come in. At last, one evening he appeared. Swift was sitting at Lil's side, and a thunder cloud descended on his face when she started up and quickly crossed the room to Laurence.

"I am so glad to see you," she said, "I want so to hear how Mr. Warrington is. Do you know?"

"No," said Laurence, "I have not seen him for several days."

"Then he must be very ill," said she; "he left my rooms one day in a dreadful state; oh, Mr. Laurence, can you find out? I do not know how to, and I am consumed with anxiety."

“I will know to-morrow evening, Miss Winter,” he answered, “if I do not meet him anywhere, I will go down to his house.”

“Thank you, oh, thank you,” said Lil, wondering how she was to wait until to-morrow evening! But wait she must. She could do nothing herself.

A great deal that Swift said to her in these days of anxiety passed through her ears unheard. Probably Swift thought he was getting on rapidly since she took all his insinuations and suggestions so quietly. What she realised was merely that he dogged her, harassed her, terrified her; that she knew not how to escape from him.

The next day she did not see Laurence at all; but a note was brought to her just as she was getting ready to go home from the theatre in the evening. Laurence had sent it over from his office, where he was very busy, as it was the night when the newspaper work was heavy.

“DEAR MISS WINTER,

“I went down to Warrington’s house to-day. He is ill in bed. He has every attention, two clever doctors and a nurse; and Lady Warrington is in great concern about him. He whispered me to tell you not to be anxious as he is ‘all serene.’ I will find out how he is to-morrow, and let you know.

“Ever yours sincerely,

“EDMUND LAURENCE.”

Lil went home crying her eyes out. It seemed too cruel that he should be really ill, and that she must not go near him! that she dared not even ask after him herself. All night long she thought of him. He had hardly ever been ill in his life, and it was so unlike him to give in and take to his bed. He must be suffering a great deal to make him do this. These ideas haunted her. In the morning she thought of something which she might send, as a sort of little message. She went up into Covent Garden, and bought some exquisite white rose-buds; these she carried to Laurence's office, meaning to ask him to take them with him to Brough and tell him they were from her. But Laurence had not come yet; so she pencilled a little note and laid it with the flowers on his desk.

When Laurence arrived they were the first thing he noticed. He read the note and looked at the flowers.

"How devoted she is to him," he said, to himself. "What can it all mean? Her history is romantic, I am certain of that; but probably I shall never know it, unless ——"

He did not finish the sentence; but turned over the other letters, and then started off at once in a hansom to Warrington's house; he was determined to take the roses with the freshness on them.

The servant who opened the door had been crying, and did not seem able to speak; but

she let him in. The next thing he saw was Lady Warrington sitting on the stairs perfectly drenched in tears. All her fine ladyism had gone like starch; she resembled a delicate piece of lace in a draggled condition. She looked a poor little heart-broken woman. She held out her hand to Laurence; in it was a paper which she seemed to mean him to read. It was a note from one of the doctors, telling her what he had not had the courage to say to her face, for he was a personal friend of Brough's and loved him as all his friends did; it told her that her husband could not live more than two or three days. There was no hope. He was dying of endocarditis, dating from the rheumatic fever, but aggravated, so the doctors considered, by mental anxiety or over-exertion and want of care. Lady Warrington was speechless; notwithstanding her pretty tyrannies, though she had made him work harder than he need, and made of him more or less of a slave, she adored Brough. She had so leaned upon his great strength that her imagination could not picture the thought of its giving way. She had always fancied him strong enough to live for ever. After some attempts to console her, which were evidently wasted, Laurence passed her by and went up to Brough's room. He was admitted by the nurse.

“He won't know you, I think, sir,” she said, “he has been delirious all to-day. He will

have the *Times* to read though he can't hold it, or keep his head up to look at it, and he keeps talking about some article that he can't get done in time for the paper unless we let him sit up and write."

True: Brough did not seem to know him. The blue shade had deepened all over his face, and he looked very strange, with the dim look in his eyes. Laurence laid the roses upon the pillow, and, leaning over, whispered, "From Miss Winter." The name seemed to arouse Brough, and give him momentary intelligence.

"Is it you, old fellow?" he said, "and are these from the little girl? Be kind to her, when I'm gone——"

"Warrington," whispered Laurence, after looking round, and seeing that the nurse had left the room; "can I do anything for her to make things easier? can I get rid of that man that haunts her?"

"Swift, do you mean?" said Brough, quickly, "no, don't offend him. But don't believe any harm of her because he dogs her; he is a scoundrel, but I tell you she is the best little girl that ever lived, as good and pure as an angel should be, if there are any angels: I suppose I shall know soon. No," he repeated, making another effort, "promise me never to believe harm of her. I know the dear child; she has had a cruel life. Befriend her for my sake; you're a good fellow, Laurence. Did she send these roses?"

He shut his eyes and moaned. When he opened them again he did not know Laurence. After waiting some time in hope of another word, Laurence went away. He found Lady Warrington outside the door of Brough's room; the nurse would not let her in while she cried so desperately. He could not make up his mind to tell Lil all this, so he wrote a line again saying that Brough was still in bed, that he was no better, and that he had been delighted with the roses. With this scant intelligence Lil had to be content. She wished now that Laurence would come and see her, for Swift's unsympathetic presence drove her almost mad. But it prevented her giving way to her anxiety, which was perhaps a good thing, for she had to save her strength for her work. There was rehearsal now in the day as well as the performance at night. She was rehearsing Miss Creswick's parts, and expected soon to play them.

The next day when she went to rehearsal, with Swift of course at her heels, she fancied she caught sight of Laurence in the theatre. But the flaring gas jet made very deceptive shadows. If it was Laurence, he had gone round to the stalls, which was not his habit at rehearsal; and it was strange, too, that he did not speak to her? Was he avoiding her? The actors and actresses kept dropping in, and gradually all gathered on the stage. Some who were new to their parts had

play-books in their hands ; others came in with a newspaper, looking easy and indifferent. One of the men who had a paper in his hand said as he came up to the group, "Have you seen about poor old Warrington?"

As the words entered her ears, Lil became aware that Laurence was there, and had now come close beside her. He tried to attract her attention, to lead her away from the group. "Yes, I will come," she said, "but first let me hear."

"What, Brough Warrington? capital fellow he is," said one of the others, "what is it about him?"

"It's in the second edition of the *Globe*," said the first speaker, relishing his piece of news, "and placarded about everywhere."

"What?" asked several.

"He died this morning. It's sad, for the poor fellow was too young to die; hulloa! what's the matter?"

It was Miss Winter who had swooned away, and was lying on the dusty boards of the stage. Two men rushed to pick her up, and reached her the same moment. Laurence flung Swift's hands away from her.

"You shall not touch her!" he said.

"Damn it all," cried Swift, "may I ask what right *you* have to touch her?"

The two men stood upright again and faced each other across poor Lil's unconscious body. The others stood silent, startled, puzzled by

the scene, and the sudden hot words, and wondering much what was to come next. Laurence recovered himself first.

"None," he said, "except that I am her friend," and, stooping down, he raised Lil and put her into a big arm-chair (the stage throne), which was close by. Some of the more good-natured of the girls clustered round Lil now and did what they could for her.

"What an extraordinary thing, though," said one of them presently, "what was Mr. Warrington to her?"

"He had been very kind to her, I know," said Laurence, gravely, "always a good friend, as he has been to many others."

Lil was recovering now; and her first thought was one of fear, lest she had betrayed anything. She glanced round anxiously; but she saw nothing to excite her alarm.

"You must come home," said Swift, who was standing beside her; "you can't rehearse after this."

"I shall try," said Lil, "I dare not let them see what it is to me!"

"I can't understand your being so astonished," said Swift; "I could have told you the other day that he had but a short time to live."

"Why didn't you?" asked Lil.

"Oh, I thought you knew," said Swift; "besides I had had enough of telling you things for one day, you had made it so hot for me."

Lil turned away her head and said nothing. This man was like iron. It was terrible to touch upon him and feel how cold, how utterly unresponsive he was. And yet he was capable of passion. Lil had not guessed the key-note to his nature ; pure selfishness.

She actually made an effort to go through with the rehearsal, but it was more than human nature could manage. Harmer, the manager, interfered, at last, and told her she must go home. He was kind to her, for he thought she had considerable promise, and moreover she had never failed at rehearsal before ; so it ended in Swift taking her home in a cab. Laurence did not dare to interfere again for he remembered Brough's words. But he determined as soon as it was possible to take a step which he had long desired to take. He longed to be able to shield her from the persecution of this man whom she so evidently feared.

He did not like to go and see her immediately. Her grief had impressed him so much that he felt afraid to approach her. But he called and inquired for her, and left her flowers. At last one day the servant said, when he came, that Miss Winter would like to see him if he had time to go up. He was very glad of this ; for one thing he felt sure that Swift was not with her, as she wished him to go in ; and he had so strong a personal dislike to Swift, that he avoided meeting him.

He went upstairs, the flowers in his hand which he had intended to leave for her. Lil seemed to him very white and quiet. She was dressed in black. She took the flowers and thanked him for them, laying them, as she spoke, against her pale face.

“I have wanted so to thank you,” she said, “for all your kindness to me, especially while Mr. Warrington was ill. I am, indeed, most grateful. Do not be surprised that I wear this dress for him at home, I like to. Indeed, I know black is not what we should wear for those who are gone on to another life; I wear it for myself. You can never know what Mr. Warrington was to me. More than father! more than any friend. I am really alone in the world now he is gone. Forgive me for talking about myself, Mr. Laurence. Your kindness always tempts me to speak out. Ah, I did not believe it possible I could live on, after he was dead. But I am doing so, you see. How strong we are! I am to begin playing Miss Creswick’s parts one night this week. Perhaps I shall earn some success, now there is no one to care for it. This world is managed so strangely.”

All these sentences came out separately, dropped one after another; while Laurence sat watching her nervous expressive face.

“But,” said he, when she had done speaking, “that is not true, you are not correct. Remember how intense an interest I have taken

in your career ever since I first knew you." Lil started and looked at him, then turned a little away. "Your success will be a great deal to me, more than you think. Mr. Warrington told me on his death-bed to be your friend always; I want to be more than that, much more." He saw her turn further away, and he began to speak quickly. "Miss Winter, I have loved you since the first day we met, and I have desired many times to speak to you. But your reserve inspires a certain fear. I could not. But I will wait no longer. I do not know whether it is wrong to speak when your grief is so new, but I cannot bear to hear you talk of yourself as alone in the world! I have to confess to such a passion for you, as I never supposed any woman could inspire in me. Will you be my wife?"

He leaned across and took her hand. A long, trembling shudder, as of one in mortal fear and anguish, passed through her frame. Her hand, which lay in his a moment, vibrated with this terrible shudder. Then she moved, took her hand away, rose, and faced him.

"It is impossible," she said.

"Impossible," he repeated, "don't use such a word, it's a word I hate. Do you not like me, can you not love me?"

"Don't ask me," she said, hurriedly; "God knows what I say is true. I cannot be your wife."

"Are you in earnest?" he said, passionately.

"Can you not see that I am?" she answered, and stood there trembling, yet resolute, with the strangest look upon her face. Laurence regarded her, and read "impossible" in her quivering features.

"You will me let be your friend still?" he said, "just the same?"

"Yes," she said; "yes."

"You will trust me just the same."

"Mr. Laurence," she said, "I trust you absolutely. I implore you to be my friend, and to forget this."

"I will try," he said, "but it is hard. It cannot be irrevocable."

"It is," she said, dropping the words steadily like two heavy blows upon some nail of desperate decision. She put her hand to her throat. A terrible lump seemed to be there, something which would, in another instant, catch her breath altogether. Her face terrified Laurence. He caught her in his arms and put her in a chair. He opened the window wide and then stood silently by her. He could not leave her while she was like this.

Lil covered her eyes with her hands and cowered into the cushions of the chair. She knew that now she must have tasted her bitter cup to the full. She had discovered, during the last few minutes, that all Laurence's gentle kindness, his tender consideration, his real loveliness, had taught her to love him. Not, perhaps, with the young freshness of her love

for Charlie Newman, but with a strong passionate affection. He had crept into her heart all unawares. She had never thought of him but as a friend, and now she found her heart yearned and ached because she must needs push back this gentle love that was offered her. She was alone, absolutely alone, now, in the wide, weary world, yet she must reject this.

Must she? For one wild moment, as she sat there, she thought of it all, how Charlie was happy with his wife and child. In that moment it seemed but right that she should take her happiness too. Whom would she offend by doing so?

But no, it was impossible; she used the same words to herself that she had used to Laurence. She was bound in links of iron, invisible though they were. What Charlie had done, he had done in ignorance. What she did, she would do knowingly. She recognised instantly that she could not do it. No; Lil Newman was dead to all intents and purposes. Yet the fact that Charlie Newman still lived was enough to take away from her all thought of love, all hope of happy living, or any joy. She must go on, alone, until she might go to Brough on the other side.

And yet, oh how the strong fire of her vigorous nature beat against the bars that held her down! Unquenched in her was the great woman's capacity to love and be loved.

She put her hand fiercely upon her beating heart as if to silence its sudden life.

Just then Laurence knelt down beside her and took the other hand very gently from her face.

“Do not answer me if I am cruel,” he said, “but I so wish to know why it is impossible? I might help you, even yet, out of this mesh of troubles which, I am very sure, surrounds you.”

She met his clear, honest eyes a moment and then spoke.

“Perhaps I owe it to you to tell you,” she said, “at all events, I can trust you with a secret. I am married.”

At that moment there was a noise on the stairway, and Swift’s voice was heard speaking to the servant. Laurence started up.

“Not to him!” he said, in a sort of fury.

“Oh, no,” she answered, with a quick gesture of horror.

“My God,” said Laurence, “if I had but the right to shield you from him. Good-bye.” He put her hand for one instant to his lips, then quickly took his hat and was on the staircase before Swift had reached the door of the room. He passed him by without any greeting.

“Nice manners, that friend of yours has!” said Swift, as he came in. “By the way, what’s he coming here again for? I don’t like it.”

But Lil made no reply.

## CHAPTER XVI.

**H**ILL plunged now into heavier work than ever. It was her only source of comfort. It gave her nerves occupation, without which they would have torn her to pieces. For she was now sorely beset; perhaps her daily trial was greater than ever. She met Laurence constantly, and felt, whenever she met him, how gentle and considerate his love for her was. She had to fight bitterly with the yearning for love which arose in her heart. Sometimes she told herself that she was foolish to fight so, clinging to a mere legal fiction. She and her husband were dead to each other, literally. Could she not take this man's love? No; she knew as soon as she had faced the thought that she could not take it and keep her self-respect. She remembered Brough's words, "don't lose your head whatever happens." Could he have foreseen this heavy tax upon her weary spirit? Perhaps he did, and dared not warn her more definitely for fear of making matters worse. At all events, she cherished what he had said, and made a desperate effort to keep her mind clear, to do nothing which would stain her

path, and add remorse to her many sufferings. "It is impossible." She had to say this to herself sometimes, when Laurence stood by her, when he touched her hand, when he did for her some little act of kindness, which made her feel how lovable he was and how faithful.

Dr. Swift became by degrees a less acute torment to her. He found, at last, that she was resolute in pursuing her own career, that not even threats would frighten her into accepting his overtures, which he made in a sufficiently intelligible manner, and that no love-making of his, however ardent, called forth any response from her. She dared not reply rudely or even indignantly, as she sometimes was disposed to, but preserved an invariable civility towards him. She kept him always at a certain distance. It was hard work for her—wearing work. It enraged him, and he often ground his teeth under it, and looked as if he longed to catch her in his arms and kiss her against her will. But he had never yet ventured beyond words; though he had taxed his wits in every way to exhaust her patience. He could not; it was inexhaustible. She had so much at stake that it enabled her to keep her temper with him. To end the battle by giving way never even occurred to her. It was hardly likely that it should when she resisted even her love for Laurence. Finding her immovable, and that he had

progressed no farther in her affections than when he first came home, Dr. Swift turned his attention more to his own affairs. He obtained a practice which suited him, settled in a good house in a fashionable medical street, and all at once transformed himself into a most respectable member of society. As he was a very clever man he soon began to make a footing and build up a position. But even most respectable members of society like to go behind the scenes sometimes and take a look at a theatre from the wings; so Dr. Swift did not think it necessary to make any difference in the frequency of his visits to the green-room of the Favourite Theatre. He knew that he was understood to be Miss Winter's lover; he delighted in having the reputation if he could not have the reality. He often told her this, and used it as an argument for his cause.

"I do not care what they believe," Lil said, one day. "My own conscience is all I have to follow. I know no other law. Outcast that I am, the opinion of society as to right or wrong, or the criticisms of a green-room, are nothing to me. Miss Winter is no one. If it pleases you to play with her name, do it. You know very well that you cannot play with the woman who hides behind that name."

She had grown a little less afraid of him since he had begun to form a good position, and she more often spoke out. The fact that he

was acquiring a reputation gave her a sense of security; he would not care to throw it away all at once by revealing that matter of the false certificate.

So the months passed by, and Lil had grown almost accustomed to the absence of her dear Brough, and daily custom was making it possible to meet Laurence without a pang. She doubted sometimes whether, after all, she did love him; her heart seemed literally to bleed within her whenever her mind turned for one instant to that husband who was hers no longer. Undoubtedly, that first love had a vigour none other could have. But still, she knew, and could not hide it from herself, that, had she been free to become Laurence's wife, she would not have hesitated. "Why was this—how was this possible?" she would sometimes pause to ask herself, "with the old love yet bleeding." In truth, she was a generous-natured woman; her full, ripe womanhood craved for some life, some happy outlet. She could have made Laurence happy; what a thought! for he was very dear to her. Then, again, that other love, though so strong, had been so cruelly blighted within her, that this new tenderness amid her desert life was inexpressibly sweet to her. The man that was her husband had now a wife that was his ideal, and their love was knitted together as his and Lil's had never been, by the

growing life of a child. She knew all this. She turned from the agony of that thought, and her heart leaped out towards Laurence. She met him very often now, for he was working hard to get his play ready for the coming season, and he brought the acts, as he finished them, for Lil to read. The play was wanted early for rehearsal, as Harmer, though well pleased with Miss Winter's playing of the parts he had lately given her, yet wished to see her in this character soon enough for him to secure someone else for it, if she did not seem sufficiently strong. She had never yet had a part which really required "force." Lil was so anxious to fulfil Laurence's idea, and to do justice to his heroine, that it filled her mind. She felt that this was the only chance she would probably ever have of pleasing him in anything. She fully realised how much it is to an author to have his principal characters well understood, and rendered as he intends them to be rendered. When there were a couple of acts completed she learned her part, and went to Mr. Percival for some lessons in it. He was very much interested in her idea of the character, and evidently considered this to be her real first appearance.

"My dear," he said, "they've seen you only in light comedy, and very nicely you do it. But they won't know you in a part like this, where you can show the stuff you are made of.

This wants force, and you have it. Besides, you understand the character. I expect your appearance in this to be a brilliant thing, and I tell you I'm never mistaken."

Jack Percival was just the same as ever, just as kindly, just as full of ripe stage knowledge and tradition, of confidence in his own opinion, of witty stories, brimming over with humour and appreciation of it. But his face settled down into another form when they took up the work of this serious part. It grew stern and set, as if he himself were about to perform the character. And, indeed, it was a part of his power in teaching that he went over every word, entered into every emotion of the part he taught.

While Lil was thus working, steadily progressing towards the fulfilment of her ambitions, and apparently full of her art, it was in reality with a double motive. The steady straining of the nerves, the taxing of the brain, served to hide from her eyes two pictures that would rise before her. One was of the happiness that might have been with Laurence, who grew daily dearer to her heart; the other, of that happiness which had been hers, yet now was hers no longer. Another picture, the happiness of Charlie and Adelaide, she dared not face at all; she fancied it brilliant and glowing. In reality, it was even more brilliant and glowing than her imagination pictured it.

Upon the blue, glorious Mediterranean, near that Spezzia sacred to Shelley lovers, lay a yacht. The sea was like a dream, still, even to unreality. The vessel was motionless, save for a gentle swaying. But in that vessel was enough, so far, to satisfy at least some of those who passed the golden days upon her deck.

In a low deck-chair sat a woman, beautiful as the sea around her, rich as the warm country whose shore it washed. A creature of radiant skies and smiling seas, Adelaide seemed to be a part of the nature amid which she was so content. Loving art as she did, she loved nature more; she had such a wealth of quiet, easeful joy in her flower-like temperament, that she could rest in a heaven of bliss amid its beauty. Now it seemed as if her content were too great for speech or thought; she held her child in her arms and gazed upon him in a silent delight. The two formed a picture as perfectly lovely as any glory of that fairest sea in the world, amid which they floated. So thought Charlie Newman, who, in the course of a constant walk up and down the deck, paused every now and then to look at them. Whenever he passed her, Adelaide raised her deep eyes to him with a lovely smile.

Presently he made a longer pause than usual, and then came and leaned against the side of the boat close to Adelaide.

“Do you know,” he said, “I think this life is too luscious. I feel as if I were eating too much fruit. After all, one wants something besides happiness. I think my brain must be stagnating.”

“You want to be among people again, I suppose,” said Adelaide, in her rich voice, which had a yet deeper note of sympathy in it than of old.

“I suppose so,” said Charlie. “I am a restless being. I think you would rest contented anywhere, Adelaide.”

“Yes,” she answered, “with you.”

“Well, then,” he said, “will you plunge with me once more into that horrible London?”

“Willingly,” she said. “Ah, there is mamma. I am sure she will be glad if we go.”

Mrs. Mainwaring had found her daughter's marriage a terrible trial, and had not seen anything of her for some time afterwards. But when Adelaide's child was born, Mrs. Mainwaring came and nursed her, and she had not left her since, but had waited upon her devotedly, watching her return to health. She was a very charming mother-in-law when once she had made up her mind, and an excellent traveller, so that even Charlie liked to have her with them. And, as yet, she had settled upon no home for herself.

“You will like to go to London, will you

not, mamma, if we go? Charlie is getting restless."

"Oh, I should like it," said Mrs. Mainwaring. "If we went early in the season, that is. But I am not sure I shall not settle in England. I have never cared for Italy as you do, Adelaide."

Adelaide cast an eloquent glance at the great blue flame which quivered above her, and thought of the gray cloudiness which in England we call a sky.

Nothing more was said about it at the moment. But Charlie went below, and wrote some letters home. One was to the house-keeper in charge of the London house, telling her to get in readiness for them. He had never let it, as Brough had heard; the idea was talked of but never carried out.

Through the long sweet night the yacht lay becalmed, and Charlie walked the deck, longing for movement and for change. His nervous irritability, born of dull living and overwork, had long left him. He was sun-burnt, strong-looking, and had a look of pleasure in his eyes. But the native restlessness of his temperament was the same. He quickly exhausted one form of life and longed to enter upon another.

As he walked about the deck that night he thought of many things. He thought of his poems, which had now been published a little while. They had been very well noticed, and

it was a trifle of personal vanity which helped to attract him to London. He wanted to mix among literary people, and feel that he had accomplished something to win their regard.

He thought of Adelaide, who lay in the cabin below in a deep, calm sleep like a closed flower; her child lay beside her as beautiful and as still. He would steal down to the cabin every now and then to look at the picture. It was a constant wonder to him that these two were all his own.

But never a still night like this passed over him without his thoughts going back to Lil, fair Lil, faithful Lil. When he looked at the child, he wondered would Lil have lived and been happy had a child come to her. When he had grown used to her death, and taken his new happiness, he grieved for her even more than at first. For then he forgot that he had been bound to her when he longed to be free—he only remembered how much she had been to him, how fair their love once was.



## CHAPTER XVII.

ONE afternoon, Lil, coming out at the stage door, after rehearsal, met with a shock which all but took her breath away.

Yet she only came into rather close contact with a gentleman who was finding his way in through the narrow passage. He looked hard at her, and passed on.

She had recognised him on the instant. It was Alfred Davies.

She hurried out into the air, feeling as if her heart had stopped beating and would never begin again. Dr. Swift had come to meet her, as he often did, at the stage door. He grew more proud of his power over her with every step she took in her profession. He saw from what Laurence and Harmer said that she was really expected to make a success in this new play of Laurence's. He clung to her all the more tenaciously for this. It was delightful to him, the thought that, however she got on, however popular she became, she never could escape from his power. Lil thanked heaven whenever she came out into the street alone, and did not meet him on her way. She never expected to be free; only she

was thankful when she was at peace for a moment. But to-day she was so startled, so trembling, that she could hardly walk; and when she met Swift and he turned to walk at her side, she took his arm without a word. This surprised him very much; as a rule she gave him the idea that she would not touch him with a pair of tongs. But it was evident that she could hardly walk, and also that she was anxious to go on and hide her weakness.

Meantime, Davies, having gone a few steps, turned back and came to the stage door. He had been struck with something—he knew not what—about the woman he had met, and particularly by a kind of quiver which passed over her face as he looked at her. His was a mind which was intensely curious. Most men would have wondered and gone their way. He turned back.

“Who is that lady,” he asked of the door-keeper, “going down the street?”

“That’s Miss Winter, our second lead, rehearsing for lead, now, I believe,” said the man, who knew all the gossip of the stage.

Just then Lil met Dr. Swift, who turned back with her. Alfred Davies uttered a little exclamation of surprise, which attracted the man’s attention again.

“Ah,” he said, drily, “that’s her particular friend. Don’t he dance attendance on her, too?”

“By Jove,” said Alfred Davies to himself,

“I’ve met that man, somewhere. I must see these people again.”

He hurried down the opposite side of the street. He had long legs, and was a quick walker, while the others did not go very fast, because Lil could not. Thus he managed to go innocently over a crossing, pause a moment as if he did not know the way, and let them slowly pass him. Lil had recovered herself now. She remembered that she looked the most unlike her old self with her eyes lowered, so she kept them on the ground. Davies looked hard at her, then hard at Swift, who returned the gaze, but without remembering the face that he looked at. But Davies, as he stared, suddenly recalled where he had once seen that man—on the steps of the station near Charlie’s old home. He had seen him dimly, also, in the road, when Swift had been talking to Lil under the trees in the dusk. He recollected that she did not say who had been with her then. He remembered, afterwards, when they met on the stairway, Swift had been to see her. He recalled the suspicions that these incidents had awakened in him about Charlie Newman’s fair-haired young wife. He watched the man as he went down the street: he watched the woman who leaned on his arm.

“Who is that woman?” he said to himself, “or whom does she remind me of?”

Puzzled and abstracted, he turned back, half hesitating whether to follow them any

further. But a certain little actress who had newly come to the theatre to take the waiting-maid parts, which Lil had formerly filled, was expecting him to fetch her; and it made her very cross to be kept waiting. So he hurried back. He found the lady in question at the stage door, cooling a pair of very high heels and looking very cross.

"If you're after that Miss Winter," she said, "you won't find it any too easy; she's as stuck up as she can be, and that gentleman of hers could knock you into the middle of next week any day. But if you *are* after her, just say so, instead of playing me tricks like this."

"She reminded me of somebody, but I can't think who it is," said Davies, humbly enough; "but tell me what do you know about her; what is she like?"

"Nobody knows anything about her, except Dr. Swift, who comes after her nearly all the time, and Mr. Laurence, who comes after her when Dr. Swift doesn't. She'll hardly speak to anybody else, so I'm sure they ought to be satisfied. That's all I can tell you."

The young lady was getting restive under all this talk about another young lady, so Davies gave up the subject and carried her off to be solaced as soon as possible by champagne.

"Can't we get a cab?" said Lil, as soon as they had passed Davies, "I can walk no further."

Swift hailed a passing hansom, and put Lil

into it. When they had started off he looked at her again.

“What on earth is the matter?” he said; “you look as if you had seen a ghost.”

“So I have,” she answered; “a ghost from the past. I do not think I can ever be so frightened again. But I had begun to feel secure, and the sight of that man’s face terrified me.”

“Who was he?” said Swift. “Now you speak of it, I believe I’ve seen him somewhere.”

Lil’s mind flew back to that day, in the long, long ago, when she had left Swift under the trees, and walked home with Davies to the cottage. Charlie was waiting at the gate for her; he was anxious because he had not found her in the house! Ah, what happy, sweet, loving days those were! And now, this man, Swift, who even then she dreaded, had become her constant companion, while those she loved she was isolated from. A sudden rush of tears was all the answer Swift got. She leaned back in the cab and let the tears rain down. Indeed she could not stay them. That face had brought back with it so many bitter-sweet memories of the far-off past.

For some days she did not recover from this fright, and went to the theatre in terror. But she had to face her danger, for the new play was called for rehearsal. These rehearsals were almost happy hours to her, when she could forget herself in her work. Laurence

was nearly always there ; he led most of the actors and actresses a life of it, by criticising their performances, and often altering or even re-writing their parts. One day he said to one of them, "you must say so and so."

"But," said the actor, in righteous indignation, "it's not in my part."

"Oh, isn't it," said Laurence, coolly, "well, I'll put it in then."

His idea enlarged, as he thought it over, and he gave the unfortunate actor another long speech to learn.

With Lil he was always satisfied. She had understood the character from the first, and he had altered it to please her, in several places, during their private readings of it. She flung herself into it and acted for him. Mr. Percival would look in sometimes when he had time, and then Lil really exerted herself. She knew he was proud of her now, and meant to claim her for his pupil. The play was half-rehearsed when Laurence and Harmer decided that one act must be entirely re-written ; so the rehearsals were off for a week to give him time to do it. This was a great relief to Lil, for she trembled every time she left the stage door lest she should meet Davies again. She was glad when she heard the arrangement made ; but an instant after she felt as if fate were pursuing her, for turning round she saw Davies on the stage, close beside her, steadily regarding her. Now she knew that she must

use all her powers. She summoned her strength, and quietly walked past him, looking him in the face without even a quiver of the eyelids. She went straight on, and out at the stage door, without looking back. That day Swift was not there. She went quickly down the street, with a feeling as if she were running away from some terrible thing. It was not very far from the theatre to her rooms, and she almost always walked. To-day she went quickly on over the accustomed way, with only one desire—to get safe into her rooms. Then she paused, and thought, How foolish! What was she running from? She turned to look behind her; her instinct had been true. Davies was quietly following her down the street. Her heart began to beat wildly as she hurriedly went on again. Why was he following her? What did he suspect. She was passing a shop where she sometimes bought gloves. She turned in, and asked for some. A long time she took over her choice, that day. At last she felt she must go on again. She was stronger now, not so terrified. She had taken a fixed resolution while turning over those gloves in the box. Come what might, she could deny her identity. If he should challenge her with it, she could deny it. All that she needed was to keep herself cool, not to lose her head, as Brough had told her.

Strengthened by this resolution, she went out of the shop and walked steadily home.

Davies was waiting for her, and followed her. He evidently meant to find out where she lived.

But he, too, had taken a resolution while the gloves were being bought. He quickened his pace when Lil turned down Cecil Street, and he saw she was probably near her home. As she reached the door, while her hand was on the knocker, he came close to her.

"Excuse me, Miss Winter," he said, "but have we not met before?"

Lil turned and faced him, all her native spirit roused within her at this emergency.

"You have the advantage of me," she said, and without any further word turned away.

The door was opened for her at that moment, and she went in. The maid did not shut it immediately after her, yet she did not look invitingly at Davies. It was for someone else she was waiting. Davies looked round; Dr. Swift was approaching the door. Davies walked away up the street, struggling desperately with his memory. "The man I remember well enough," he said to himself, "but the woman! she told a lie; I have seen her somewhere. It can't be a resemblance. The familiarity is too strong; and yet there is no feature distinctly that I can recall. It is rather the walk, the voice, the look in the eyes, the way of drawing up the head."

He went home in a dream, utterly puzzled. His house was not an over-comfortable place

to go to, nor exactly the one to dream in. It was noisy with growing boys and hearty babies. It was evidently wanting in many things which can only be got with money. The fact was that though Davies had plenty of children, he had very few briefs. Mrs. Davies had pretty well succumbed before these combined facts. She had grown fat, lazy, untidy. With some women poverty and difficulties act as stimulants. Not so with Mrs. Davies. She liked good living and comfort, and when she had them was cheerful enough. Without them she was cross and spiritless; and, having lost what appearance she had, was no longer a very attractive object. She might have been still considered a fine woman had she flourished under the sun of prosperity. But, as it was, it was small wonder, considering Davies's character, that he spent a little spare cash occasionally on champagne for the lady of the high-heeled boots. Her frothy impudence refreshed him.

The obtaining of money had now for the best part of Davies' life been his one desire and object; yet he had not obtained it in any sufficient quantity. He now desired it more than ever. Indeed it was becoming more necessary than ever with all these growing boys and girls about him.

Perhaps he did not work hard enough, for he was not without brains. But he hated work, and there is no other road to success.

He liked better to idle about town than stick at his dingy chambers, reading law, and waiting for those briefs which did not come.

To-day he walked home, went into his drawing-room, not much less dingy than his chambers, and sat down in the first arm-chair he came to. He shut his eyes and appeared to be asleep. Mrs. Davies came into the room soon after, and as she much objected to anybody besides herself being lazy in the afternoon, she promptly roused him.

“Don’t, my dear,” he said, “I am thinking.”

As he spoke very snappishly, and used the *my dear* with the same sort of emphasis as Sir Peter Teazle, Mrs. Davies said no more, but sat down on the opposite side of the room with a baby in her arms. The baby cried, but this did not appear to disturb its father’s thoughts. He had grown accustomed to the sound, and perhaps thought better with it than without it. At all events he presently sprang to his feet with an oath, and an ejaculation so violent that it startled Mrs. Davies considerably.

“I’ve hit it,” he cried; “by Heaven I’ve got their secret. Oh, Lord, Lord, this is rare.”

“What on earth are you talking about, Alfred?” inquired Mrs. Davies. “Are you gone mad?”

“Not yet,” said her husband, “and shan’t, till I’ve tracked this down. There isn’t time to go mad in. Oh Lord, it’s rare!”

His discovery, whatever it might be, seemed

to have restored him to good humour. He went about chuckling and rubbing his hands. Indeed the idea he had got hold of seemed to increase in richness with the passage of time, and every now and then he would slap his leg and laugh with delight, until Mrs. Davies really began to fear for his wits and to wonder what would become of herself and her babies if he lost them altogether.

He woke up in the middle of the night and exclaimed out loud, "No, it's impossible, it can only be a likeness!"

He could not sleep again for thinking of the extraordinary discovery which he believed himself about to make. The middle of the night is a good time for the memory; we can often dig deeper into the past than in the day-time when the present is active. Davies thought of many things as he lay in the dark. He recalled Lil's face during different phases of her career. No; he concluded that it was not her face which he recognised. That was very much altered. It was "a something about her," as he expressed it to himself.

Swift's evident connection with her afforded him abundant food for thought. He remembered to have heard of some affair between them before Lil's marriage. Swift had always assumed the air of an old lover, too! Then there were those stolen meetings after her marriage. And then, suddenly, he remembered Lil's inquiries into the divorce law, just before

her sudden death. He had not believed at the time that she wanted this information for her writing; she was too intently in earnest about it. He went over that talk he had had with her, trying to bring back every word she had said. He remembered most of it. He fastened all that he could recollect deep in his memory. Every detail would be of use to him.

For, if this were true, that he suspected, that boy of Charlie's was illegitimate, and, after all, he would be next heir! That changed the future for him, and the present, for he could borrow money and get into debt again, on the strength of it. And then, too, he might extract hush-money from Charlie himself, if it came to that; or perhaps from Lil, for she would soon be in clover, with her increasing popularity.

And so at last Davies fell into that sleep which is only supposed to be the sleep of the righteous—deep and contented.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

**A**LFRED DAVIES now for some days led an unusually active life. Lil soon saw that he suspected something, that he was on her track. He was evidently determined to meet her, as she saw with a sense of agony. For it showed that her little piece of acting—her denial, had not convinced him at all.

She felt like a hunted creature, brought to bay. And her stake was so great! Not her life, *that* might easily have been given up. No hunted creature quaked as she did when she came face to face with Alfred Davies at the theatre every evening. She felt as if her secret was being snatched away from her. And he came, every evening, professedly to see the lady who played waiting-woman. But, in reality, his purpose was to see Lil, and she knew it. He went to the front when she was on the stage; she felt that he was there. He came to the green-room and took every opportunity of standing near her or of speaking to her. Lil decided that her best course was to notice him as little as possible; to treat him with quiet indifference. She managed to do this, though her heart fluttered like a frightened

bird whenever he came near. This conduct puzzled and baffled Davies. He expected to frighten her; but, though he did frighten her, she would not show it. Sometimes she was so scared that she would make plans for escaping—leaving London—hiding herself once more. But her first thought was of Laurence and his play. She would not desert him now, after all his care and anxiety, and when he based such high hopes on her representation. The second thought that struck her was that this course would be, practically, confession. Davies evidently suspected who she was; did she run away from him, and at such a moment, when her success was at hand, he would be convinced.

Better stand at her post and bear the brunt herself than leave this man in possession of her secret. Indeed, she saw it was her only course. She must stand her ground and face out whatever might happen.

Contact with Lil made Davies, though sometimes he was sorely puzzled, grow gradually convinced that his suspicion was correct. But he failed to startle any confession from her, though he often referred to his conviction that he had met her before. Lil used all her strength in her endeavour to disguise her terror; but she tried, without letting him see it, not to be alone with him. He found this out directly. She encouraged Swift to come to the theatre for her now, so that she should

not be in the street alone; if he was not there, she went in a cab from the door. She lived in terror. Davies discovered that she avoided him, though she hid it so carefully, and that gave him confidence.

One night he came into the wings, where he knew she came off. She must pass him. He was standing alone. She saw him waiting for her, and swerved an instant; but her stage training kept her steady. If she went off at another wing she would interfere with someone else. So she went straight on, and passed him. He caught her arm. A thrill of fear went through her.

“Do you mean to tell me you are not Lil Newman,” he said into her ear.

“Take your hand from my arm! I do not know what you are talking about,” she said, steadily facing him. Then she turned angrily, and walked quickly away to her dressing-room. Once there, she locked the door, and sank down, clasping her hands upon her beating heart as if to keep it in her body.

He went away, out of the theatre, and walked about the streets, thinking.

“She’s no good,” he said to himself. “If ’tis she, she’s too clever for me.”

The next day he went and called professionally on Dr. Swift. A guinea was but little to pay for such information as he desired to extract from him. But he did not extract it. Dr. Swift knew there was danger, directly he

saw who his patient was. He did not want to let this secret out, now that he had a position worth preserving. At all events, if it was ever told it should be for his own purposes, not for another man's. So he told Davies nothing, and amused himself by writing him a very nasty prescription. Davies revenged himself, as soon as he was outside, by tearing it up and scattering it on the doctor's doorstep.

He was quite puzzled how next to act. At last he bethought him of Lady Warrington; perhaps she might know more of Lil than he did. She might give him a clue. So he dressed with care, and started off to see her.

Lady Warrington had recovered her butterfly graces, and wore her second widowhood with as much grace as her first; though she did very deeply regret her dear big Brough. She felt, and told everybody, that she should never meet such another man. So it was understood among her friends that she did not intend to marry again. She was not as well off as she had been before her marriage; for she had once or twice trenched upon her capital when they had got into difficulties. She was living very quietly in a few rooms of their London house; as soon as she could let it she meant to go into a cottage in the country, and retire for ever from the gay world. Her old friend, Dr. Swift, had found her out; but though she was herself again, he thought her getting a

little too old to be amusing ; so she did not see much of him.

Alfred Davies she but faintly remembered, as a decidedly vulgar young man. She put up her eye-glasses to look at him, and concluded that he was still vulgar, and therefore not interesting. But Davies was clever enough for such a conversation as this ; he managed to suggest some little mystery about Lil Newman which had just come to light ; he would not even hint at his cherished secret that he believed her to be yet living. But a mystery before her death was enough to excite gossip-loving Lady Warrington. Then he spoke of Dr. Swift and asked her, with an air of serious sorrow, whether she had ever really thought there was anything between them.

“Oh, la, la !” cried Lady Warrington. “Why, I did my best, I told the girl before her wedding-day that she ought to tell the whole thing to Charlie Newman. Why, it was dreadful. But then she was a mere hoyden ; she had no proper training. She never had anyone to teach her anything but her father, and he had very odd ideas, even for a man, poor dear. She lost her mother when a baby ; I’m sure I don’t know if that was any loss from what old Mrs. Warrington has told me. And that old lady, too ! Well, I don’t know what effect she had on the child, but she used to make even me feel inclined to do something dreadful, out of sheer contrariness. She was so funny !

I daresay the girl had some excuse, with such a bringing up; but still I must say I should be surprised at nothing I heard about her. She was always most ill-regulated, and capable of doing anything wild."

All this pleased Davies very much, as it confirmed his own opinions. But he did not discover anything of actual use to him from Lady Warrington, because she knew nothing. He was glad he had talked to her, for he saw she would be admirably useful if he wanted a rumour started. At present, however, he was determined to tell her nothing; he left her gently excited over an untold mystery. She asked him to come again and tell her more when he knew more. She was very busy, she said, but would gladly see him.

She was, indeed, very busy. She had been busy ever since she recovered from Brough's death, hunting over his manuscripts and selling them to the very best account. She had got down to the bits and scraps of verse now. But still she persevered. The editors were beginning to be afraid of her, and she to fancy herself quite literary now that she had corrected so many proofs. She always used to suppose that Brough was doing nothing when he was correcting proofs, and that she might talk to him. But she had begun to find out her mistake.

Davies went away home, having hit upon a plan which he fancied was the best he had

thought of yet. It seemed clear that he could get no certain information, and that Miss Winter would not be terrified into confession. Charlie Newman would pooh-pooh such an extraordinary suggestion, unsupported by facts, or even by probabilities.

But his wife! she might be more easily frightened. She would not like such a scandal to arise, her marriage and her child's legitimacy called in question. She was the person to go to, undoubtedly.

He had heard from Charlie Newman that he expected to come home, with his wife, soon. He walked away, directly he remembered this, to their house, and made inquiries. They were expected daily, in fact at any time. All was ready for them.

He went the next day and heard that they had arrived early that morning, and were very tired; but would receive any visitors in the evening. So he said he would call again.

Adelaide he had never seen, and he was a little curious to see Charlie Newman's second wife. He had heard that she was a beauty.

He found them in the very drawing-room where he had had that talk with Lil about the divorce law. It was a double room, and as Davies entered, the scene came back to his memory more vividly; she had led him over to the further fire, and by that they had sat and talked, just out of ear-shot of Mrs. Davies. How clearly it all came back to him! No doubt

she wanted to escape from her position, and be free to go to her old lover, Swift. And, seeing that the law would give her no help without a public scandal, she had acted, as he would have advised her to, without consulting the law. It all seemed to him as clear as possible.

Charlie came forward to greet him ; and a moment later Adelaide came out of that inner room. She was looking lovely ; dressed in a quiet, rich style, all her own, and with a ripe beauty on her face as though she had carried away with her some of the very spirit of beauty which glorifies a Tuscan harvest. Davies sat and talked to them a little, and wondered, as he looked from one to the other, how he could get Adelaide by herself. It was not so easy at any time, for Charlie had no particular occupations to call him from her. Therefore it did not seem much use to ask her when she would be alone. Besides, she had never seen him before, and might naturally be much puzzled by such a request. It might rouse Charlie's curiosity, too.

Should he keep coming to the house till he got an opportunity? He was very impatient ; he had a fear sometimes that Lil would get too frightened, and escape him. He determined, at all events, to try his luck as soon as chance favoured him. That favour came sooner than he expected. Before he left some other visitors came in ; they were friends of Charlie's, and he became engaged in talk

with them, leaving Adelaide and Davies rather out of the conversation, at opposite sides of the circle. Presently Adelaide rose, and seemed to hesitate between coming to talk to Davies where he was, or going away into the other room. Davies seized his chance very quickly by rising and joining her. She went back to her seat in the inner room, and Davies sat down opposite her. It was almost exactly as he had sat with Lil. But he had no sentiment about him; all he felt was that his memory was getting clearer, his conviction stronger.

They talked about trifles for a little while. Presently Davies asked Adelaide where she had first met Charlie. He knew all about it, but he wanted gradually to approach the subject of the first wife.

A second wife or husband has always a difficult task in speaking of a first one; especially if they have been known to each other. Adelaide felt no hesitation in speaking of Lil to anyone except Charlie. Between them she had never been mentioned since their marriage.

"I met him in Rome," she answered. "I was living there with mamma, and he was travelling with his wife. I was very fond of her. She was a beautiful, a most lovable woman."

Adelaide spoke very earnestly. Indeed she wanted everyone who had known Lil to know how much she, too, loved and admired her. Davies was a little perplexed. He did

not understand her feeling, and he fancied she was playing some game.

“Of course you knew her very well,” said Adelaide. “You have seen a good deal of Charlie, always, I suppose.”

“Yes, until he went abroad. Travelling has done him a world of good. He looks quite a different sort of fellow. He used to be melancholy. I chaffed him about his poetic temperament.”

“He is melancholy sometimes, now,” said Adelaide, simply.

“And he still writes poetry?” said Davies, with the faintest suspicion of contempt in his voice; had Charlie not been a man of property that suspicion would have broadened into a certainty. As it was, Adelaide caught it and took a slight dislike to Davies. But he saw his mistake, and quickly mended it by speaking of the favourable reception which Charlie’s book had met with.

Gradually he led the conversation back to Lil again; he hinted that he fancied she had been very unhappy for some time before her death. Naturally this drove a pang into Adelaide’s heart. “Oh, I hope not!” she said. “What makes you think so?”

He hinted that Lil had told him things which made him think so. He let fall suggestions, half-said things, which frightened and excited Adelaide. She looked round once, for Charlie, thinking that perhaps she ought

not to hear these things in his absence. But he was busied with the other visitors. What Davies suggested to her by his words was that Lil had really been desiring a separation or divorce. He did not deliberately say this, but he contrived to impart the idea to her. Now Adelaide had always a very tender place in her conscience about Lil. She could not hide from herself that, however they endeavoured to disguise it, Charlie and herself had awakened to the absorbing passion which eventually drew them together, when first they met. She had often wondered, with fear and trembling, whether Lil had observed this; indeed she felt almost certain she had, when she remembered many incidents of their travel together. But surely this could be known but to herself and Charlie. Surely Lil had never revealed this, a thing which Adelaide hardly dared think of!

"Tell me plainly what you mean," she said at last to Davies. "I don't wish to go on talking about others, in this way; but you owe it to me, having hinted at so much, to tell me the truth plainly. If I am to live here among people who knew her, it is better I should understand all this. Do you mean that she wished to leave Mr. Newman; to obtain a divorce?"

"I believe so," he answered.

"But why should she?" asked Adelaide. "I am sure they were very much attached! What do you mean?"

“Well,” said Davies, hesitatingly, “I believe there was an old lover of hers—a man with whom she was entangled before her marriage, who came to see her afterwards—in fact, I think she wanted her freedom.”

“Good God! How dare you malign the dead like this?” exclaimed Adelaide, white with indignation. “I do not believe a word you say. It is false! False or true, why should you tell me such scandalous tales?” She paused a moment, to recover herself; Davies did not speak; he was thinking. He had made her very angry. Perhaps she would not see him again if he left her in this mood. He must cast his die at once.

“I think,” said Adelaide, half-rising, “we had better put an end to this conversation, Mr. Davies. I wish to hear no more. I cannot understand your bringing me this detestable scandal on my very first evening in England. I suppose you have some purpose in your conduct.”

“I have,” said Davies, leaning forward and preventing her from stepping out of the corner in which she had been sitting; at least, she could not pass without brushing roughly by him. “I have a purpose. It is to warn you. It is indeed. I would not have interfered, I would have said nothing, had you not won my interest and sympathy at once. There is a danger to you in this country which I feel I must warn you of.”

Adelaide moved and looked round as if to call Charlie to her. Davies understood her gesture, and, putting up his hand, arrested her.

“He must not know,” he said, “at least not at once, not abruptly; you must think about it; I feel sure when you use your judgment about it, you will not tell him. Remember, though I am a stranger to you, I am his cousin, his oldest friend and companion; I have his interests at heart.”

“For God’s sake, speak, and tell me what you mean,” said Adelaide, fixing her eyes fearfully upon him. “I cannot imagine what secret, unknown trouble, can descend upon us like this. Will it hurt Charlie? Will it hurt my child?”

“Both, I fear, unless you are very cautious,” said Davies.

“Speak! and quickly!”

“I told you of this old lover of Mrs. Newman’s.”

“Yes.”

“I saw him once or twice with her, after her marriage; I know him slightly. He entirely disappeared after her supposed death.” Davies said this slowly, that its meaning might be clear to her. “I did not see him for a year at least. A little while ago I saw him again. I have seen him several times. I have always seen a lady with him. I thought I recognised her the first time; I have since become con-

vinced that she is——” He hesitated, watching her face.

“Well?” came through Adelaide’s lips, parted in suspense.

“Mrs. Newman.”

For a few moments Adelaide stared at him, a puzzled frown on her beautiful brow. Then she said—

“Please repeat that—I don’t think I understand.”

He repeated his words to her. While he spoke she gradually sank back upon the couch, a stricken look coming over her face.

“Oh, my kind Father in heaven,” she whispered, “spare me!”

She sat quite still and said no more, though her lips moved, perhaps in prayer. She was stunned. Davies drew his chair nearer to her.

“You are not faint? Can you listen to me, if I speak?”

She bent her head a little, but still with the fixed, stricken look of amazement on her face.

“I am sure you will see what madness it would be to tell Charlie this until it can no longer be avoided,” said he. “He is a sensitive fellow, and really the position he would be placed in would be hard for a man of iron temperament. She has disgraced him, and he has unknowingly betrayed you. And then your child! We must shield Charlie from all knowledge of the affair as long as possible. Of

course, your one desire will be to prevent this terrible thing becoming known ; so long as it is a secret, your marriage will be all right, and your child will inherit ; the disgrace of this must, at all hazards, be averted from you, and the dishonour from him, poor little fellow. You know, I suppose, I am Charlie's heir, if he had no child, so that this fact should show you my advice is disinterested. You understand me ? Well, what I propose is that you entrust the matter to me ; I will protect you from all disgrace, or risk of this shameful thing being exposed, if man can do it. Of course, you will understand that I shall have to devote time and attention ; I am, as things stand, a poor man, though, under these circumstances, I hardly need be. But if you would use your influence over Charlie, to induce him to will his property—well, we will be fair, and say will half of it to my children, while your boy has the other half—come, that's generous, eh ? under the circumstances, and if you got him to hand me over a nice little cheque now and then, for I have a large family and many expenses, if you could manage this, as I've no doubt you could, I would guarantee the secret should be kept for you."

He expected her to say, "I will do all, anything, if you will keep the secret and save me from this shame !"

Adelaide realized nothing but the suggestion that Lil was not dead ! all else Davies said had

over her unheard. Her old faith in Lil made his insinuations useless.

She did not speak at once; but, after a moment's silence, she seemed to arouse herself.

"Lil Newman alive!" she said, "and I in her place! I must find her; I must see her; I must know the whole truth. If you know where she is, take her to me. I must find her—ah! how she must have suffered!"

Davies puckered his brow, and stared at her. Certainly women were unreasoning beings. And he had thought this woman looked sensible; now, what nonsense was she talking, instead of replying to a fair—in fact, generous—business offer! This impulse of hers he did not at all like; he had no idea of letting her come face to face with Lil; he wanted to hold the situation himself.

"No, don't be rash," he said, quickly; "you must not try to see her! I can't let you do that!"

Adelaide turned and looked at him.

"I insist upon it," she exclaimed. "You know where she is, if you know anything! I don't believe you do! It is all false together. I should never have listened to you. I will tell all to Charlie, and let him sift it. He will not allow scandal to be talked about his dead wife, whom he loved and respected."

She was full of passion and emotion. She made a quick movement forward as though to go at once to the other room. Davies was

scared by her impulsiveness. He was not at all prepared to bring this before Charlie. His case was not good enough, while Lil denied her own identity. A man would naturally demand proofs at once. He had none: nothing but his own conviction. He had no real hope of convincing Charlie and coming to any good terms with him about the property, or about immediate hush-money; he feared that even if Lil were personally assailed, she might prove herself too clever for him, as she had already done, and then his whole case was gone. For he had no case! except, indeed, he got her grave opened; but even if that were empty it would not prove that Miss Winter was the Lil he wanted, or that Lil was still alive. All this he had clearly before him. He had hoped to simply frighten the woman through danger of disgrace on herself and her child; he had calculated on her yielding, without demanding proofs, to the mere thought of so terrible a prospect. But Adelaide's intensely romantic nature carried her into the same attitude which a practical person would have taken up. She took no heed of these proposals of Davies—she hardly thought of her own social disgrace; all that would instantly have occurred to her mother, never occurred to her at all. She only felt that she was an unwitting participator in some terrible tragedy; that she was in a false position; that a woman who had been dear to her, and loved by

Charlie, had been forced into some strange and terrible action. She must have light upon it all—she must find this woman—she must escape from that position which was not hers, if indeed it was not hers!

Davies stopped her again, as she was about to pass him.

“Don’t be rash, I entreat you,” he said, “I will show her to you if you insist upon it. Meet me alone some time to-morrow, and I will manage it.”

“Are you in earnest?” exclaimed Adelaide.

“Indeed, I am,” he answered; and looking at his face, she believed him.

“When would be best?” she asked.

Davies considered a moment. “Meet me at the end of this street about half-past two.”

“I will come,” she answered, and then sank back, her heart beating at the thought of what she had engaged to do. To go alone, with this man she had never met before, to see—what?—a woman living, whom she believed dead; a woman, whose existence, if a fact, took from her all she had! “And I must not tell him!” she said, half to herself, half to Davies.

“Do you not yourself think that he is the last person in the world to tell?” asked Davies, watching her face as he spoke. Its expressions were absolutely mysterious to him.

“It may be so,” said Adelaide, with a heavy

sigh of perplexity. "At least, I will wait until I am certain ; that at least I will do."

Davies had to be contented with this. He left her now ; said good-night with a very fair imitation of sympathy, and went away, leaving her there, just in the same place, her eyes still full of expressions which he could not fathom.



## CHAPTER XIX.

**T**HE next morning Adelaide moved about in a dream of wonder and terror. She professed to be very tired, in order to avoid going over the house with Charlie. She felt as if that would be an unbearable ordeal. What had that unhappy woman been driven to do, who should be here in her place, mistress of this house? She kept in her own room, restlessly walking about it, all the morning; and got away from the lunch table before the others had done, saying she wished to go out alone to make some purchases for herself.

Charlie stared. "Why, you will lose your way," he said.

"Nonsense," said she. "I do know London a little, mamma, don't I?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "but I don't feel sure you know it well enough to go out alone."

"Oh, I will show you that I do;" said Adelaide, "and if I lose my way I can take a cab and come home. This is not like Siena, where, when I lost my way, I found there were no cabs! That was alarming, I allow." And so she escaped, and hurried upstairs for

her bonnet. Davies was waiting for her at the end of the street.

“You are a little late,” he said. “Never mind; I have a cab waiting, and I think we shall be in time.”

Adelaide wondered in time for what? But she said nothing; only got quietly in and sat down in the hansom, while Davies told the man to go to a certain street, to stop at a certain corner, and to stand there till told to go on. The man grinned, and drove off. He evidently thought he had got a queer fare.

Davies knew that Lil was daily rehearsing Laurence’s play; and that she generally went home about three, from the theatre. He calculated that they were just in time to see her walk away from the stage door. He thought that was better than letting Adelaide see her come or go from her own home; he relied on Adelaide’s being too timid to make inquiries at the theatre.

Lil was a little late in coming out from rehearsal to-day; Laurence was talking to her about his re-written act. They kept themselves strictly to business, now, these two, and so got on very well indeed. He came out with her at the stage door intending only to walk a few paces at her side, just to finish what he was saying. When they had walked a little way down the street, Lil, raising her eyes, saw a hansom standing at the other side of the road. Davies had got the driver

to turn round so that Lil, walking in her usual direction, should not see who sat in the cab; and he had drawn the curtains across the little side windows, intending Adelaide only to peep through. But Adelaide dragged the curtain back to look the better, and Lil saw at the window a face, excited and strangely familiar. She was frightened instantly, and walked on more quickly. A moment after, she heard a hansom-door violently thrown back—she looked round—a lady was in the road, rapidly coming towards her. She knew her then—that walk, that exquisite bearing—it was Adelaide. She put her hand on Laurence's arm. "Come quicker," she said, "and, for heaven's sake, hail a cab, at once—ah, there is one——"

A cab had stopped at the kerb, and Lil sprang in. "Tell him, down to the Strand—quickly," she said; "don't wait to give him the address!"

Laurence told him and jumped in after her. The cab drove off, leaving Adelaide a few yards behind, just defeated of her purpose—which was to look this woman in the face, speak to her, find out what it all meant.

"Do not be so rash," cried Davies, who had followed her. "How can you put yourself in her power, like this? It will suit her admirably to have you know she is alive—she will make you pay dearly for it!"

Adelaide looked at him, but made no reply.

Instead, she turned and walked straight to the stage door of the theatre. Davies followed her, aghast at her determination. She asked the door-keeper whether he would give her the address of the lady who had just gone out.

“What, Miss Winter?” he said. “No, I oughtn’t to.” But he looked hesitatingly at Adelaide’s beautiful, pleading face. Adelaide quickly caught at the name.

“I am her friend,” she said, “but, of course, if you mustn’t do it, I must wait till I meet her again. I am an old friend of Miss Winter’s, and she doesn’t know I am in England.”

Of course it ended in the man telling her the number in Cecil Street at which Lil lived. Davies stood by, fuming. He mentally concluded that Adelaide was a fool and of no use to him. He determined to let her go her own way, and himself attack Charlie. He began to think that though he might not get proofs together, yet he might be able to frighten Charlie into making some reasonable terms. “After all,” he said to himself, “women are always fools at business; I had better have taken my chance with Charlie, at first.”

Laurence, when he got into the cab by Lil’s side, looked at her terrified face, in amazement.

“Forgive me for coming,” he said; “I did not like to leave you, you look so strange.”

“Ah!” said Lil; “no wonder if I do; I

am being hunted." And she drooped her head. After a moment she said: "What shall I do?"

"Surely," said Laurence; "no one can hurt you?"

He remembered Brough's dying words about her; surely this woman had nothing to *fear*?

Lil looked strangely at him.

"No," she said; "Perhaps not—but they can hurt themselves! Oh, how terribly! No, no, no, it must not be! I must escape?"

She leaned wearily against the side of the cab, and her eyes looked dazed with the difficulties they saw. Laurence, after a moment's pause, spoke very gently.

"You will not misunderstand me—you will know I do not mean to insult or hurt you—when I say, trust me—and let me take you away—to Australia, if you like! We will both disappear from this side of the world; we will awake again in a new country. We should be married, in God's sight, of that I am sure. You would escape from this misery which I believe is killing you, I would shield you from everything."

Lil looked up into his eyes with almost an awe for his generosity of love. "What," she said; "leave your work, throw up your position, sacrifice your career!—and all for me! Your love is grand. I feel nobler now that you have offered it me. But no; I cannot do

this with my eyes open ; I know that I am married—he did not.”

These words, and the tone in which they were uttered, shed a new light into Laurence’s mind.

“ Ah ! ” he said, “ he has married again ! ”

“ Yes, ” said Lil wondering at herself that it should be so great a relief to her heavy heart to utter these quiet words. “ I left him that he might marry again. I suppose I did a wicked thing. I do not know. You will not judge me hardly—God will not, I think—the world would, if it could know ! He loved her, and was killing himself in the effort to kill his passion. Perhaps I was proud—perhaps I was wild—I don’t know ! but I know that I loved them both ; ay, and do ! Could I stand between them and separate them ? But I slipped away unseen ; and left him free ! While he knows nothing, he is innocent—that is my comfort—while the world knows nothing, she and her child are safe ! I have told you enough now ; you can imagine how deep my trust in you is, when I confide so much of my secret to you. I know you will try to find out no more ; I know you will be silent as to what I have told you, even when I am dead. I felt you ought to know a little more ; I have longed for you to understand me a little better ! ”

“ Your secret is as safe with me as with yourself, ” said Laurence ; “ so far as you will

let me, so far will I shield you, now and always. But, Miss Winter, why not escape and come away from all this? Looking at it, I cannot see that you would do any wrong, situated so strangely as you are."

Lil thought for a moment. "Yes," she said; "I should be doing wrong. Whether myself I do not know. My life has been so full of strange experiences, that I cannot always discover now what is right and wrong. The world's morality is very perplexing to me. I could not degrade myself worse than if I had remained with a man who was weary of me. To take what you offer me, by comparison with that, would seem to me an honest, righteous act. But I suppose I must be wrong, and the world must be right! I cannot do it. I cannot altogether escape from the influence of the world's opinion. I should doubt myself and be wretched."

They had been driving slowly down the Strand, and now were at Cecil Street. Laurence stopped the cab and they got out.

"There are other reasons, too," said Lil, as they turned down the street.

"And those are——?"

"One, that I cannot be so cowardly as to run away, now I have been suspected. I should leave a terror behind me. No, I must face it out. *She* has seen me now; that man Davies, who has been dogging me lately, had brought her there, I suppose. He has some

purpose—money, I should think. He prepared her to see me, so that it would have been hard for me to pass unrecognised. To one who never imagines but that I am dead, it is another matter; the idea does not suggest itself. I saw agony in her face to-day—can I go and leave her with that agony? No; I must avoid her, naturally, if possible; but to run away would be confession.”

“Have you yet another reason?”

“Yes,” said Lil, her manner changing suddenly. All the tenderness of her generous nature arose towards him. He felt it; the warmth of her spirit thrilled him. “Yes, the play. We cannot leave that! it is all that we shall ever be united in! Let us forget all other dreams and live in our work.”

They had reached Lil’s door now. Laurence took her hand in his to say good-bye.

“Do you not feel we could not leave it?” asked Lil, looking up into his face

“It would be hard,” he answered; “but it is as hard to stay—and lose you!”

“But you know! she said,” “you know I could not go with you! You know I should be wretched; you would regret it!”

“I suppose you are right,” he said.

“The circumstances of my life have shut me out from all such fair possibilities,” she said. “I may not love—I may not be loved. Good-bye!”

“Good-bye,” he said; “if you are driven

too hard—if you want help, send for me.  
Let me be always your friend.”

With a smile for all her answer, she left  
him and went in.



## CHAPTER XX.

GAIN, the next day Adelaide went out alone. Charlie was rather surprised at her sudden desire to explore London shops by herself; but he let her go very easily as he had found enough to do in looking over his affairs. He had begun, too, to turn out letters and papers, partly his own and partly Lil's, which he had not had the heart to look through before he left England. These he would probably not have touched had Adelaide desired his society, but, as she evidently did not, he thought he might as well put these old letters in order and get them out of the way. It was a strange occupation to him. When he shut up the house, he had gathered up a quantity of letters and papers which he found in the drawers of Lil's writing-table, and, putting them into his own bureau, locked them away. It seemed to him, then, almost impossible ever to look them through. It was not difficult now, though a strange sad memory came from the past. Among Lil's letters he found one or two from Lady Warrington. He did not remember these; the others he knew well; they were

almost entirely from her father. Lil habitually destroyed letters when she had received them; all except her father's. Charlie was surprised to see that she had kept Lady Warrington's, and read them to discover the reason. The first he took up was very old; written to Lil in her early married life; warning her not to offend Dr. Swift and speaking of him as an old lover. It was one which had made Lil very angry when she received it. She had not shown it to Charlie simply because she felt ashamed of Lady Warrington, who, after all, was her father's wife. Charlie read this through very thoughtfully.

"No," he said to himself; "she was mistaken. Lil never cared for that man. She told me so; and she was true as the heavens above."

While Charlie was dwelling thus amid the memories of his dead wife, Adelaide was engaged in actual pursuit of her. She drove straight down to Cecil Street, and, going to the house, asked for Miss Winter. Lil had gone to rehearsal, so that the errand was fruitless.

Adelaide came back dispirited. She found Davies was at the house. He was with Charlie downstairs; but he evidently wanted to speak to her and made some excuse to do so, for she had no sooner gone into the drawing-room, where she sat down to try and think how next she could act, than he joined her.

She looked apprehensively at him as he entered.

“You do not trust me,” he said, sitting down by her; “that is foolish. I am your best friend. I have told Charlie nothing. I have kept the secret, though you have treated me very ill. You need not disturb yourself as you do; if you will agree to the terms I proposed to you, I will see that she and Dr. Swift leave the country; and you shall never be in any danger of their re-appearance. I assure you this is a generous offer; if I chose to expose the matter I should stand in a very different position. But I am anxious to shield you.”

“I want to see her,” said Adelaide. “All that you say is wasted on me. Do not speak, but help me to find her! Surely she cannot escape me, if she is really alive! But I am very uneasy about it. She will hide herself again—she will go away—I shall lose her, and yet I shall know, as one knows in a nightmare, that she is somewhere in the world!”

“No, I don’t think that,” said Davies, with a half-smile. He partly guessed how much there was to keep Lil at her post. Besides, he judged others from his own standard.

“Do you not see?” he went on, “she will not go away now, because she has you in her power. People, in your position, will be expected to pay anything to avoid such a scandal.”

“I am not afraid,” said Adelaide, looking steadily at him; “I do not believe my child would be judged illegitimate, born under these extraordinary circumstances; my husband and I are innocent; our marriage must be as good as any other! You think of nothing but money; and I can see, even in the confusion and distress, that you are trying to terrify me for your own purposes. I am not terrified, Mr. Davies; I am not one of those women who fear scandal or undeserved shame above all other things. What I do dread is the discovery that a woman has suffered what I dare not think of—a woman whose rightful place I have held, while she has gone struggling out into the world. Whether this is true or no, I am determined to discover. And if it be true, I will also discover what caused her to take such an awful step. My instinct tells me that you wrong her, if alive. I will meet her face to face, and that, without your help, if you will not give it.”

Davies rose, white with anger.

“Very well,” he said, “I see you are incapable of understanding the sentiments of virtuous society on such matters. You are insensible of the shame of being a wife, yet no wife; you complete your character by pursuing your husband’s true wife, who is enjoying the companionship of the lover she always preferred. You were brought up in Italy, it is true; perhaps you learned morality

from the Venetian women. But I hope to protect a respectable English family from such disgrace. Charlie is my cousin; I have no wish to see him figure before the world as a bigamist."

Davies, having relieved his feelings by revealing his underlying brutality, left the room quickly. Adelaide stood, like a statue, silent and white. But when he was gone she raised her trembling hands as if in mute prayer.

"What will he do?" she exclaimed. Then she sat down and began to think of the extraordinary events which had come upon her.

Davies had begun by suggesting that Lil was yet alive; he now spoke of her as a living person, with a certain positiveness and familiarity which carried conviction with it. He had pointed out to her, walking through the street, in the sunshine, a well-dressed lady, whom she was to accept in the place of a dead woman lying cold in her grave. A certain strange familiarity about this woman's air and walk had seized upon her imagination; and she had half-believed that Lil it was who stood there and then drove away, out of her reach. But now, a great, natural incredulity was settling upon her mind. The thing was impossible. "Banquo's buried; he cannot come out of his grave!" This was in truth the only argument that rose to her mind. But it was a strong one. She had been accustomed for a long

time to regard Lil as dead—buried—a thing of the past, tenderly and gently folded away in the memory of those who had loved her. A deep distrust of Alfred Davies helped her back to her old attitude of mind. Lil was dead, of course; her father had seen her buried; Charlie had seen her grave. Davies was trading upon some strange resemblance between Lil and Miss Winter in order to get money out of his rich cousin, or his rich cousin's wife. The thing seemed to her plain as possible, and she wondered at herself for a foolish dupe. Why, thought Adelaide, some doctor who was a friend, or acquaintance, had attended her, and had actually seen her die—suddenly. Then she started up again from the chair in which she had sat down to think. Started as though a word had been spoken in her ear and terrified her. She had remembered, without any search for it, the name of that doctor—it had come naturally into her mind, as one of the details of that past event—and she recognized in a sudden fever and terror, the name which Davies had used but just now. Dr. Swift! the man who was now seen with Miss Winter; the man who was said to have been Lil's old lover.

Adelaide stood trembling and full of a horrible fear. This lent a ghastly probability to the story. Could it be? could that Lil who had seemed so devoted to Charlie—who

looked so fair, so true, so honest; could she have been this base thing, a hypocrite, a double-hearted woman? Then came another thought; Adelaide, honest as true souls are, dared not hide from herself that the passion which existed between herself and Charlie had become at one time beyond control—must have been visible to Lil. She saw again that white face of pain which Lil had worn through those terrible days at Siena. In Lil, Adelaide had always recognised an extraordinary fund of rich, silent romance. She was one of those rare women capable of Quixotic deeds. Was it possible that, suffering as she did, and seeing others suffer, she took the old mad way which women have so long been driven to; flung herself blindly into the care of a lover who was ready to lead her from misery into shame? An agony of remorse rushed in upon Adelaide's heart—all the sympathy of her tender being rose up and roused her.

“I must find this Miss Winter and discover the truth,” she exclaimed; “she cannot deceive me when I am face to face with her.”

Action was necessary to her, for she was in a fever of fear and apprehension. She went out alone, and drove again to Cecil Street. Miss Winter was not at home. Lil had begged her landlady to say this to everyone for to-day. In truth she was packing her boxes upstairs. To-morrow Miss Winter would be gone—no address left. Lil was terrified to distraction

by the discovery that Adelaide was actually pursuing her.

Wearied out, Adelaide went home again, with no idea what to do. On the way she thought of something and directed the cabman to go to the stage door of the theatre. She went and spoke to the friendly door-keeper.

"Miss Winter will be here to-night?" she said, inquiringly. She knew nothing of the ways of theatres, and had an idea that it might be a very dreadful deed to penetrate a stage door. Yet she determined to do even that, if she could discover at what hour it might be possible to meet Miss Winter. She began to feel for her purse as she spoke. She must win even this door-keeper. But, to her surprise and disappointment, he shook his head in reply.

"No," he said, "Miss Winter ain't very well, and she arranged to-day to have her place taken for a night or two. She's coming out in a leading part and wants to be at her best I suppose."

Adelaide felt utterly disconcerted by this. "When will she appear in that leading part?" she asked, after a moment.

"It's advertised all about, Miss," said the man, pointing to some big play-bills which adorned the door-way. Adelaide went and looked at them. Yes, Miss Winter was advertised in large letters to appear as Amy

Davenant, the one important female character in "a new and original drama, by Edmund Laurence."

Adelaide got into her cab and drove home. While she was thus uselessly trying to carry out her own plans, Davies was forming a new one, and putting it into action. He saw that he could do nothing with Adelaide; he did not understand her. She seemed to him to be stupid. He determined to risk Charlie's incredulity and common-sense; he knew well how sensitive men are about the honour of the women immediately connected with them. On this characteristic, which he felt sure was strong in Charlie Newman, he depended for a foot-hold. Charlie might disbelieve him—might even believe and yet have no fear of any actual punishment or disgrace—and yet he would shrink from the exposure of his first wife's inexplicable desertion of him—from having the doubtful position of his second wife publicly discussed. Davies thought he saw his way to representing himself as the possessor of this secret, able either to disclose, or hide it: thus he would still hold the position.

He went to see Lady Warrington again, and left her burning with desire to tell someone the new-old scandal confided to her keeping. He would not tell her positively that he believed Lil to be alive; that fact he wanted for his own use. But he suggested the possi-

bility and hinted enough to drive Lady Warrington nearly wild with excitement.

The very next day he went to see Charlie again. Adelaide was out. "She has taken quite a craze for shopping," said Charlie; "I suppose women are all alike; but I really had no idea she cared for such things."

Adelaide had said, with a face that for the moment grew scarlet, that she found so much shopping to do in London; and then hurried away. She was not clever, as common-place women so often are, at telling little lies; and she feared lest Charlie should suspect that something lay behind her words. In reality, she was searching for Miss Winter; using her utmost ingenuity to try and discover her, and meet her.

Lil knew this; she had heard of Adelaide's inquiries at her lodgings, at the theatre. She sat in her new rooms, trembling at every knock lest it should be Adelaide's. She said she would be at home to no one, to make herself safe: and yet she longed to see Laurence. Since Brough died, in him alone could she trust or feel any comfort. But he did not come that day. She sat trembling alone, each moment fancying she heard Adelaide's step on the stairs and wondering a thousand times how she should face her. Would all the actress's art desert her in that awful moment? She sat still, her book before her, trying in vain to nerve herself to study.

In the afternoon there was a dress-rehearsal of the new play. She sent for a cab, and got into it with a feeling of horror that Adelaide might be in the street, watching to see her! She hoped Laurence would come in to the rehearsal; in fact, she felt sure he would. But he was not there; and she realized how much she had learned to care for him, for without him the theatre seemed empty.

Lady Warrington had two visitors that day and was a little excited by both; for each had a strange though very different interest in her new piece of scandal. She was essentially one of those women, too often to be met with, who glory in having "something to tell."

The first one was Charlie Newman. He went straight to see her directly after lunch, which meal he enjoyed alone with Mrs. Mainwaring. Adelaide had not come in. This annoyed Mrs. Mainwaring, who was utterly mystified by these excursions from which she was excluded. But Charlie hardly seemed to notice Adelaide's absence. He was absorbed. Certain sentences which Davies had uttered that morning, and which at the time seemed to be utter madness, now began to sing in his head and fasten themselves in his mind. "I saw a woman the other day, so amazingly like your first wife. It was curious that she was with Dr. Swift, who, I daresay, you remember as having been an old admirer of your wife's."

That was the first speech which fastened in Charlie's mind. Davies dropped it gently on to him. Then he went on to talk about Dr. Swift. He did not dare to insinuate anything about Lil's connection with him; but, after talking about him a little while, he assumed a sudden air of seriousness, dropped his voice, and asked Charlie if he saw Lil in her coffin. Charlie wheeled round in his chair and stared at Davies.

"I can't make out what you are driving at, Davies. What is it? No, I did not see her; she was buried when I reached the place."

"Ah—h—," said Davies, looking with a mysterious expression into the crown of his hat; much as men do when they first go into church. In fact, Davies having learned to do it there, had got rather into the habit of associating the action with serious moments.

"What on earth do you mean by this?" asked Charlie; "speak up and have done with it."

"Well—that fellow Swift has made a position now—but he is, and was, a scoundrel; I'm hanged if I'd have trusted his certificate of death."

Charlie stared blankly for a minute. Then he said, "I'm still in the dark."

"Well, doctors do write false ones sometimes," suggested Davies, meekly.

"False ones," echoed Charlie; "but what should be his purpose?"

“Ah!” said Davies, rising, “that I’d rather not say. It’s a delicate matter. If you want to know about that, go and ask Lady Warrington what she has to say about the old connection between her step-daughter and Dr. Swift. We all know in what sort of a way Brough Warrington’s daughter was likely to have been brought up. All I say is that this woman, whom I have seen with Dr. Swift several times, bears a most extraordinary resemblance to her. But I believe no one else has seen her, that knows you, and I am no gossip-monger.”

When Davies spoke of Lady Warrington, Charlie’s right hand had mechanically reached up on to his writing-desk and closed upon some letters which lay there. They were those from Lady Warrington to Lil. But he did not move his eyes from Davies’s face. Now he rose, white, with a sudden heat.

“Be kind enough to remember,” he said, “that Brough Warrington’s daughter was my wife, and keep your insinuations to yourself.”

“I do not forget it, I assure you,” said Davies very clearly. “Good-bye, old fellow,” he added, moving to the door; “I know when you have thought it over you will see how distinctly I have considered your interests in speaking to you first.”

He was gone, leaving Charlie standing there, his hand on the letters. He was utterly bewildered. He turned and looked

at the letters, took them up and read them again. Then he locked them away—safely—wishing he could lock his thoughts with them. But he could not. The lunch-bell rang. He went in to lunch, carrying his thoughts with him. They grew wilder with every passing moment. Before the meal was over, he had resolved to go and see Lady Warrington. He started up and went off, without explanation.

Mrs. Mainwaring began to think she would take a house of her own.



## CHAPTER XXI.

**T**HE next day, in the morning, Laurence came to Lil's new lodgings. He was told she was not at home. "Tell her it is Mr. Laurence," he said. The maid came back to show him up.

Lil was walking up and down the room, speaking Laurence's own words. On the next evening she was to make her first appearance in the new play; and sometimes she almost began to fear lest her own troubles and torments should drive the words out of her head. She paused and held out both her hands as he came in, with almost a smile on her face. "Why, what is the matter," she exclaimed, directly she saw him. He seemed uneasy, grave; and there was a new, questioning look in his eyes. It reminded her of her early acquaintance with him, when he was in doubt about her; she had seen it there then, sometimes, but never of late.

"Nothing," he said; "nothing is the matter; at least, nothing that concerns me. And yet; I cannot help thinking of it."

“It is something about me,” she cried, suddenly; “I can see it in your eyes!”

“I am afraid it is,” he answered, “and yet I don’t know, it may not be, and I find it so hard to believe.”

“Tell me what it is!” said Lil, steadily, now, but with her heart beating wildly with fear; “you know something of the danger I stand in, Mr. Laurence. It is kindest to tell me all of anything you may hear about me!”

“It was not about you,” he said, “not directly. It was about Dr. Swift.”

“What!” she exclaimed; “Speak! tell me!”

“There is a scandal about him,” said Laurence; “that he did something very queer a year or two ago, that he and a married woman, whose lover he had been, went through some farce of her being ill and dying, in order that they might get away quickly together. It is said that she has been seen in London with him; that she is now an actress!”

Lil had turned white under his gaze. But she stood steadily, looking at him with her clear eyes.

“Who told you this?” she asked.

“Are you determined to know?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Lady Warrington.”

“My God!” cried Lil, and sank into a

chair, helplessly, as if under a sudden blow. "Thank God my father is dead," she said; "he would have gone wild to hear her say that!"

"It is false, then!" exclaimed Laurence.

"Mr. Laurence," said Lil, quickly, "she did not tell you who that married woman was; did not mention her name?"

"No, no," he said.

"How could she suppose you knew Dr. Swift?" said Lil, anxiously.

"I think that gossip, Davies, had told her of it," said Laurence.

"He is at the bottom of it all," said Lil, in a tone of conviction; "but still it is strange she should talk to you about Dr. Swift—only that she is such a scandal-lover."

"And then she had just been talking to some one else about it when I went in," said Laurence; "a gentleman was with her; they had been talking about it. Her mind was full of it.

"A gentleman!" exclaimed Lil, turning white again; "oh, is she circulating this infamous lie? Can you tell me what he was like?"

"I did not notice him particularly; a handsome fellow, I remember."

"You did not hear his name?" asked Lil, in nervous anxiety. Every incident filled her with fear now.

"She called him something; what on

earth was it," said Laurence, trying to recollect. "He was very much upset about this affair, it seemed to me; he went directly I came, and she followed him to the door, saying, 'I'm really sorry you should have heard about this, Charlie;' ah, that was it; she called him Charlie."

Lil started to her feet and came close to him.

"Are you positive?" she said. "You are not mistaken?"

"Mistaken?" he repeated, in perplexity.

"What punishment!" she cried, suddenly, and seeming to grow taller as each wild word came out; "what retribution should come to that man who has followed me and been my evil fate, followed me with his loathly protestations of love, used his cruel power over me, and made me a by-word! I have tried to forgive him until now, but now they, the only people in the world who know me, whose respect or opinion I value, they have heard this tale, born of men's evil minds, based on that man's persecution of me! Oh, heaven punish him! make him suffer as I have suffered!"

Laurence was absolutely terrified by her manner, and the wild look in her eyes. But at this moment an interruption stayed the torrent of her words. The door was opened, and Dr. Swift stood on the threshold. She had not dared to hide herself from

him, or to bid them say "not at home." He had already been to see her in her new rooms, and now came in again.

She turned and flew at him almost like a wild creature. He fell back before her fury. She hurled her anger at him.

"I will bear it no longer," she cried, "go, and let me never see you again. My tongue is loosed, at last; you have made me suffer like a slave! I will bear it no longer. Go and tell what you choose, I can kill myself and would do that sooner than be subject to such base slanders. What! you my lover! I leave my home and a husband I respected for *you*! The first rough man in the streets would have more humanity in him than to persecute a miserable, lonely woman, and advertise himself, falsely, her lover, until the hideous lie reaches the ears of those whose respect she values. You have brought this misery, this humiliation, this last, final, unbearable sting upon me; you, with your hated company, your loathed attentions. Go and tell what you choose, I am strong enough to deny it. But you will not tell the truth! you are afraid! I know you are a sneak and a scoundrel, though you set up in a grand house and pretend to be respectable and honest. I could tell the world what a cruel tyrant, what a false wretch you can be. *You*, my lover! Oh, heavens, this

is the utmost insult, the heaviest cruelty, the world has for me. Go, I defy you, I am no longer your slave, afraid of you! No! I will defend myself. Go, and let me never see you again!"

Her passion was so tremendous that Swift, who was always afraid of her in his heart, retreated as she advanced and so backed out of the door. She pointed to the stairway as she spoke, with a gesture so resolute, so unmistakable, that he obeyed without a word and went away. She watched him go, then shut the door, and coming back into the room fell upon her knees. The tears came suddenly and relieved her frenzy. She knelt there, sobbing wildly. Laurence could bear it no longer. He came to her, lifted her up, and held her in his arms. At last her sobs ceased, and her head dropped.

"My darling," he said, "you cannot bear this. You are killing yourself. Come away with me, out of it all, and let me save your dear life!"

She disengaged herself slowly, and looked into his face.

"What," she said, "and let them believe that! Let them think I was all they say I am, that I was afraid of being found out and had run away because of *that*! No, I would much rather die. I cannot bear that. I will live it down."

She stepped back and sat down, a little away from him. There was an intense resolution on her face. Presently she held out her hand to him.

“Dear Edmund,” she said, “I hate that man; I love you! But the world only judges by appearances. It will couple my name with his, it will never know how I have been tempted by your dear love! But, thank God, I have loved you too well to let you sacrifice yourself to a wretched, disgraced woman, as I should have been, had the temptation been too strong for me. Those invisible bonds that have eaten like iron into my soul, I have not tried to break them! In this, at least, I have not offended against the morality of the world. I shall die easier for that, dear! How tired I am!”

She leaned back her head, and seemed almost to sleep, so great was her exhaustion. He looked anxiously at her; and then, kneeling down by her, took her hand and laid his cheek upon it. He knew, instinctively, how his touch, his presence, the mere consciousness of that tender love of his in which she could so deeply confide, soothed her.



## CHAPTER XXII.

**C**HARLIE NEWMAN went that same evening to find out old Mrs. Warrington. It had occurred to him that she was still living and might know something of this strange and terrible thing which had risen like an embodied horror from his past.

He found the old lady living in a quiet suburban cottage, and dying very, very slowly, of old age. It was quite surprising, considering how clear she was on the subject of her own salvation and the definiteness with which she anticipated heavenly joys, that she should have so strong a hold on life below and surrender it so slowly. She was very deaf and did not always know people. At first she took Charlie for somebody quite different, and he was about to go away in despair when, suddenly, she remembered who he was. She immediately began to abuse Lil, using all her old formulas, which she had applied to Lil ever since the child had been old enough to be scolded. She evidently forgot that Lil was dead. This came strangely upon Charlie in his present state of mind. He leaned

forward close to her. "Has she been to see you lately?" he asked.

"No, no," said the old lady, "she's an undutiful child, given up to heathen doings, like her father before her. But, Mr. Newman, what are you thinking of? My grandchild Lil's not living now; she died in her sins, poor child, spite of all my earnest prayers, and has gone to eternal flames and everlasting damnation."

One would scarcely have thought this to be a cheering reflection; yet Charlie gave a sigh of relief. But still he was not satisfied.

"I dare say you will think it very strange of me to ask you such a thing," he said, "but I have heard lately some insinuations about Lil, which I cannot believe—about Lil and Dr. Swift, and I want very much to ask you whether you believe them, as I do, to be false."

The old lady shook her head very solemnly.

"He was a bad fellow that Swift," she said, emphatically. She looked very witch-like when she spoke like this, for her nose and chin nearly met now. "He was a bad fellow, and I never could understand how Lil could like him. But there's no accounting for tastes. He led her into sad mischief, and I say to you, what I wouldn't say to everyone, that it was not right for a young

married woman to have him to the house as she did. I saw him come, I saw her send him away, because I was there, and I never forgave her for it. I gave her my mind then and never altered; I don't forgive easily," and the old lady bridled up with a vivid consciousness of uprightness and virtue, and heavenly rewards in store. Alas, poor Lil!

"Then you really think there was something between them?" said Charlie, sadly.

"Think!" said the old lady, putting all that volume of meaning into the word which old ladies can put into a single syllable, "I don't think about it; I grieve to say I know the girl was fond of him before her marriage. It was an unfortunate affair; she never should have seen him afterwards. But she did."

Charlie did not say anything for a minute. Then he began, hesitatingly,

"But you don't think she would have done anything rash, positively wild, you know."

The old lady interrupted him by holding up her hands, just as she used to when she saw Lil romping on the lawn with the dogs. She had begun with one fixed idea when Lil was born; that "the little thing would be sure to be queerly brought up," and, therefore, wicked; and that idea had never altered. The little thing *was*

queerly brought up ; according to Gran's notions, therefore, was wicked.

" My dear friend," she said, solemnly, holding her hands high in holy horror, " don't ask me. I don't wish to speak ill of the dead. But I must confess that Lil was a very foolish, headstrong, young woman. Nothing you tell me of her would surprise me. Her father would never listen to advice or counsel, nor would she. I tried in vain to guide or help her in the right path."

Granny paused. In the silence that followed, Charlie only sighed, a little out of disappointment, a little out of the feeling that Lil had been, indeed, a friendless girl, if this old lady's was the only mother's love she had known.

Mrs. Warrington was tired with talking so much. She shook her head, half of purpose, but partly from weakness. Presently Charlie heard her saying something indistinctly.

" She would not listen nor give heed to Moses and the prophets ; Jehovah is just ; he will punish her and chastise her for her sins. She will be devoured by eternal flames, without a drop of water to cool her burning tongue."

Charlie rose abruptly to take his departure. In his present excited state of mind this sort of thing preyed upon his nerves ; and he saw that he could obtain nothing more from the old lady. Indeed, she was wandering in mind again ; and, when her mind was clear, he doubted if her

word was worth much. She had not a good one to say for Lil; but he began to see that this was really because she had always been prejudiced against her. Still, what she had said had made a strong impression on his mind, as words will when one is in a state of great uncertainty. He began to remember how unconventional Lil really was; how little afraid of consequences. After all, she might have been tempted to some desperate act, for he had not forgotten what a miserable time it was just before her death or disappearance.

He went home perfectly miserable. Mrs. Mainwaring had not been out to take a house, but had sat at home all the afternoon wondering what had come over these two. She saw at once that Charlie was in as unpromising a state of mind, for any social purposes, as when he went out.

"Charlie," she said to him, suddenly, "what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing," he said, and went away. Presently Adelaide came in. Mrs. Mainwaring put the same question to her and got the same reply.

"I believe you are both out of your minds," said Mrs. Mainwaring, with decision; "I should go away, only I begin to think someone ought to be here to look after you."

"Why," said Adelaide, turning quickly, "is there anything wrong with Charlie?"

“Look at him at dinner,” was Mrs. Mainwaring’s reply. Adelaide followed this advice, forced back her own thoughts, and watched him carefully. Mrs. Mainwaring went away to her own room after dinner, leaving the two alone; indeed, they were not very exhilarating company.

Adelaide went straight to him and touched him with her soft warm hand. “I have heard it too,” she said.

He started and looked up into her face; she was regarding him with steady, fearless eyes. She had a power over him, which Lil never had after the enthusiasm of their first early love was dead. Adelaide, by her peculiar quiet warmth of character, stilled his nervous irritability of temperament, when Lil would only have suffered from contact with it. Adelaide exercised this power now. He felt strengthened by her sympathy. But, while he looked in her face, he remembered what all this might mean to her, and he could not talk to her of it. He kissed the hand she had laid on his, and then went away, without a word, out of the room, out of the house, into the street, that the cold air might stir and revive him.

Adelaide, meantime, sat down alone a little while, but, after a few minutes, the solitude proved unbearable. She went upstairs, and wept hot tears upon her baby’s pillow.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

N the following day Charlie and Adelaide again went out separately. Mrs. Mainwaring saw that the mysterious cloud was still over them and asked no questions. Adelaide was pursuing her old search. She went to the stage-door once more and tried to get Miss Winter's new address from the door-keeper. But he had promised Miss Winter, and as that lady was a favourite with him, he resisted Adelaide's entreaties and bribes. Then she went round to the box-office intending to take tickets for the evening. She must see this woman, if only on the stage.

Every seat in the house taken a week ago! Laurence was a favourite and successful dramatist, with great influence, and the management had supported Miss Winter with an admirable company. Everybody meant to be at the first night of this new play.

Disappointed to the last degree, Adelaide went home. She found Charlie had just come in.

He, too, was disappointed. He had been awake all night thinking over this extraordinary thing. As the morning came he un-

derwent a revulsion of feeling. It appeared that all this was a nightmare, a thing which had fastened on his brain in the dark hours. It was impossible—it was a mad fancy. He went, immediately after breakfast, to tell Lady Warrington that he utterly disbelieved the whole thing, that, the more he thought of it, the more his knowledge of Lil's character convinced him this scandal was untrue; he wanted to implore her to contradict it. Lady Warrington was out. Disappointed there, he went to find Davies. He was not to be found. He went home, resolving to write to them both. While he sat at his table, his head on his hands, Adelaide came in, and, with a gentle touch, expressed her silent sympathy. He turned and looked into her face, and saw a new look of misery and anxiety there.

He held out his arms to her.

“I do not believe it!” he said, emphatically.

There was a knock at the door. A moment and Alfred Davies was announced. Charlie rose and walked towards him.

“I am glad you have come,” he said. “I shall repeat what I have just said—what I came to you this morning to say. I do not believe it!”

“Oh, you don't?” said Davies, with a slightly contemptuous tone, veiled under a sort of sympathetic air. “I am glad of that.”

Adelaide rose to leave the room. Charlie stayed her by a gesture.

“Don’t go away,” he said. “No,” he went on, turning again to Davies, “I do not believe it, and I’ve been thinking this morning what purpose you can have had in concocting such a villainous affair. You primed Lady Warrington very well, but you have not taken me in; you told her all she knows. You have always been desirous of getting into my shoes; I suppose you are jealous of my boy now. That child is my rightful heir, Alfred; this lie of yours will not help you.”

Davies had lost his temper, but he was determined not to show it. His game was to be as angelic as possible.

“Don’t use strong language,” he said, gently, “till you are sure you are in the right.”

“In the right?” said Charlie, angrily. “I know I am! You are a wretch to start a base slander against a dead woman who cannot defend herself. But she has left a memory behind her. She was my wife, and I know she was a true woman. Adelaide knew her, and knew her to be a lady in the highest sense. She would never have put herself in the power of that scoundrel Swift,—she could not have loved a fellow like that. Men, like you, who are everlastingly mixed up with fast women, believe they are all alike. I tell you, you are wrong. If you can’t keep your

scandalous tongue quiet, leave the dead alone. Lil was a pure woman, beyond your understanding. There's the door, Alfred; I'm sorry to have to do this, but it can't be helped."

Davies did not go. He stood still, giving an uneasy look at Adelaide. She saw he wanted her away and this determined her, notwithstanding the painfulness of the scene, to stay. Presently, he said, without looking at Charlie, "Will you go to the theatre with me to-night, old fellow? This thing's harassing your mind, and you don't know what you're at."

Charlie deigned no reply, but turned on his heel and walked away. It seemed to him mere frivolity, this speech.

But, to his surprise, Adelaide exclaimed, "What theatre, Mr. Davies?"

Charlie turned back to look at her in amazement. He had imagined she did not care for theatres.

Davies did not answer, so Charlie spoke again.

"This is nonsense," he said, impatiently. "I don't want to go to the theatre—certainly not."

"But," said Davies, "this might interest you."

"Mr. Davies," cried Adelaide, "do tell me what theatre it is."

"The *Favourite*," said Davies, reluctantly.

"I thought so," said Adelaide. "You must take me. I must go. I have tried to get

seats to-day, and every seat in the house was taken."

"I have had this a week," said Davies.

"Is it a box, then?" exclaimed Adelaide.  
"Oh, then you can take me. Yes, yes, we will go."

"What does all this mean?" said Charlie, in increased amazement. "You have been trying to get seats for this theatre, Adelaide? What for, may I ask?"

"Because—" said Adelaide, "there—she—"

"What!" cried Charlie, in sudden excitement, "the one Davies has seen——?"

"Yes," said Davies.

"Good God!" said Charlie, "does she act there?"

"Yes," said Davies. "Will you go?"

"Yes," was all Charlie's answer. He put his arm round Adelaide and drew her towards him. It seemed as though they must help each other through this coming ordeal. Then he rang the bell. "I will tell them what time to have the carriage ready," he said, in a sort of feverish impatience. "What time is the play?"

"Eight o'clock," said Davies. "Good-bye; I will meet you at the theatre."

He took his departure, feeling a strong disposition to vent his ill-humour on the servant he met in the hall. He would have liked to kick him down the steps. But it would be better not to. Never mind; he told himself

that there was no doubt about this Miss Winter being Lil ; at all events, the likeness was strong enough to startle any one to whom the idea was already suggested. He promised himself he would not spare Charlie when once he had frightened him—he would put the screw on then !

It seemed to these two, Charlie and Adelaide, that the dinner lasted an interminable length of time this evening. Neither could eat, but they tried to, and tried also to talk to Mrs. Mainwaring. But it was evident to her that they had a trouble which they did not choose to confide to her. She accepted the situation as graciously as might be, like a woman of the world.

At last the carriage was announced. Adelaide drew on her cloak, and put a trembling hand under Charlie's arm. They got into the carriage in silence, and drove through the lighted streets in silence. Adelaide leaned back in her corner with a strange and heavy feeling of coming misfortune upon her. It was impossible to rouse herself to any ordinary thoughts, the experience before her was so extraordinary.

Davies was waiting for them on the steps of the theatre. He had not wanted Adelaide, because he felt he could play better upon Charlie without her influence. But he had summoned all his politeness now ; he felt he must not make an enemy of her. And it occurred to

him that her presence might serve as an excuse for not attempting to go behind or see Miss Winter any closer.

If these three could but have looked in on the actress, the Miss Winter who was the heroine of the evening, as she sat in her dressing-room! Shivering, pale with fear, her ambition, her dread of an audience, her terror of the critics, all drowned by another greater, more absorbing emotion, by a more overpowering fear. Of what!—of her pursuers. Here she was, preparing herself to face the public, knowing that those who were following her, making themselves her terror, might be at any time a portion of this public. She knew this only too well. When another actress would have awakened at night seeing herself successful—or failing—Lil had started from her dreams seeing before her one known face among an audience of strangers, a face too terribly familiar—the face of her husband. For nights this sight had haunted her as if some warning were given her. But that warning was in vain. She must keep to her post. A dozen reasons held her fast. Last, but not least, of these reasons had come the dogged determination to deny the scandal which connected her name with Swift. That Lil, whom she had once been, that Lil, honoured and loved by her friends, should not suffer by so base, so ugly a calumny. She knew too well that innocent

women, who struggle against cruel circumstances, are credited on the least doubtfulness of appearance with frailty. Her pride rose furious against the thought that Charlie, to whom she had given her life, that Adelaide, for whom she had sacrificed herself, should be made to believe so horrid a lie. She could see, as she thought of it, how credible the thing might be made to seem to them. This thought gave her strength, gave her power to conquer her fears.

This woman, who suffered so—who shrank from her pursuers like a hunted criminal—what was she? One who had given up her all to make those she loved happy. And this terrible, humiliating fear was what the world had to reward her with!

At last she was dressed. She had completed the very last touches when she was called. One look into the glass—no, this was not Lil. It was a new being, it was Amy Davenant, the suffering, heroic, wretched wife, the heroine whom Laurence had conceived, and she had completed. She felt her own individuality pass away and this other rise up within her. At that call to the stage, all the actress rose within her, strong, full of her art, determined to conquer. She left her dressing-room and walked forward to the wings, with a strange feeling that here she was in her place, that here she was proud, fearless. The faces in the house became one great blur in her eyes,

the footlights at her feet bounded her world. But that world, how large it was! On those boards she had the drama, she had the range of her art. She felt inspired and enlarged as she stepped forward to speak those words which, until now, had been doubly dear to her as Laurence's—now suddenly had become something greater, a medium for her own expression.

What the audience saw was an actress who singled herself out instantly from all the others on the stage, whose low, penetrating voice thrilled the house with the emotion in it; whose every gesture was full of meaning. At once she seized the whole attention of the house and held it fast. The other actors about her suddenly became mere adjuncts. She had so taken the character she acted into herself, she so completely understood it, and all the emotions of a crushed, bruised, deserted love, that, in the first few moments of her entrance, everyone, even those who had rehearsed with her, became aware that she had taken a great step on this evening, and placed herself in the front ranks of her art.

Upon the occupants of a certain box the entrance of this actress had an extraordinary effect. Adelaide and Charlie both sat perfectly still, paralyzed, scarcely able to breathe. Both knew in an instant that this was the woman upon whom the extraordinary suspicion rested. There was no mistaking her. Something in the

carriage and delicate quick movements unquestionably suggested Lil. But when they had realized this there came a strange sensation upon both. This was nothing more than a likeness, a resemblance such as might be met with any day. And each experienced an immediate incredulity of Davies's belief. So completely changed was Lil's general appearance by dress, make up, and cultivation of manner, that Charlie looked at her in perplexity that any one should have entertained such an idea as that she was Lil. But still he was spell-bound by the strange experience, which he was undergoing. And Adelaide was incapable of speech or motion. Only Davies watched the stage with any general or ordinary interest.

Gradually Adelaide became aware of the action of the story. Lil's passionate, heartfelt acting aroused her to a sense of what this acting meant. Lil had to tell the story she was best fitted to tell, to express the agony of a wife, whose husband—the husband she still loves with all the tenacity of a faithful heart—wearies of her. Her sense of degradation, her wounded pride, when she gradually realised that her love was wasted, unfelt, unappreciated, when she saw that the man to whom she was bound by law and love had no longer eyes or thought for her—all this was depicted with a startling reality. Then came a terrible and powerful speech, in which the

unhappy wife suddenly rages against the law which makes it her duty to follow out what seems to her the lower and more selfish instinct of her nature, to hold her husband, to demand his love, to deny him his freedom. Here the actress rose tremendous, and became more than the actress—became the real woman, impassioned by wrongs which have seared her own life.

Charlie, listening so intently that he forgot all else, was startled by a sudden touch. It was Adelaide. He was amazed to look in her face. The tears were running down it.

“I am going,” she said. “I cannot bear it. I shall make a scene. I will go home. I will take the carriage and send it back; do not move.”

But he would go with her. He was frightened by her face. Just then the curtain fell, and it was easy to take her down and call for the carriage. She clung tremblingly to him. “I will come home with you,” he said.

“No, no!” she answered. “See it out, and see her closer if you can. Promise me that. I am going that I may not be in the way, for I am unnerved to-night, and all that seems like a picture of her sufferings—oh! so terrible.”

“Do not be foolish, dear child,” he said. “Davies is mistaken. It is only a resemblance.”

“Do you think so?” said Adelaide, eagerly. “I think so, too; but yet I cannot bear to see

that strange likeness and to hear those terrible words of pain from her. There is the carriage ; I am glad, for I can hardly stand. I shall not be asleep when you come home ; I shall wait to hear if you have seen her closer."

The carriage drove away, and Charlie went slowly back into the theatre and to his box. He felt like a man in a dream. The people he met appeared as though they were phantoms. What world was he living in ?

The curtain had risen, and Amy Davenant was again on the stage. She seized upon the audience again with the same electric power ; thrilled them, wrung tears from them. Charlie sat through the act, scarce knowing what he listened to or what he saw. It was all a wonder to him with this strange resemblance bewildering his mind.

But, as the curtain fell, he leaned back and said to Davies, "It is not she." He spoke with an air of such conviction that Davies could not keep the disappointment out of his face. He looked away that Charlie might not see it.

"Never mind," he said to himself ; "if he is obstinate I must make them meet face to face."

In the meantime, an enthusiastic house was calling for Miss Winter. She came out on the opposite side of the curtain and moved towards the box in which Charlie and Davies were sitting. Charlie leaned right forward to look at

her. He was very near the stage. As she paused to bow to the house, she raised her eyes and met his full upon her.

For a long instant that look was interchanged. It was the strangest instant either ever lived through. Lil was absolutely paralysed. She had not seen him before—she had no idea of his presence. Suddenly, she met his eyes straight looking into hers. It took consciousness away from her. The actor who had come in front of the curtain with her took her hand and led her off, else she might have remained there like one petrified.

Charlie, when she had gone, leaned back like one utterly exhausted, completely amazed.

He had seen the flash of recognition in those eyes. He had felt the familiarity of those dark eyes, unchangeable by any disguise. Those were Lil's eyes. He was convinced of it—more, he knew it. He could not speak—he could hardly breathe. Before he could in any degree collect himself, the curtain rose again. By the exercise of tremendous will-power Lil had nerved herself, and stepped on to the stage once more as Amy Davenant. She alone could guess what this cost her, and she guessed it but dimly. She was using her very nerve life, exhausting the fountain of her being.

The third act was a very heavy one for her. She had to kill herself in order to liberate her

husband, and it was a scene which only an actress of the first rank could render properly. But Lil went through it like a genius on fire. The whole story and agony flamed in her mind, and she gave it out in searching words and burning glances. At last the house rose at her, thundering its applause; and, meantime, Amy Davenant, lying a corpse, dead by her own hand, when the curtain fell on her, lay motionless, as though really dead. The other actors executed a little spontaneous dance of delight when the curtain fell and concealed them from the applauding audience, but Lil lay still and motionless. She was called for—shouted for—she did not move. At last, when she heard her name repeated again, she started from the ground and ran to her dressing-room, where she fell, utterly exhausted.

The manager followed her. "You must go on!" he said. "They will have it."

She only moaned, and buried her face in the cushions. Laurence had come to the door of her room, and was about to plead for her. But at that moment he heard his name called as well as hers. "Author! Author!" rang out from the house.

"I will go on," he said, hurriedly. "If they call for her I shall tell them she is ill."

But Laurence's appearance satisfied them for the moment. He bowed to vociferous applause. When he had come off, cries for Miss

Winter were raised again, but they gradually died away, cooled down perhaps by the rapid putting out of the gas in the cheaper parts of the theatre, a trick in which subordinates seem to delight.

Charlie, meantime, had caught Davies by the arm.

“We must get behind,” he said. “I must see her close!”

Davies looked at him, and thought it better to say nothing, but quietly lead on. He knew the way very well, though he did not choose to say so. Charlie was intensely excited, too much so to ask any questions. He only felt that he must meet this woman, and he hurried out of the box, intending to ask the way. But Davies went straight to a certain door, and asked an attendant who stood near to unlock it for him. The girl hesitated.

“It is all right,” said Davies. “I am going to congratulate Miss Winter; she knows me very well.”

The girl unlocked the door, with a smile. Davies walked through some narrow passages, Charlie following him. Suddenly they emerged upon the stage. Then Davies turned quickly, and went up two or three steps. They were at a closed door.

“What is this?” asked Charlie.

“Her dressing-room,” answered Davies.

Charlie immediately went up a step or two to get close to it, pushing him aside. Voices

were heard inside. Suddenly the door opened, and one of the other actresses came quickly out, followed by the manager. They had all thought Miss Winter was dying, but she had partially recovered, and now they were intent upon getting ready to leave the theatre. In the doorway stood two figures. One was Lil, still in her stage-dress, though she had thrown off the wig which had hidden her black hair. Beside her, a little out of sight, stood Laurence. Charlie advanced a step; Lil turned and faced him, eye to eye. It was an extraordinary experience. Charlie forgot everything but that Lil, his old, well-loved, brown-eyed Lil, stood before him! He became unconscious of where they stood, of the presence of any others—the years had vanished—other ties had vanished!

“You are Lil,” he said.

She stood like one whose very breathing was frozen. A strange trance or delusion appeared to her to be upon her. Before her stood her husband, the man whom now, she realised, she still loved best, as faithful hearts always cling to their earliest love. Here was Charlie, her lover, her husband, her own! To her, too, the years had vanished. Why did she not fling herself into his arms, nestle into her old place, rest once more in that dear rest that was her own?

Her hand had been on Laurence's arm when Charlie spoke. Suddenly, Laurence felt it con-

tracted so that he could scarcely bear the pressure. Lil had remembered, with a sensation as of a stab in her heart, that, though united by love, by familiarity, by religious bonds, by links of iron, to this man before her, she was a stranger to him.

"Excuse me," she said. "I do not understand. You are under some strange mistake."

She turned back into the room, took up a large hooded cloak which lay on a chair, wrapped it round her, and drew the hood over her head.

"Good-night," she said to Laurence. Then she passed the others, giving Davies an icy bow, as slight as possible. She walked away alone across the stage, leaving the three men standing there. Laurence stepped down past the other two. Charlie touched him as he went by.

"Tell me, in God's name, if you know, who is that lady?"

Laurence looked at him—looked beyond him at Davies.

"You are very mysterious and melodramatic, sir," he answered. "That lady is Miss Winter, from to-night one of the most popular actresses on the stage."

Without another word, Charlie turned and walked away in the direction which Miss Winter had taken. Laurence looked after him, and wondered what to do. His heart

ached for this defenceless woman. He guessed that this man was her husband, he could see that the ordeal she had had to undergo was too great for her strength. As a woman, he loved her; as an artist, he adored her. He longed to shield her from these torments which shook her whole being and wore out her strength. Ah, if he might but take her home, and shut her door in the face of everyone else! If he might but protect her from all that disturbed her! What could he do?—nothing.

He walked moodily out of the theatre, and through the streets. He hardly knew where he was going; he was absorbed in thought.

But, presently, he found himself standing—listening—looking. What did he hear? What did he see? He was gazing at a house, of which two windows on the ground floor were brilliantly lit. One of these windows were wide open to admit the heavy night air. He heard voices, and one of them went to his heart. Its low, penetrating tones pierced his being. He detected the suffering which underlay the subdued accents of that voice.

His feet had carried him to the house where Miss Winter lived. In that lighted room her maid had prepared her coffee and some slight supper. It all stood untasted. The actress had not come home to rest. She was still acting. She was using all her powers.

Laurence crossed to the side of the road

farthest from the house. From there he could see her. She was standing with one hand on the mantel-shelf, her head turned over her shoulder to speak to some one who seemed to be moving about the room. Suddenly, this other person came in the range of Laurence's vision. It was Charlie Newman. "Poor child!" escaped involuntarily from Laurence's lips. From the depths of his soul he pitied her. He understood now that look on her face, a proud, strange look, as of a queen who denies her right.

She was speaking now with that expression on her lips. Charlie turned suddenly away with a violent gesture. Laurence saw her whole face melt and change—an agony come into it—a despairing, yearning, hungry look, as of a creature starved. For one wild instant she stretched out her hands passionately, entreatingly, then hastily covered her face with them.

Laurence heard a sound; the house door opened and shut quickly. He indistinctly saw Charlie Newman striding down the street.

He could restrain himself no longer. He crossed and knocked gently at the door. The maid, who was waiting up to help Lil undress, opened it. She was a new servant, whom Lil had engaged when her salary increased sufficiently. But she had been with her long enough to know Mr. Laurence was a friend.

"Sir," she said, "I am afraid Miss Winter

is ill. I don't know what to do. Come in and see her. I think I must go for a doctor."

Without answering, he strode across the hall and went into the room where Lil was. She had fallen upon her knees, and was leaning on a chair, her hands pressed tight against her side. She seemed unable to speak—hardly to breathe.

"What do you feel?" asked Laurence.

"This pain here," she said, feebly. "I have had it before, but not so badly. It is killing me!"

"What do you mean!" exclaimed Laurence. "Killing you?—nonsense—yes, go for a doctor," he said, turning to the maid, who instantly left the room.

"No, no," said Lil. "It is not worth while—I know I am dying."

Laurence raised his hands and shook them wildly, as though menacing the fate which pursued her.

"Why could you not have loved me and lived for me?" he cried, desperately. "God! that a woman like you should die in such a way! It makes me mad!"

"I am dying," repeated Lil, faintly. "I have done my best. Oh! that I had his forgiveness—for one word of love from him before I die!"

Laurence would have done anything for her at that moment.

"Let me fetch him back," he said, leaning

over her to hear her indistinct words. But she suddenly grew distinct.

“What! waste the agony of this last hour, in which alone, face to face with my husband, whom I have loved, whom I still love, to whom I have sacrificed my life, and to whom I have been true to the last—waste the torture of this hour, in which, alone with him and under the eye of God, I told the one lie of my life, and swore that I was not myself!—swore it, that he might still be happy—that his wife might—oh, God!—no, no—I have lived without him—I can die without him!”

She had half risen from her knees with the excitement of her words. Now she fell forward, speechless and exhausted. She seemed to Laurence to be dying before his eyes. He grew wild with the sense of impotence. He knelt beside her, kissed her hands and her hair. Suddenly she roused herself, and spoke again.

“Edmund,” she said, “you have learned my secret; keep it, if you love me. Swear, that when I am in my grave, it shall be safe as though you did not know it.”

“I swear it,” he answered, solemnly.

A smile slowly came upon her lips. Her deep confidence in him gave her a sense of happiness. Suddenly, a cry broke from her lips. “Ah, the pain!” She stretched out her hands to him with a look of agony in her eyes. There was a little foam on her

lips. He wiped it away, and held her head against his breast. At this moment the servant came back with a doctor.

The doctor took her from Laurence, and laid her down on the floor, with a cushion under her head. He loosened her dress, and then asked for some brandy. While the maid got it, he was examining Lil attentively. When the girl came with the brandy he poured some out, and put into it a few drops from a bottle he had with him.

“What is that?” asked Laurence.

“Laudanum,” he answered, as he put some between her lips. “It will ease the pain a little for her. I can’t do more for her than that; but that is something.”

“What!” cried Laurence. “What do you mean? Can you not save her?”

The doctor only shook his head, and went on administering his laudanum and brandy. Presently, Lil opened her eyes and looked at Laurence. He saw in the earnest gaze of those beautiful brown eyes, something which he had never seen in human eyes before. It was farewell. In that look there was love, confidence, trust. She was passing away into the eternal, knowing that she left upon earth this one man who would be faithful to her trust, who would respect her memory.

She closed her eyes again with a faint moan. The doctor went over and watched her face awhile. Presently he looked up to Laurence.

“She is gone,” he said.

Laurence turned his eyes upon the motionless form, but he could not see it. What he saw was that last gaze of the escaping spirit. There was a tie now between this man in the finite, and that unknown world of the infinite beyond. Somewhere, that sweet spirit still looked to him to love her, to be true to her.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

**A**BOUT ten o'clock the next morning Charlie Newman knocked at the door of the house which he had visited so late last night. He had not slept in the interval; and with the morning his own conviction grew in strength, and he disbelieved what he had been told. He came, as early as was just decent, to once more tax this woman with being something other than she claimed to be, and resolute to force the truth from her lips.

He looked up, noticing that all the blinds were down. "She is late this morning," he thought. "Never mind, I will wait till she is ready to see me."

The maid opened the door, looking worn out with the experiences of the past night. Charlie asked for Miss Winter. The girl admitted him into the hall and shut the door before she answered.

"She is dead, sir," she said. "She died suddenly last night, after you had gone. We got a doctor, but it was no use."

Charlie stood still a moment or two, completely staggered. But, presently, he recovered himself sufficiently to speak. "Do

you think I might see her," he said, hesitatingly. "I should like to, very much."

The maid turned, opened a door very gently, and went inside. He heard her whisper with someone. Then she came out and said, "Yes, sir; in here."

He followed her; she showed him into a dim-lit room and then went out herself. He stood a moment, confused. It was the same room he had been in last night. How changed—how different!

Something white lay on the table; in the midst of it he could discern the outline of a form; that sharp, clear outline which only a dead form can make. It was half hidden by white flowers. Laurence had been laying them there. He stood at the other side of the table. He drew back now and went to the window.

Charlie approached the table very slowly. For a moment he felt unnerved by the position. A horror came upon him of that grim death, which had snatched away this woman at the supreme moment of her success, with an untold secret in her bosom.

He conquered himself, and, leaning over the table, gently drew back the cloth which covered her face. Ah, how beautiful it was, with that smile, so infinitely sweet, upon her lips. How like Lil now!—for the dead face had taken on a look of youth. Charlie was appalled, spell-bound.

“Can it be!” he said to himself. “Is it possible!” He longed to kiss her face, but dared not; he wanted to kiss it for Lil’s sake; but this motionless form, with the mysterious smile upon its lips, terrified him. If this was not Lil’s form, how strange, how terrible the likeness!—if it was, how much more terrible the reality! He shuddered as he stood gazing on the silent, beautiful face. The dead lay motionless for ever, the life-secret safe and unrevealed.

He lifted a lock of the dark hair and put it to his lips. He had forgotten Laurence’s presence in the room; did not know how keenly he was being watched.

Very gently, Charlie put back the cloth over the fair dead face and left the room. He could bear it no longer.

No word passed between the two men. But when Charlie had gone, Laurence came back, drew off the cloth and passionately kissed the white forehead.

“My darling!” he said, “how I could have hurt him had I chosen to speak. But I will keep your secret and bring it safe to you when we meet again.”

Four days after that there was a quiet little funeral at the Brompton Cemetery, where so many favourites of the stage lie stilled for ever.

Laurence had managed it, and refused to announce the hour in order to prevent the

crowd of outside admirers from coming to gaze on the coffin of the great actress snatched away at the very hour when her genius became visible. But the affair had naturally created a good deal of excitement, and, notwithstanding all Laurence's care, there were many strangers in the churchyard. The coffin was an absolute mass of flowers; those flowers which should have fallen on the stage at her feet were sent to cover her dead form.

Laurence, as he approached the grave, saw another man draw close to it. He recognised Swift; and for a moment felt an intense desire to tell him not to insult the dead by his presence. But another glance silenced him. Swift's face was working with emotion. The rough, harsh nature had been cut painfully by the death of this woman, for whom he had always entertained an extraordinary feeling, whose hold over him had been lifelong. Though, with his native cruelty, he had embittered her existence, yet, at her grave he stood, undoubtedly, a genuine mourner.

It fulfilled the character of the latter part of this unhappy woman's life that the only two who felt a right to approach her grave were two men utterly unconnected with her by any tie.

When the ceremony was over, two other persons came close, while those scattered about the cemetery gathered a little nearer

to see the earth thrown in upon the flowers which lay so thick over the coffin.

Laurence recognised, in one of these persons, Alfred Davies; the other was a lady, with a veil on her face.

Davies stood morosely gazing into the grave. The game was played out; the dead had won, and he had lost! He had no proof that this new-made grave contained the body of Lil Newman, instead of that other made long ago!

The outer circle of mourners were watching sadly the earth as it was shovelled in. It seemed a cruel, a horrible thing to them that the fair, brilliant actress, burning with genius, should die at the very moment when her glory was commencing.

Suddenly, Adelaide put back her veil and came close to Laurence. She saw that he held some relation to the dead woman which none of the others had. A sudden impulse made her speak.

"In the name of heaven," she said, "tell me, if you know, who was this woman that lies buried here?"

Davies and Swift drew closer when they saw her movement. Laurence found himself in the midst of a little circle. He looked round at the faces about him before he spoke.

"I can only tell you that she was an actress who would have been great had she lived;

and that she was a brave and virtuous woman. The world is cruel; and, perhaps, it is best that she was cut down on the very eve of her career, and in the flower of her youth. No more can be said; let us leave, reverently, the grave of a pure woman and a true heart."

Adelaide, looking in his face, read there that he had spoken his last word. She turned away, her heart sick with fear and wonder.

Swift gave a gesture of impatience, and hastily walked out of the cemetery. The motives of the dead woman's actions had always been a mystery to him; they were so, still.

Davies paused a moment, and smiled as he looked down in the grave. "Bah," he said to himself, "if people are such fools as not to know how to sin within the law—why, they must suffer."

The grass grows green over that grave now. The white cross which stands at its head bears the name of a forgotten actress, who died too young for fame.

THE END.