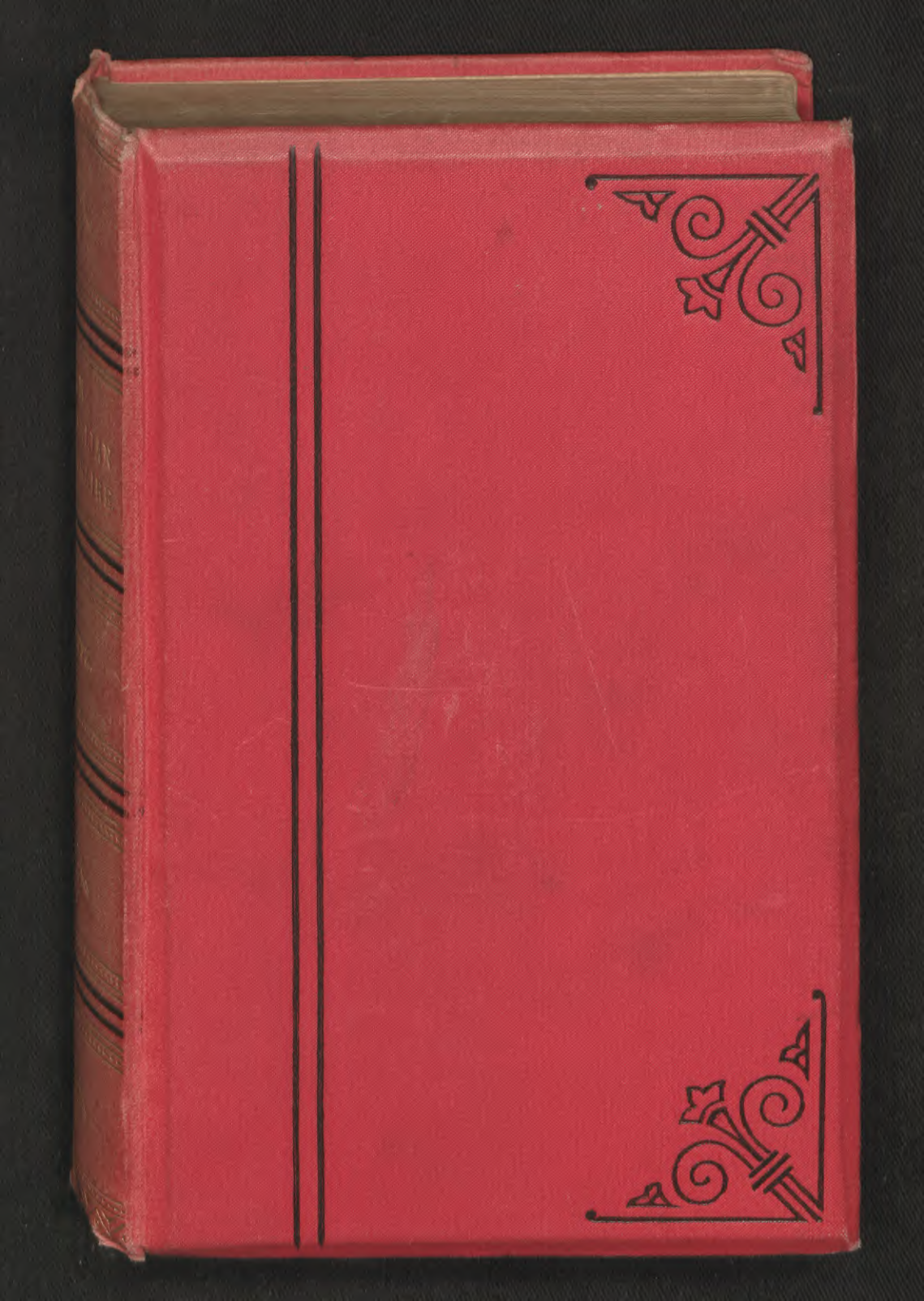
AN
AUSTRALIAN
MILLIONAIRE.

BLITZ.



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BY

MRS. A. BLITZ.

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AN AUSTRALIAN MILLIONAIRE

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE BRIDE AND THE BETROTHED.

'WITH this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow.' Thus spake the bridegroom.

The die was cast, the irrevocable vows were recorded, and the bride and bridegroom were in the vestry in the act of signing the requisite papers.

The bride sat at a table under the full glare of a window facing her—sat pen in hand, and in her sheeny pearly robe, mantled by the marriage veil of rare lace, now thrown back from, and framing, a milk-white, oval face, with a double scarlet line, curved and voluptuous, marking the mouth, with a luxuriant crown of a coil of hair—fair and rich as raw silk—of the faintest tint of amber, in which a twinkling comb of sapphires and diamonds caught and secured the lacy fall flowing from the bridal wreath. Her nostrils, pink and clearly cut, were slightly dilated; her full, wide, sweeping lids were now drooped as she held the pen within her firm white, ungloved hand to dash her maiden name off for the last time with an exceptional boldness and decision. That being done, the lids were swiftly raised to disclose eyes clear as the topaz, and of a

neutral blue, yet taking a pale green tint, under the strong morning light flashed from the window.

In the whole aspect exultation spoke as she put the pen from her with the manner of a triumphant soldier clinking his victorious sword back to its sheath.

The bridegroom, however, evinced some signs of agitation as his pen gave forth a loose, scrawling, spluttering signature, and the name of JEREMIAH GOLDWIN stood revealed.

He was dressed in broadcloth and the finest of lawn, with diamond studs, breast-pin, and solitaires. His left hand was cased in white kid; his right was bared for the task of writing, and was coarse, knotty, and prolific in hair. He was tall, heavily framed, with a slight stoop, and his head covered with a stiff crop of pale-brown hair dotted with patches of iron-gray till it was more piebald than anything else. His face was round and red, and so perseveringly shaven that a blue-purple tint ran through cheeks and chin, where the strong hairy tendency was determined to assert itself in tiny painful hirsute points. He was a man long past his prime, while his bride was something like thirty-five years his junior.

Their surroundings were peculiar.

A pair of elderly couples officiated as the respective parents of bride and bridegroom. There were a couple of bridesmaids, foils for the bride in their conspicuous want of personal attractions, and a best man who looked older, but was more than ten years younger, than the bridegroom—a seedy-looking personage, who might reasonably have impressed the spectators with the idea that he was an impromptu appendage hurriedly called upon with no time allowed for attention to toilette.

His contrast to the company rendered him attractive for once in his life.

He was a long, lean, mummy-skinned man, with ferret, sunken eyes under a low forehead, with sleek hair and a long brown beard which crept up to his cheekbones and over his lips—a perfect tangle, trespassing wherever it possibly could—the upper portion of his face peeping as it were out of the jungle. This was Washington Larry—no impromptu attendant, but the sworn friend of the bridegroom—an American by birth, an Australian by nature, and generally addressed as Wash. He was dressed entirely in rusty-black—funereal rather

than festive, in the absence of anything bright—he only needed a crape band on his arm to heighten the impression of mourning, for even his hands hid away their veiny parchment-coloured lean ugliness in a most respectable pair of black cotton gloves. This completed the wedding group—quite a motley one—for which a couple of carriages stood in readiness without the church porch, with ribboned whips and decorated horses, where a crowd had collected and awaited to see the exit of the party as it had witnessed its entrance.

A number had scrambled and smuggled into the church during the ceremony, and one individual in particular had walked up as far as he dared to watch the better the beautiful bride, but neither to admire nor criticise. He was quite a young man—tall, slender, wiry, and of excellent physique. His form was erect; his face fair as a girl's, but deathly pale now; his brows dark and straight, but so knitted under present passion that they met almost in one even line over keen hazel eyes which were fixed on the bride with no expression of goodwill; while his mouth wore a mocking smile, partly hidden by a thick, soft, well-arched moustache drooping below his chin. He followed her as she left the altar, and watched her again as she sat under the blaze of light from the vestry window pen in hand; and as she wrote, his hand for a second became a fist with cord-like veins, but held stiffly at his side as if it grasped a dagger. The next moment it relaxed, and he strode moodily away from church and street. Nobody noticed him. Everybody was eulogistic about the bride, so bewitching, and had no eyes for aught else.

Far away from the church, however, somebody was thinking of him very seriously, very anxiously; a very unimportant somebody, and yet an important part of a whole, since she must be one of the supports of this history—and this was Priscilla Glade, or, as her mother called her, 'Cilla. She was no heroine, but a simple, credulous, confiding young person who might have been fooled over and over again in blissful ignorance. The world teems with such women.

She was not beautiful or bewitching, but was not without a certain prettiness, for she had limpid brown eyes, a clear skin of the brunette type, and cheeks faintly tinted with pink, a button of a mouth, rosy and fresh, and a graceful form of *petite*

dimensions. At present her countenance does not represent light-hearted youth, for it is doleful—and more than doleful: it is woebegone, and declares a heavy spirit within. Priscilla Glade was in love, be it said; and, moreover, as she firmly believed, hopelessly in love.

Quite two years previously her mother—a gentle widow—desiring to make her small income go as far as possible, advertised 'An apartment to let for one gentleman.'

The gentleman who ultimately came to terms with Mrs. Glade was young and handsome, a bank-clerk, and with fair references. His affability and respectability were unquestionable, and Mrs. Glade was delighted with him as a profitable and pleasurable investment. He became a permanent boarder, and in a very short time the friend of the house. Mrs. Glade and her daughter, having lived hitherto alone, were glad of his companionship.

Priscilla was a school-teacher, a patient, plodding school-teacher, conscious of mental deficiencies, and anxious for intellectual advancement that she might take something in hand higher than an infant class, and so add materially to the domestic treasury, which was straitened. She tried to teach herself many useful things, but a memory not retentive often blocked her efforts. When the boarder—Theodore Lockstud—had been some few months beneath her mother's roof, and his intimacy was beginning to take to itself a somewhat fraternal colouring, he volunteered assistance to his landlady's pretty little daughter, whose aspirations towards higher culture were stronger than her grasp upon the books she attempted to study. Never was preceptor more warmly appreciated by pupil. He helped her over knotty questions, supplied her with books of reference, and more often than not imparted information without the aid of books. She believed him a miracle of learning, a living, breathing encyclopædia—handsomely bound, too—an oracle to be venerated.

Theodore Lockstud believed her to be a silly romantic girl, who amused and enlivened him during the hours when he had nothing better to do than to sit by her side and give her the benefit of his superior education and attainments. Nevertheless, it pleased him to feed her with sweet or tender speeches occasionally, to see her eyes brighten, or the colour mount to

her temples or die away entirely, according to his pleasure, to feel her hand tremble at the touch of his, to note the admiration, the veneration, that beautified her face when she looked up into his, to know the power that was his to influence her for sadness or gladness. His vanity was touched, but his heart unreached.

The lessons went on, and Priscilla's soul drank in intoxicating ecstasy far quicker than her mind absorbed his teaching of dull facts. So it came to pass that often of an evening, when their heads drew closely together over book or paper, Mrs. Glade would glance at them, and reconnoitre the position in all its bearings with a smile, and yet not without a tear. The one said, 'A pretty pair!' the other, 'She will leave you for him!'

But the months wore on, and pairing and departure seemed remote indeed, for by some freak of circumstances the venerated beloved master showed unmistakable signs of avoiding his disciple, neglecting his pupil. It was well known to Mrs. and Miss Glade that he had an aunt with whom he had once lived until he had quarrelled, but that latterly he had made his peace with her, and was therefore a frequent visitor at her house. Priscilla associated the unhappy reversal of matters with the reconciliation to his aunt, having had from the gentleman himself such an analysis of this relative's character that it served to cast no creditable reflection on her, but imaged to the simple, confiding, credulous mind of the girl a selfish, grumbling, exacting, parsimonious creature of whom he stood in some fear.

The day of the wedding which opens this chapter was a general holiday (St. Patrick's) throughout the colony of Georgius, and Phillipia, its busy metropolis, was not backward in putting on its festive attire, or running to the sea-side or picnic-grounds to do honour to the worthy—the immortal Apostle of Ireland. Priscilla, in the midst of it all, stood a miserable unit away from her daily duties, but inclined to no pleasure. Indeed, the first half of the day she applied herself to pen and paper, meaning hard work, but making no headway.

She made a desperate attempt to compete for a prize of five guineas, offered through the daily papers by a temperance society, for the best essay on 'The Evils of Intemperance'; but as her earnestness leaned more to the handling of the five guineas than to a desire to further an excellent cause by con-

vincing argument, and as her brain was already occupied with a problem mischievously drawn there by Cupid, and having nothing in common with Bacchus or anti-Bacchus, it may well be understood that her efforts promised to be futile.

She sat in her own room before a small table with paper spread in readiness to receive her thoughts, and with a pen in her hand; but instead of writing she found herself trying to draw on the margin of the sheet the profile of a young man with an arched flowing moustache, a Grecian nose, and an expressive dark eye. This also was a failure. Next she nibbled at her penholder, puckered her brows, and stared at the ceiling for inspiration on the temperance question with a resolution to fix her mind on the subject. Alas for her resolution! alas for her inspiration! Unless a strong hand beckons, a strong will attracts, grapples, and controls, Resolution defies; unless Genius woos, Inspiration is not to be won.

Priscilla, lacking the strong hand, the strong will, and the necessary genius, wasted more than an hour in scribbling and tearing up, and scribbling again, and bemoaning her incapacity the more because she missed Lockstud's assistance, and felt that with his help she might do a great deal; but, wearied with disappointment and sore at heart through his neglect, the only thing she succeeded in doing well was crying. She cried bitterly with her head down between her arms on the table.

"'Cilla,' said a voice at her elbow presently. It belonged to a mild-faced woman, with smooth gray bands of hair under a becoming cap, and eyes like Priscilla's, only more inclined to sink in their sockets, and less bright—"'Cilla.'

'Yes, mother.' The girl started to her feet, and stammered forth an excuse in broken words. 'I never thought it so hard to write an essay. I don't know how to begin, and can't find ideas. I am a useless, stupid girl, and there isn't a book amongst the lot to help me. Oh!'

And here she sat down again and fell to crying.

Mrs. Glade, noting the badly-drawn profile on the paper's margin, gave a sad little smile, and said tenderly:

'Are you expected to illustrate the essay?'

'Cilla, making no reply to this, kept her head down, but put forth a hand, blindly groping for the sheet containing the faulty likeness, that she might cover it up.

'Child,' continued her mother, with gentleness still and a meaning emphasis, 'when you are as old as I am you will understand how much deceit there is in the world, and not break your heart over it either.'

'Cilla, in reply to this, beat back her tears, and arose on the defensive, fully understanding the allusion. She protested against the broken heart.

'I don't say,' went on Mrs. Glade, unheeding her daughter's protestation, 'but what you have some reason on your side to be hurt and angry; and I myself am disappointed, for it was quite patent he gave you to understand that he was very fond of you, though perhaps he never said as much: yet actions can lie as well as words, and his were false, evidently. But for pity's sake don't let him think you are so stricken over it; he might come in any moment. You need not hide anything from me; a mother can be lynx-eyed sometimes, you know, and you need not deny that he troubles you more than the essay. You are crying over *him*. Come, 'Cilla, give up your tears: perhaps he isn't worth them, and remember whatever happens you have me; I must be true to you.'

'Oh, mother,' 'Cilla, making no further pretence, threw her arms round her mother and sobbed, 'but for you, I'd like to die!'

'Sh—sh!' Mrs. Glade prefaced her reply with a gentle hushing and a wave of her hand, as if to ward off a gnat; 'don't talk so; it is silly—worse than silly; it is wicked. You must face the world and its worries like a soldier faces the enemy—determined to conquer. I have had foes to face in my time—I have done my battles; and now I want to see you happy, that's all. You must be happy for my sake and your own, and let him see that you can be; if not, I'll tell him to suit himself with other quarters, and that would be quarrelling with our bread-and-butter. We can't afford to lose an excellent lodger who pays to the day and is always courteous; and to snap at him because he has neglected you, or has turned aside from attentions which we have misconstrued, would be absurd. Yet if you continue like this—mooning and moping—you will force me to give him notice.'

'I wish we had never seen him!' exclaimed 'Cilla. She had no wish to attempt to disguise her real feeling now, and emerged

from her mother's arms the better for her sympathy and counsel. With an effort she next spoke calmly, and not without a secret sense of shame at her recent outburst. 'Depend upon it, his aunt has something to do with it.'

'I don't see why you should blame her. He has a will of his own, and is not likely to be influenced by her.'

'Yes, of course, but he has told me much about her. She is rich and stingy, looks the picture of health, and is always complaining and doctoring herself. But he is her only surviving relative, and it was his duty, he said, to make his peace with her, and listen to her sometimes.'

'Did he say all that?'

The tone of the words, and the expression in her mother's face, were alike harsh, and made 'Cilla say with a blush, as if to defend him:

'He told me in confidence.'

'He is too politic then, I fear,' said Mrs. Glade, not relaxing in severity.

'I don't understand; what do you mean?'

'Cilla could not follow her mother's train of thought just then; her unsophisticated nature did not, could not, admit any taint of deceit or disloyalty, and she believed others to be as she was herself, until convinced to the contrary. It never occurred to her that Theodore Lockstud erred in speaking as he did of his aunt, because he spoke the truth undoubtedly, and then but whispered it to her. She did not blame him altogether for neglect of herself, because she considered the most blame rested on her. She had failed to please him, and his aunt's influence was the stronger, or, existing to a certain extent, was capable of counteracting her own, which she felt to be so very slight. But even while she writhed at his altered action towards her, and was wounded and stung to the quick, her love, far more powerful than her aggressiveness, created apologies for him and removed his culpability willingly to anybody else's shoulders, even her own.

'I mean,' answered her mother, 'that he is wrong to speak of his aunt in that way, even if it is the truth. She is rich, and he naturally expects to be her heir; his duty to his aunt is seemingly prompted by what he considers duty to himself. To speak ill of her behind her back, and be at her beck and

call and show a respect not felt, is a false idea of duty. Hearing this from you has hardened me more against him, and I believe I was nearly as fond of him as you are; but now I say put him out of your thoughts, for you and he would never be happy together.'

'You always spoke of him well,' said 'Cilla with a little inconsistent pettishness, and not ready to accept her mother's clear penetration of the character of the man to whom she had given her whole soul. 'You wrong him. His aunt used to badger him, he told me, and want him to dance entirely to her piping, but he was too much of a man to submit to it. Yet he is ready to do his duty as far as he can; so he went to her house again, and only is anxious for peace for the sake of peace, and not for the miserable money she hoards; I'm sure of that.'

'Very well, my dear.' Mrs. Glade shrugged her shoulders. 'You are right, of course, and I am wrong. There, let it rest. You are right to stand up for him; he deserves it.'

Priscilla, not slow to detect the irony and tartness of this little speech, flushed as she replied:

'He deserves my gratitude, at any rate, for all his kindness and patience with me. You forget how patiently he has taught me much that I should never have known but for him. We have been foolish in thinking it anything else but disinterested kindness. If I am a silly girl, and no congenial companion for him, so that he seeks companionship elsewhere, why, it is my fault, not his.'

'Be as grateful as you please, but don't be a fool; don't let him see that it matters to you whether he chooses to remain with you as before, or prefers being at his aunt's. That is my advice.'

Again there was an unusual tartness in the accents, a ring of impatience and wounded pride. Mrs. Glade turned and walked from the room quickly to hide bitter tears, as she had hidden her tender pity, beneath a sudden acerbity which she could not suppress. She left her daughter to continue, if she could, hammering at her brains for temperance ideas and words to clothe them.

That same afternoon the would-be essayist, spiritless and disheartened with vain effort, looked out from her bedroom

window longingly at the sunshine, and decided to try a solitary stroll.

She honestly intended taking a little walk, but fate or caprice controlling her footsteps, it so transpired that she took a drive as well, and came home again physically and mentally warmed with sunshine.

She left her mother's house equipped in out-door gear, neatly gloved and booted; a broad-brimmed straw hat on her head; summer draperies floating over the hoop—then in vogue—not clinging with æsthetic grace about her little person; parasol in hand, and a hand-bag on arm, in which she carried a note-book and pencil, as a ready vehicle for transmission of thoughts on temperance, should they occur to her.

At first she sauntered slowly away, and almost unconsciously found herself at the corner of a street not far from the Phillipia railway terminus, and about ten minutes' walk from her own home. Arriving there, her senses were suddenly quickened by a low rumbling in the distance which awakened her to surroundings. A tram-car was bustling along on its way to the city; not a steam-car with its clumsy, screeching, panting, belching locomotive, but one drawn by horses, plying principally for the convenience of passengers by train.

To-day it carried a load of pleasure-seekers; it looked inviting; a drive would cost but little. Priscilla peeped into her hand-bag to hunt for the coin required, and finding one, she met the car as it stopped at the corner, and added one more to its occupants until it entered the heart of the city.

Here she alighted, and began to wend her way up a crooked hilly street. Abstracted with thought having nothing in common with the essay which had so troubled her, she walked on, scarcely sensible of or grateful for the blue and golden brightness above and around her. The street was quiet, with its shuttered shops and suspended business traffic; saving for a few passengers or an occasional cab or carriage, it was empty, but had it been never so lively Priscilla would not have heeded, for her thoughts were travelling hopelessly, not unlike the footsteps of a man lost in the Bush, who, tramping a wretched circle, meets despair as he finds a delusive goal nothing but the starting-point: she only saw Theodore Lockstud, receded from

him only to advance, and then feel as deluded and miserable as ever.

Over the ground and up the street she walked till she reached the city domain, entered, passed on, sped quicker as the earth sloped under her feet in easy descent, and before she was aware of her proximity stood outside the Botanical Gardens.

Coming suddenly upon the closed gates, she halted, and for a second forgot her trouble in her hesitation about passing on or going in. She decided to go in. The perfume that greeted her caused a slight exultation of spirit; colour, light and inviting shade soothed her senses. A great Norfolk Island pine, like a mighty sentinel, towered to the skies and stretched its gigantic arms, waving and whispering a melodious welcome. Many-hued flowers peeped upward from their beds, and varied foliage glistened under the sunshine.

The air was soft and deliciously scented, the trees rustled pleasantly, the birds twittered in their branches. With fragrance breathing all around, and Nature in her sweetest dress and smiling on every side, what wonder that the soul should be momentarily elevated above mundane things?—and Priscilla loved flowers, the dear flowers, God-created, and so full of vivid life and blooming beauty, so fair and so fragile.

Lingeringly and lovingly she bent over a rose-bush, longing to pluck but one flower, yet dread of the Argus-eyed caretaker restraining her hand. She bent lower, and went on her knees to lay her cheek caressingly against the soft rich petals; she envied the rosy short life blooming to-day, to perish to-morrow with the mission fulfilled in giving brightness to the world, and never to know a check to the sweetness of existence. Stooping thus, she spied a rose close by, one fallen from the bush to die, with petals unhinged and drooping like broken wings. She picked it up tenderly, laid it on her lips as if for a farewell kiss, and then as a new idea dawned upon her she slipped it carefully into her hand-bag, raised herself, and walked on to the lower garden with a quicker spring in her gait, and, for some not altogether inexplicable reason, with a quicker beating at her heart.

Within the lower garden the harbour expanded before her a comprehensive sweep of laughing, sparkling water—glittering blue, and bearing upon its bosom a man-o'-war at anchor

bedecked with flags due to St. Patrick. The clarion notes of a brass band and the hollow beat of a drum, mellowed by distance, wafted across to her ears, told of festivity on board. Excursion steamers paddled and snorted to and fro, with a track of smoke belched from their funnels flying before the wind. Pleasure yachts with sails unfurled glided gracefully, a few with bright bunting flapping merrily in the breeze.

There were many people around, some in groups of twos and threes, others singly as she herself was, but the grounds were not overcrowded, and many isolated nooks and corners offered themselves here and there. She sought one in particular, a favoured spot, a pretty nest where a rustic chair meant for two was stationed, and all embowered within a tall thick clump of bamboo-trees.

Glad to rest, Priscilla sat down here, and, after gazing around her in quiet enjoyment of the scene, she opened her bag and looked once more at her rose—the dying rose. She drew it out lovingly from its hiding-place, snapped to the bag with a sharp click, glanced hurriedly on each side as if fearing detection in a contemplated action which she wished to conceal—which her conscience told her was silly, and yet to which she felt impelled.

Who does not hanker after the unrevealed?

It was the old old story—the old charm. She began to pick the leaves one by one, and, as each fell to the ground, she murmured softly to herself: 'He loves me—he loves me not.' Her heart was actually stirred by faith in the eloquently dumb and oracular announcement expected of the last leaf.

The sunlight slanting through the clump which partly hid and wholly sheltered her touched her not. Was it ominous?

She did not hear a slight movement behind the bamboos following the clicking of her bag: yet the sharp snap had aroused a young man who had been stretched there in slumber.

He awoke dazed; his face was pale and drawn rather, as if he had gone through but recently some sharp physical pain which had left its tracks and shaken his nerves. As the stupor of sleep wore off, he, peeping through the trees, saw a woman, whose back was turned to him, and whose dress was familiar.

Priscilla was still plucking at the petals; the grass at her feet

was strewed with them; her countenance was full of earnestness, and a smile was stealing to her lips, when it was suddenly arrested by a well-known voice at her ear. But three words were whispered distinctly, and, turning swiftly, she saw Theodore Lockstud leaning towards her over the back of the seat.

'What wilful destruction!' he said.

'You here!' she cried, not without agitation, and starting to her feet.

'Undoubtedly'—this with an amused smile—'I am sorry to have alarmed you.'

'I thought you were away boating somewhere, because we have not seen you at the house since breakfast—I thought I was alone. How long have you been here?'

She was beginning to recover from her surprise and to set herself the task of showing an indifference to his doings which she could not feel, and she looked regretfully at the scattered rose-leaves, wondering if he had the least idea of her purpose with them—a feeling which forced her to search his face, which in its pallor and haggard lines appealed at once to her tenderness.

'Have you a headache?' she added.

'I will attend to both your questions in order,' he said, coming round to the front of the seat and sitting down, 'if you will reseat yourself and look less scared.'

Without a word she sat down.

'That is right. Well, I have been here a long time—asleep, I believe. These bamboos have sheltered me like a Jonah's gourd, for which I am duly thankful. I sought peace, and for a time found it. This leads to question No. 2: I sought this peaceful shade because I did have a headache, or something of the sort.'

'And why not make your presence known before?' She spoke half angrily, half tenderly. She was afraid he had been watching her with the rose; she pitied his evident suffering, and turned her eyes away to look towards the water, because they would have betrayed her.

'It is sheer impossibility to see through closed lids. I told you I was asleep; but some noise awoke me, and then I recognised your dress and came to the back of the seat to see

you intent upon the wilful destruction of an innocent flower. It was not like you.'

She thought she could detect a ring of banter in his tone, which brought the small quantity of mettle she possessed to the fore and sent the blood to her temples.

'It was no wilful destruction!' she exclaimed. 'The flower was dead or dying when I lifted it from the ground. I'm too fond of flowers to wilfully destroy them.'

'You accelerated its dissolution, then.'

'I was counting its leaves, that's all.'

She began to dig with her parasol into the grass, and persistently kept her head turned from him.

'Just for curiosity?'

He smiled—not pleasantly. In some moods his mouth curved downwards at its corners, giving the index of cynical temperament; it would have given a sinister expression to his features, but for being partly lost in the moustache.

'Just for that, if you like,' she answered, still digging and with head averted. Next, with a sudden impulse, she rose again, and said: 'I am going.'

'Going! Why, you have only just come, I suppose.'

'No matter; I want to be alone; I have a paper to prepare, and I want to take notes. Good-bye. I suppose we shall not see you this evening?'

She spoke carelessly enough, throwing one glance at him, and once more turning her face to the harbour. Another smile on his lips, but a more pleasant one; amusement lurked at the corners.

'I ask you to stay,' he said, also rising and laying a detaining hand on her arm; it was a firm, white hand—long, taper-fingered, filbert-nailed—and it sent a thrill through her frame. His manner and voice were, as of old, soft, winning, and wooing. 'I ask you to stay for a little while. Let me help you with the notes. It is a long time since you asked my assistance.'

Priscilla here was learning so well the lesson her mother had set her that, although her mouth twitched, she replied:

'I never asked your assistance. It was offered, but I can get on very well without it.'

Oh, Priscilla! This was in for a penny in for a pound truly.

One fib over the flower, and now a second over the essay. Where would it end? She was getting conscience-stricken; his hand still pressed her arm; her mother's words rang in her ears: 'Don't let him see it matters to you whether he chooses to remain with you as before, or prefers being at his aunt's.'

'You are offended with me, surely,' he said.

'I am nothing of the kind; I want to go away.' She shook her arm gently from his hold.

'Not alone, 'Cilla, for I shall accompany you.'

'Check!' cried an inner voice which did not belong to Priscilla Glade, and which she could not hear.

'Oh, in that case,' began 'Cilla, all of a tremble, yet desperately struggling to assert herself, 'if you are determined to harass me with your company, I may as well remain here,' saying which she went back to the chair, and, opening her bag, brought forth her notebook. Sitting sideways to partly turn her back upon him, she began to write as an approach to the essay, 'Phillipia, March 17, 187—.'

Lockstud sat down again, and watched for a few seconds as she wrote. Presently tender reproach was whispered. 'Can you be Priscilla Glade, first to hurry a flower to its death, and next to withhold a single word of sympathy from one who is your friend—an especial friend? What have I done?'

Priscilla's hand shook as it held the pencil, which made nothing but dots and dashes; all her feeble dignity was beginning to melt.

'I really need your sympathy,' he went on, 'and your tenderness; you give me neither. Why?'

He knew why, but he missed her yielding to his words and wishes, and knew as well how to touch at her heart for the harmony he sought as any Greek of old ever mastered his lyre.

''Cilla,' he said, 'be yourself; look me in the face.' He put forth his hand a second time and took hers—the one nearest to him, holding the stump of a pencil; she did not resist. His next act was to take the pencil deliberately from between her fingers and slip it into his waistcoat pocket. 'Look me in the face,' he continued. 'I have been badly treated—have had trouble—and I came here to pitch myself headlong into the harbour there. Would you have been much distressed?'

'Oh!' she gasped at last, with her mother's counsel all forgotten and her eyes tear-filled. 'What has happened to make you say anything so dreadful? You could never mean anything so wicked.'

'I did indeed. I was mad; I was bitter.'

'Why? Aunt Jessie again?'

'No; she has nothing to do with it this time.' His hand, still holding hers, closed on it with a fierce pressure. 'It is something far from her. It is a—a robbery, if you like—a false trust.'

'Money?' asked innocent 'Cilla, leaving her hand in his passively, submitting to the painful pressure with a new gladness, believing that love, and not a meaner passion, had impelled it. She was agitated, and, gazing at him with dewy eyes, wondered at the hard, cynical look in his face, which she had never seen before.

'Never mind,' he said evasively; 'you would not understand. It is all over now; I did not pitch my life away, you see. I ask you again, would you have been distressed if I had done it? Would you have forgotten me after a week?'

'You know I could not forget you, when you have been such a friend; and I would be distressed.'

'Very well; then it is only fair to tell you what held me back from this madness.'

'What?' eagerly.

'You.'

'I?'

'Yes; you. Did you ever hear of Al-Sirat, the Mahommedans' supposed path to heaven?'

'No,' she said ever so softly, her right hand still lingering in his, her left holding her notebook.

'They believe a bridge spans from earth to heaven—to paradise. It is so narrow that it has been compared to a spider's thread or the razor's edge. The dead are supposed to pass over it with a pace in proportion to their virtues. The truly perfect skim it like lightning; the moderately perfect go it with the speed of a racehorse; those who are burdened with sin get over laboriously; but those who are overweighted tumble headlong into the abyss below—a polite name for that which is opposed to heaven. Now, I've got a belief of my

own; I say the living as well as the dead may pass over such a bridge. I've been standing on it to-day; I've seen the awful abyss; the dead weight of my sins nearly sent me over, but I kept my balance when I thought of you; I said, "I'll live and reach paradise on earth if I look just straight ahead." My progress has been impeded through my own fault; but I am travelling there, and will reach it in safety if you will let me, if you will give me absolution for all sins of omission and commission. 'Cilla'—it was not sufficient that he held her hand; he drew nearer and put an arm about her; his voice fell sweet and low—''Cilla, you are my paradise. Will you shut its gates in my face? You will not—you will marry me; we are not friends of an hour. Say you forgive me.'

Cilla whispered her answer, which may be easily guessed, especially as Lockstud there and then said:

'Ah, now you are Priscilla Glade once more.'

The sun played through the branches over their heads, but left them in shadow. Again was it ominous? The broken rose denuded of most of its leaves—a withered calyx—was lying forgotten and trampled under his heel in the dust, its oracular petal never having been reached.

Priscilla's soul awoke again, alive with fervour and strong thanksgiving; but a passing thought clouded for a moment her new-found joy; the uncomfortable vision of an irate, sharp-featured woman arose before her—the formidable aunt whom she had never seen, and whom she feared. She turned quickly, and asked plaintively:

'But what will Aunt Jessie say?'

'Say?' replied Lockstud with a self-satisfied smile—'that I have done the wisest thing of all my doings.'

'She will not scold or treat me coldly?'

Lockstud laughed outright.

'Not unless you ask her for money.'

'I'm not likely to do that.' 'Cilla laughed too, and added gaily, 'Let us go home and tell mother.'

'And what about those notes?' he asked mischievously. 'Do you still intend to take them here?'

'Cilla flushed prettily—coyly.

'Neither here nor anywhere without your assistance.'

The notebook went back to the bag; and perhaps for the

satisfaction of the reader it may be necessary to state that the notes never were taken, that the essay was never written, that Priscilla believed she had already received a prize before which all other prizes paled as meaner things to be left for other competitors.

A memo appeared on the first page of the notebook, beneath the words already written there—'Phillipia, March 17, 187—': 'HE DOES LOVE ME—POOR ME, THE HAPPIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD.'

In less than three months hence she signed herself Priscilla Lockstud.

CHAPTER II.

A LETTER AND A GLIMPSE FOR PRISCILLA AT THE WRITER THEREOF.

WHEN Theodore Lockstud was a month-old husband, he received a letter one afternoon at the bank: it was without signature and without date, and ran thus:

'Fool!—is your revenge sweet? You think you have been very clever, don't you? I say again, fool! You have cut the ground from under your feet. What is it to me? Well, it is this to me; for auld lang syne I must befriend you. I am able and willing to do it, though you don't deserve it; first with your heroics and sulks, and next with your hot-headed marriage.

'You thought it would revenge mine—it would spite me—when revenge and spite both must rebound on your own head. We are young, you and I; somebody else is not, and perhaps an early hard life makes itself felt now with advancing years. I have heard that it does; but what does it matter now?—the move is lost.

'Do you understand? If December offers May riches, and all the luxuries that she must revel in, May would be a fool to refuse, especially when December completes the calendar, and May is less than half-way through.

'What is the paltry salary of a bank-clerk to an income that has multiplied itself over and over again out of acres and acres of wonderful land? When one sees the prospect of securing that income, and hesitates about clutching at it with the first chance, then that one deserves a strait-jacket. Do you think I was born to be tied to a hypochondriac for fifty pounds per annum, to read the maudlin books she loved and I hated, and be at her beck and call every minute of the day? What is the use of beauty if left "to blush unseen"? I don't believe in girls pretending unconsciousness of their charms—not I. *I* don't pretend any way; and if it was my good fortune that this same hypochondriac should happen to have a landlord visiting her sometimes, and visiting in the neighbourhood, and rolling in riches, whose sight was true enough to make him critical, in spite of his years—to make him look upon me with admiration and love—it would have been sheer madness on my part, and base ingratitude, too, to have allowed other matters to interfere with my acceptance of so much worth and honour. He worships me, and I worship—well, the golden calf, if you like. I longed for rich dresses, jewels, servants, carriages, and a grand house, and I have them all now, with an infatuated husband given in; one can't have everything.

'We have been "doing" the colonies, visiting his plantations in Flindersland, and saw his broad acres in one place, and his houses in another, and streets of houses in another, and suburban lots in another. Oh, idiot! why do I write to you? I gnash my teeth and stamp my foot when I think of the stumblingblock you have raised. You know well enough what I mean. All this will be mine, only mine, some day and soon; and, who knows? but for that stumblingblock might be yours. As you sow, so shall you reap. But I'm not vindictive. I will get you out of the harness you always railed at, and put you in something better. We are at home now—at Goolgun, Virginia Bay—a splendid place. We shall have a formal reception on Thursday next. You had better break the ice and come and be introduced with your blandest expression on; he won't take to scowls; and bring HER with you. We shall have to meet sooner or later. But I shall be at City Park on band-day, probably alone. My lord hates music. Now burn this, for ashes, like dead men, tell no tales. *Verb. sap.*'

When Lockstud had finished reading this remarkable letter, he did not burn it at once. There was no need for signature; he knew the writing—knew the writer; and as he read his face darkened, his lip-corners fell; he looked as he did that day in the church—the day he asked Priscilla Glade to marry him.

Bitter words rose to his lips, and the letter, instead of being consigned to the flames, was slipped into his pocket-book for a second, and more leisurely, reading at his own fireside later on.

His mouth quivered with wrathful epithet inaudibly spoken—with a smothered imprecation on all women alike; yet his mind was busy planning a visit on the day alluded to—the 'formal reception'—a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Lockstud to Mr. and Mrs. Jeremiah Goldwin.

The bank harness galled him more than ever.

While he was meditating, frowning, and munching his moustache-ends, his wife was sitting with Aunt Jessie.

After Priscilla's willing affirmative to Lockstud's pleading under the bamboo-trees, she determined to face the formidable aunt. Accordingly, within a week of their betrothal, with a wavering courage, but quiet persistence prompted by duty, she accompanied him to his aunt's residence.

Mrs. Calliport (that is, Aunt Jessie) had her own reasons for a certain amount of suspense, and agitation too, in the prospect of meeting her niece-elect, for her nephew was very dear to her, and his welfare her sole care; therefore was she the more anxious to know that his choice of a bride was in all truth a wise one. Each woman had mentally drawn a likeness of the other; but as Lockstud had portrayed Priscilla more faithfully to his aunt than he had described his aunt to Priscilla, the latter experienced a surprise and reversal of feeling to which the former was not subjected.

When Priscilla was ushered into Mrs. Calliport's bedroom, and saw Theo's aunt for the first time, she somehow felt relieved of previous terrors at once, as one who, setting out on a dark road believing it to be beset with dangers, suddenly perceives a light close at hand, to guide his footsteps and cheer him on. She saw a woman who was about forty years of age, yet almost youthful in face, with her clear pinky complexion, and eyes exactly like her nephew's. As a foil to the youthful aspect of countenance, she was supplied with rather a super-

abundance of flesh, which gave a tendency to a double chin; but she was tall as well as corpulent, so that the plumpness was not of that disproportion which makes a short fat individual conspicuous, and she was generally admitted to be a fine woman.

It was one of her bad days—one necessitating isolation from the chill air of a misty atmosphere. She had not the appearance of an invalid, nor was she always confined to her bedroom, but asthma threatened and enforced caution, and dyspepsia was chronic with her, disposing to a nervous fidgety manner at times, and a strong desire to discuss her ailments with anybody willing to listen.

She was said to be very rich, but her surroundings not being absolutely luxurious enough to testify to that fact, she was also said to be parsimonious.

She loved dogs and birds, and indulged her love of them, for an aviary of birds chattering and piping stood at the veranda side as you entered, and barking dogs greeted the occasional visitor. She was now reclining on a couch at the foot of her bed when Priscilla advanced. A white woollen shawl enveloped her shoulders. A soft rug was drawn up as far as her waist, and her head was pressed back against, and framed in, a pillow cased with the whitest of linen edged with deep cambric-frilling. The position asserted the double chin more decisively as it bulged on her fair round throat. She was like her nephew—that struck Priscilla immediately on entrance, and perhaps accounted in a measure for the sudden dispersion of fears—like him in his kindest moods, as she had always seen him.

The sarcastic smile was absent, and there was no scorn to mar the ever-present benevolence of expression which lent a sweetness to her countenance never to be found in his. Her forehead was high and arched at the temples, unlike his; but her hair, falling low in wavy bands, hid this distinction of feature, and therefore completed the strong likeness.

It was a large, lofty room, with an island-like square of carpet in the centre, surrounded by about three feet of well-waxed boards. There were pink-flowered chintz curtains on the French lights, which led to a balcony fronting the house, and corresponding curtains adorning the bed. There was no more furniture than absolutely necessary to a bedroom; everything

was clean, solid, and old-maidish in its primness. A silky, fluffy, bright-eyed little spaniel lay cosily on a chair at her side, his head pushed forward on his forelegs, his diamond eyes wide open, fixed on the approaching figure of one who was strange to him, and whose coming caused him no excitement whatever. A canary in the act of trilling its loudest, and hopping merrily from perch to perch as it hung in a dome-shaped cage at the farther end of the room, ceased trill and hop for a brief inspection of the newcomer. All windows and doors were closed, excepting one French light, which stood ajar sufficient for ventilation; while a faint odour of toilette-vinegar breathed throughout.

'Aunt, this is 'Cilla,' said Theodore, in his off-hand way; and then with suavity: 'She longs to know you.'

Mrs. Calliport half lifted herself from the couch, smiled benignly as she clasped the neatly-gloved hand in her own—large, white, and firm—and drew her as closely as possible for a more affectionate welcome.

The formidable aunt kissed the button-mouth, and Priscilla was moved to a spontaneous and reciprocal feeling, wondering at herself because fear was vanished—wondering at Theodore for having excited it.

She sat talking and listening for quite an hour that afternoon, conscious of no restraint, but the pleasant sensation of an agreeable surprise. She made friends with the spaniel, who was introduced to her as 'Charlie,' and, being won over by a caressing hand, walked from the chair straight on to her lap immediately near, to coil himself there confidingly into a silken ball. She was enchanted with Santley, the canary, whose little throat seemed ready to burst with song; and when at leaving Aunt Jessie said, 'You must be charitable, my dear, and spare some time from that Theo of yours to come and sit with me as often as you can,' she promised sincerely to come, for her own pleasure as well as for Mrs. Calliport's.

Both she and her mother then opened an intimacy, which never faltered. They found it an easy matter to ignore what her nephew called 'fads,' and to sustain an admiring friendship. Why he had misrepresented her to them, or why he could not see her as she was, or as they did, was somewhat inexplicable, until Mrs. Calliport herself let in some light on the

subject, during a confidential chat with Priscilla later on, when they had become firm friends.

'I am immensely relieved,' began the elder lady, 'to know that Theo is going to settle down. He needs a wife—a helpmate, such as you will be.'

'I'll try to be,' said 'Cilla, colouring at the implied praise, and industriously hem-stitching a twelve-inch square of cambric while Mrs. Calliport knitted.

'Of course you will; don't I know that? I thought there was something between him and that person'—Aunt Jessie mostly alluded to a late paid companion of hers as 'that person'—'who was employed by me once, for four months, and four months too long; but I was happily mistaken; for, as it turned out, she flew at higher game. Did he never mention her to you?'

'No.'

'No! Never spoke to you of Isabella Gimp?'

'No,' repeated 'Cilla, dropping her work and looking with speaking eyes fixed on Mrs. Calliport's face: they said as plainly as possible, 'You tell me.'

'I suppose he didn't think it worth while,' said Mrs. Calliport. 'Well, she was one of the most selfish, conceited creatures it has been my misfortune to meet, and as fair as a goddess.'

'Her beauty could not have made much impression on him, else he would have told me.'

'Cilla said this innocently and lightly. She felt relieved, somehow, to hear Mrs. Calliport abuse the 'goddess.' It was wrong—unchristian, was it not? But even pure Priscilla Glade had her moments of erring humanity, while an uncomfortable fluttering disturbed her at the mention of 'something' having been between her Theo and 'that person.'

'Very likely.' Mrs. Calliport did not think it 'very likely' at all, but she had noted a change in expression and colour come and go, like a passing cloud before the sun, over the bright face turned to her, and thought perhaps she had said too much. Her hazel eyes, so like her nephew's, and quick to observe, were filled with tenderness as she said, 'Very likely,' and added, 'But she is married now—married well, as the world puts it; and you may rest assured he has forgotten her. I'd never be bothered with her kind again. She was docile

enough—too docile—and soft and plausible; but somehow I always fancied she was laughing at me in her sleeve. Mind, I never found her out in any breach of faith, but was always expecting to do so. I never felt sure whether her sympathy was given in jest or earnestness, and I couldn't trust her with a word in confidence. It was much better for her to leave me, and now I have you I'm better pleased still. I do like to have young people about me.'

'But,' 'Cilla ventured to ask, 'don't you ever go out visiting like other people, and receive visits?'

'Go out!' and here Mrs. Calliport's eyes and hands simultaneously expressed surprise, the former rolling upward for a momentary over-display of white, the latter extended on each side of her, palms outward, as if to ward off something unpleasant. 'I dare not go out,' she said, 'excepting in a close carriage, if the air is chilly, and then at mid-day. My real friends do come to see me sometimes, not waiting for return calls. They know how I suffer. Sometimes in the summer I go to see them. Mere acquaintances I don't bother about. I hope, my dear, you'll never know the physical ills which are mine—the iron band on the chest, and the sword between the blade-bones. And then at night my breathing is so bad that it chokes me sometimes, and I have to sit up. Why, sometimes I'd like to lie down and die, but as soon as my breath works properly, you see, I pray to live; that's the worst of it; we are such poor creatures, not knowing what is best for us. I don't get over-much pity—you don't pity me now; I can read faces, and you are thinking this moment I'm the picture of health, and just a fussy old woman.'

'Oh, Mrs. Calliport!' cried 'Cilla, getting very red, and not feeling quite guiltless, because she was thinking of what Theo had told her about hypochondria, etc., and beginning to wonder if he was right, after all.

'You don't think I'm in blooming health, then?'

'How can you be if you suffer?'

'Well, many people do think so, and Theo is one of them. When he lived with me he was not thoughtful for my ailments; often in the midst of my suffering, or detailing my suffering, he would be thinking of something else, or look bored, or make some pretence for hurrying out of the room.'

'Oh!' again from the girl. 'Is that why you fell out?' She asked the question eagerly; it was but natural she should long to know all the facts bearing upon the quarrel and subsequent reconciliation, since Theo had never enlightened her.

'He did tell you we had quarrelled, I see.'

Mrs. Calliport's face wore at this moment its severest expression, with a shadow of pain.

'Cilla dropped her work for the second time, and coloured furiously. 'Only that you had quarrelled, but never why—never why.'

'Ah!' and here the elder lady relieved the younger considerably by a little soft, melodious gurgle of a laugh. 'You are a very woman, and I like you, because your face can't dissemble. I don't care for faces that take one a long time to understand. Say what you mean, mean what you say—that's my motto, my dear, at all risks; and *look* what you mean, otherwise it is a lying face. You are anxious to know all about him, of course. One thing you must know is, that he is not faultless by any means. He is very dear to me, almost as dear as he is to you; but my love is not blind—blind love is a sorry mistake; don't you be blind, that is, if you would be a help to him and guard him from passions to which he is subject. Now, I suppose he has given you reason to believe that the quarrel was my fault, eh?'

'Cilla hesitated, and was about to reply, when Mrs. Calliport interrupted.

'Never mind—don't answer, I will spare you equivocation. I *know* he has done so, there! I wouldn't blame him so much for his faults, poor boy, for who is faultless? But I tremble for his all-absorbing sin—his utter inability of self-reproach—his thorough belief in himself. Constant companionship with such as you—love for such as you, my dear, may work wonders. The influence of a pure-minded woman is a guardian angel to a worldly soul. This is why I am so thankful that my wayward boy has found just the woman he needs for a wife and a moral help. I will tell you why we quarrelled and leave you to judge which of us was in fault. I think I am justified in defending myself.'

'You need not, Mrs. Calliport—that is, not to me,' spoke up 'Cilla.

It cost her an effort to say this much. She said it with her head bent over her work, with her heart palpitating just because her love was not quite blind, though deep and earnest. Theo had misrepresented his aunt; why should he not misrepresent the quarrel? She had understood him to be the martyr, and Mrs. Calliport persecutor, until now. There was something in the blunt honesty of his aunt's manner that defied doubt of her statements, and she believed that she would in time make Theo have a full and perfect knowledge of the real worth of his sole surviving relative, and that his misrepresentations were not the result of anything like mendacity, but of his impatience with failings which in his estimation completely counteracted virtues.

'You need not,' she said lowly. 'I know Theo misunderstands you sometimes, and that you are too fond of him to quarrel for nothing.'

Mrs. Calliport's plump fingers busied themselves with her ball of shaded red wool, which was fast diminishing as a tiny petticoat developed. She paused for a moment, her breath wheezing slightly, her eyes moistened, and then she began abruptly:

'We quarrelled over money. He thinks I've got money for him to make ducks and drakes of. I have tried to be as a wise mother to him—not to be foolishly indulgent. His mother died in giving him birth; his father was already gone then, so that he was an orphan, but not a dependent one. His mother and I had been left early orphans too—left to the care of trustees, one of them appointed our guardian. We were sent to a boarding-school, but my sister, six years older than I, left before I did, and married when quite young. She went through a lot of trouble; I never saw her husband; he was gone before Theo was born, as I told you, and—and she died. Before she died our guardian sent for me—some time before; but I was very young, and could not understand much that I saw and wondered at. When I was old enough to understand and had a husband, I learned that my sister had bequeathed her child to my care. My sister and I were entitled to a legacy of £5,000 when of age; hers reverted to her child, the interest to be employed for his education and maintenance. He was sent to a boarding-school—that is my regret—next to college; at eighteen he was expelled for some offence, and came to live with me entirely, when he was too old for me to take him in hand and undo the harm worked by wild associations. I tried my best to do a mother's duty; he was everything to me. I was a widow; I had lost two dear boys of my very own; I thought he would be as a son to me. I wanted him upon attaining his majority to enter a profession, but he was not stable enough for steady application to one thing; he wanted to travel and see life, he said: and so he did—so he did, my dear. He had what is vulgarly called his fling. He flung his £5,000 broadcast, I can tell you; scattered a splendid legacy, ruined himself, got into debt—actually into debt, which I had to clear when he came back to me, a prodigal son, repentant and promising reform.'

Priscilla's work lay idly in her lap; there was a fascination for her in a recital which laid bare all the past of the man she loved too dearly, and perhaps unwisely. The fascination which a funeral procession might have excited in her, with the glass-windowed hearse, the nodding plumes, and that long narrow box within, silver-decorated, flower-strewn, bearing its burden of chilled clay—a thing once of warm flesh and blood; the long line of mourning-coaches, the slow measured tread of the horses, the bowed heads and sobbing friends; the whole something to attract even while it repels, and from which we turn conscious of a heart-sinking and indefinable awe, though the dead be unknown and the mourners strangers. She saw her lover exactly as described, and her eyes filled with tears; but she also saw him, as she believed, a reformed man. She buried the sins of him—the wild boyish follies—and fancied his soul arising purified out of its remorse, and so she faltered:

'Poor Theo! how unhappy he must have been, and how thankful you to know he really intended to reform!'

'Yes; and I made a promise too—to myself: I vowed never to leave him entirely to himself again, but to watch over and guard him to the end of my days; so when he set his heart on coming to Australia, where he would not be known, and where he could begin a better life, I came with him. And it is just as well, for the London fogs would have taken years from my life. Well, we settled in Phillipia, and I found a place for him in the bank where he is now; but after he considered he had

had enough of it to suit him, he wanted something bigger. Just when I thought he was benefiting by my discipline, he showed himself dissatisfied. What do you think he wanted of me?'

'What?'

'Only the loan, he said, of £1,000, on interest for three years, to go into business with; to enter a partnership with somebody he knew nothing at all about, and to let the money slip through his fingers again. I knew what was best for him; he would have burnt his fingers—would have been a baby at business. I refused him point-blank. It was Hobson's choice for him to remain at the bank, and so we quarrelled—that is, he quarrelled, said some high and mighty words about his independence, and some disrespectful things about me, and went off in high dudgeon, vowing never to come back. But he did want to come back when he cooled down, and I refused to receive him, you see.'

The knitting-needles flew quicker and quicker under Mrs. Calliport's dexterous handling—flew without the aid of eyes very often, and at long intervals, the eyes flashing and bent on her willing listener. It was a rare treat for her to be able to talk like this to somebody trustworthy; for the girl would never betray her confidence, and loved her promised husband too well to give more than a sigh or a tear for sins she considered consigned to their grave without fear of resurrection.

Nevertheless 'Cilla looked pale and distressed.

'Don't think any more about it, my dear,' said Aunt Jessie. 'I dare say he was sorry for it afterwards, else he wouldn't have pleaded for forgiveness; but you wanted to know why we fell out, and there you have it; and I have given you my side of the story with a long preamble, because there's no knowing how he still views my action, though he is respectful and deferential enough now; and I value your good opinion too much to let myself appear to you under a false light, so that you perceive in me a selfish woman after all, since I must show you the spots on your sun, my dear, which may falsify me. Only think leniently of me if your Theo still chafes under fancied injury. All the time I was holding myself aloof from him I was dying to see him—to throw my arms round his neck—but was restrained by a Brutus-like motive; he deserved to be punished. He is all the better for it now, and will still improve now that he has

chosen a good girl for his wife. He will make a good husband, I believe; if he has faults he has merits; but you must not let him have his own way in all things, but be firm. You must rule him sometimes, but do it so gently that he shall be unconscious of the ruling.'

Mrs. Calliport looked at the mild-faced 'Cilla for several seconds intently, and was thinking, as she advised, of the docility and submission written there, but hoping her 'word in season' would develop more forcible qualities hitherto latent; but 'Cilla was not born to command or guide.

It was in this way that she received much enlightenment relative to her Theo's disposition. She learned many things of which she never spoke to her mother, remembering her warning. His faults could not make him less dear to one who was confident of existing virtues, like charity, covering a multitude of small sins, the mere errors of an impulsive temperament. Her mother, perhaps, was not so conscious of his worth as she was, and would have been ready to insist on breaking off the engagement had she heard Aunt Jessie's story; but Mrs. Glade remained in happy ignorance.

To Priscilla Glade, Theodore Lockstud was no level, monotonous plain already watered and tended, offering her a tranquil haven for the rest of her life, but as a majestic rock, the more entrancing for its rugged, steep sides and jutting points, where she would plant her foot in safety, and strew flowers and scatter herbage to remedy the sharp, cutting extremities, to soften its whole aspect, to create smiles for frowns, and be rooted in that paradise he had said life would be with her. So the poor little dreamer lifted her eyes to the grand summit of the rock and let a fancied blaze of sunshine dazzle her sight, and from peak to peak saw golden bright-hued butterflies flit which she thought to chase and grasp when her wifehood came.

It did come, and the short honeymoon of two weeks passed like a beautiful dream—passed for ever. Aunt Jessie had made a wonderful effort to attend the wedding, and she had given a handsome wedding present, represented in the furniture and general fittings of a cosy little home. 'Cilla was brimming over with gratitude; her husband did not go into ecstasies, but observed in an undertone, 'She won't die of this stroke of

generosity, either.' He was bitterly disappointed; he had been living quite a model life, and he had taken a saint of a girl to wife, and where was his reward? A goody-goody little mouse of a creature ever at his side; a toy house and capital spent in gimcrack furniture, when he thought his whole conduct would have led up to the wider opening of Mrs. Calliport's purse-strings as an outlet for that coveted £1,000, over which he had so justly lost his temper. But no such thing; she was adamant. And as he read that letter in the bank—that letter without date or signature—he bit his lips and moustache-ends and thought his marriage a failure in more ways than one.

He cursed the writer, and yet with the bitter invective on his lips the smouldering ash of a love at his heart's core revived into unholy flame with the fanning of that letter. He began to look forward to next band-day at City Park, when the writer had said she would be probably alone, and already determined that she should not be.

His wife, we have said, was with Aunt Jessie; the latter still at her knitting, which work Priscilla had discovered was for the benefit of certain poor families needing warm petticoats and socks, etc. Here was another point borne home to her mind to refute her husband's condemnation of his aunt as a 'niggardly, selfish old party.'

Mrs. Calliport was in her drawing-room below her bedroom, to which it corresponded in size, with broad windows which overlooked a wide stone veranda, with a flight of steps leading to a front garden and thence to the street. Priscilla had been listening to quite a lamentation of aches and pains, putting in occasionally an ejaculation of sympathy. Sorry for infirmities which she could not remedy, tone and manner declared her pity. But when Mrs. Calliport had exhausted the subject of self without having had any interruption, and felt as relieved as the over-plethoric might after blood-letting, she gave a great sigh, smiled gratefully on the patient little visitor, and said:

'There! that's enough about me, isn't it? You are a good soul to listen to a miserable woman's growling so long, but the growl does me good sometimes when I know it touches a sympathetic heart. You are a great comfort to me, my dear.'

Priscilla was about to reply, but did not, for in that moment a handsome carriage drawn by a pair of glossy bays, and with

liveried coachman and footman, dashed up to the curb-stone before Mrs. Calliport's house, and drew all her attention to itself. Lost in her admiration of the whole turn-out—her face was pressed against a window-pane that she might see carriage and occupant the better:

'Aunt Jessie, Aunt Jessie!' she cried; 'see, somebody is coming to see you—some queen to invade your peaceful domain. See!'

Aunt Jessie gathered up her knitting in her two hands and walked the few steps to the window as quickly as she could, and what she saw evidently did not please her.

The footman was running up the front steps with cards in hand; a lady was seated in the carriage gracefully lounging—a beautiful woman beautifully attired. Mrs. Calliport peeped from behind the window-curtain, and vented something like a grunt.

'Who could dream of her coming to see me, and like *that*, too? She looks like a fashion-plate. Her quick eyes have caught us at the window, perhaps; I can't say, "Not at home."'

Aunt Jessie almost mumbled this to herself, and Priscilla, wondering, said:

'Why, aunt, who is it? You know the queen?'

'Pshaw, child! don't call her queen. Why, that is Isabella Gimp!'

Then came a quick rap at the street-door and a ringing of the bell, a servant's hurrying tread across the hall, and the snap of a dog. Priscilla rose hastily, and held out her hand.

'Good-bye, aunt. I've got a long way to go to get home, and—and I don't care about meeting her at all.'

'Oh, you wicked, lucky little sinner, you will leave her comfortably alone, and I must receive her with the best grace possible. Well, run; she's at the door. Good-bye.'

And so Priscilla fled through a back-door, glad to escape the woman who had been described to her as a goddess, who had suggested the idea of something having been between her and Theo. She had never forgotten that, and now it occurred to her that it was strange he should have been impervious to her charms. She was certainly beautiful, too grand a lady altogether for a bank-clerk's wife to open an acquaintance with—too haughty-looking to tempt an intimacy.

Urged by these reflections she hurried away, and arrived at her little home—which was quite a long distance from Mrs. Calliport's residence—when darkness had well set in. She found the table laid for the evening meal, the lamp set in the centre dimly burning, and her husband sitting before the fire in the dining-room.

He was bending forward, elbows on knees, with a letter in his hand, which he was reading by the light of the cheery blaze.

CHAPTER III.

SHADOWS CAST BY COMING EVENTS.

THE fire crackled and blazed cheerily, its flickering light playing on Theodore Lockstud's face with a ruddy glow, in strange contradiction to its expression, which was dark and scowling.

He never heard his wife enter, nor did he know she was in the room and just behind him until her hand was gently laid on his shoulder, and she asked, 'Good news, dear?'

Her touch roused him immediately, and the letter became a crumpled mass in his palms as he turned sharply and faced her.

'You are very late,' he said, ignoring her question. 'Where have you been?'

'Only with Aunt Jessie. She had a bad night, poor thing! but is better to-day.' Then, noting his flurried manner and the crushed letter, she asserted interrogatively, 'You have had bad news?'

'Well, no, not exactly,' he replied. 'It need not worry you. There it goes.'

And there it did go straight into the leaping flame, thrown from his grasp with a sudden jerk. And then, not content with that, he took up the tongs and held it between them over the coals with something of the ferocity of a cannibal toasting his victim.

The blaze danced around, lashing and licking till the letter was reduced to ash, and separated in flaky particles feathery light to fly up the chimney.

Priscilla's cheeks lost their colour. It was not the act of burning the letter which distressed her, but the manner of it. She watched him as he held the tongs in a vice-like grip, as if with cruel, brutal strength; as he dropped them again when they had served his purpose, letting them fall with a jangle on the fender.

'You have had bad news, and you won't tell me,' she persisted.

'I tell you not to worry; that is sufficient. Worry won't cure it, if it is bad news.' He stood up as he spoke. 'Perhaps you will be good enough to remove your bonnet and cloak, and let me have something to eat.'

She did not ask any more questions just then. This bristling, pricking humour of his was best left alone; but after dinner, when he sat down again in the little drawing-room on his own especial easy-chair set before the fire, and smoked a cigarette, she drew a stool, and sat down on it, almost at his feet.

She allowed him to smoke in silence for several minutes, but, suddenly moved to speak by the thoughts agitating her heart, she folded her hands over his knee, and, looking wistfully up into his face, said:

'Theo, do you want money?'

He answered with his cigarette still between his lips and muffling his words, and with his eyes on the fire:

'Want money?' He laughed rather contemptuously. 'Of course I want it—as much as I can get. Who does not?'

'I know that, dear. I mean, I know that nobody can get along without it; but—I thought perhaps——' She hesitated. 'I thought you might be in debt, and that if you were perhaps I could help you, because I have a very little of my own.'

She was thinking of a crisp little bundle of notes which Aunt Jessie had given her for her private purse, and which she was hoarding only for his benefit, to revert to him in the shape of presents in the future.

'In debt? Your imagination is pretty warm this evening; the sooner you let it cool down, the better.'

'You have not answered me,' she said quietly. 'Are you in debt?'

'What reason have you for these absurd questions? You haven't had to entertain the bailiff any time this week to my knowledge.'

'You never looked so troubled before, to my knowledge, Theo,' she answered. 'If it is not debt I am more than thankful, because debt is worse than an illness—it is an illness. Mother suffered from it once, and of course I suffered with her, and know all about it. It seemed to me that it was your trouble to-night. You never looked so wretched.'

He shifted uneasily on his chair, took his cigarette from his mouth, knocked the ashes out into a little plate on a small table at his side, and before he replaced it said with unwarranted chilliness:

'You seem to be labouring under some delusion. I am quite well: I am not in debt, and I shall feel obliged if you will drop the subject.'

The cigarette went back to his lips, and again he smoked in silence for a short time.

She withdrew her eyes from his face, and began to stare at the fire.

'How shall I guide him,' she thought, 'if he will not give me his full confidence? I grope in the dark. He thinks I am a child—not to be trusted.'

Presently he quite startled her with a little considerate speech almost significant of tenderness.

'You must be lonely here while I am absent,' he began, in quite a changed tone. 'Your mother can't come to you often. How would you like to make some new acquaintances?'

She looked up at him gratefully, and said:

'I don't want anybody, dear. I am like that woman in the Bible—"I dwell among my own people." I am content, wanting nothing while I have you, and mother, and Aunt Jessie.'

All her soul was stirred in the depths of her eyes, fixed on him, for she honestly meant what she said. He made an impatient movement as he replied, with his cigarette now held aloft, and his sarcastic expression very strong:

'That is all very well, but we are remote from Bible days; and, besides, I think that woman—if she ever existed—was a fool to refuse a social lift when it was hers for the asking, and is no guide for practical folks of this age. It may be absolutely necessary to make friends—in fact, I wish it, understand. How is a bank-clerk to make headway, I ask you, without a friendly push—somebody to back him?'

Here he paused, as if studying the question, and seemed to have lost the thread of his talk, until she gently reminded him.

'Somebody to back you, you were saying.'

'Yes, exactly; that's it.' He frowned at the fire, and his cigarette was paling to ash between his fingers. 'Somebody to back me, and rich and influential people—friends of mine—can and will do this backing. They are within my reach.'

'Are they?' she said quite simply.

'Yes, and we must call upon them.'

'You and I?' she said, this time submissively; but the tone, charged with reluctance, made him repeat her own words with a certain decisiveness, warranted to check any opposition did she wish to oppose.

'You and I.'

'When? Soon? Who are they? Where did you meet them?' she queried excitedly, with an undefined dread of having to meet people whose social position so towered above their own.

'When?' answered her husband, 'why, next Thursday; that's their day at home. Who are they? Mr. and Mrs. Goldwin. He is not young, not handsome, not brilliant; but he is a long-headed fellow, and partly owing to that, as well as to luck, he is something better than the whole three put together—he is a millionaire, though not a society man, but society is very fond of him all the same. Are you satisfied?'

She was fain to be, though he had not answered her last question, and she said almost below her breath:

'A millionaire, and we are to call upon him and his wife.'

He caught the words, however, and put his veto down once more on her disinclination, with his own provoking chilly authority of manner.

'That is what I propose,' he maintained.

She did not dare to advance any pros or cons. Rebellion or disobedience, she told herself, would be no ally at all in assisting her to rule or to throw that invisible chain about him which her aunt Jessie had recommended.

She was treating him like a gouty invalid—with all the gentleness and leniency of a well-trained nurse—careful not to hurt

the offending limb in an attempt to relieve it of the painful pressure of bandage, which he, mulish-like, objected to have touched or removed.

Muddy currents fouled his temper this evening, and she, trying to trace the source of the muddiness, floundered out to a sea of supposition, prompting a second rush of interrogation, playing detective very badly.

Her hands were still folded over his knee, and her face upturned to his, as she asked, woman-like:

'Is she pretty? Nice? Have you seen her?'

He threw his spent cigarette in the fire, and watched it consume as he replied:

'Wait till you can judge for yourself; my opinion may not count.'

'Then you have seen her?'

'Yes.'

'And him.'

'Yes.'

'Is she young?'

Again he answered in the affirmative, and still studying the fire.

'And he is old, you say?' continued Priscilla, with a vague idea that the Goldwins were expected to find a salve, somehow, for whatever was so sorely troubling him this night, and that her questions would batter at his reserve to some purpose. 'And he is old, you say?'

'Old enough to be her grandfather, nearly.'

'Well, he must be good and noble,' asserted the unsophisticated 'Cilla, 'for her to marry him.'

'Probably,' said her husband. She was not looking at him just then, and consequently could not see how very disagreeably his mouth was curved. 'He must be, as you say, noble and good. Millionaires are always noble and good, of course.' There was a sneer in the tone, however, which could not escape her, especially as he went on: 'With friends ever at their elbow and women at their feet.'

'You don't mean that she married him just because he is a millionaire?' She looked at him inquiringly.

'My words are open to that construction.'

'Oh, Theo, don't look like that! don't talk like that! don't think so unkindly of us poor women!' Then emphatically: 'I would have married you without a sixpence.'

'Yes; and you would go begging at the street-corners, singing, perhaps, for something to eat and something to wear. People who marry without sixpence deserve to be sent to the poor-house. It is a good thing for you that one of us is practical.'

She removed her hands from his knee and her eyes from his face, and began to gaze at the coals again with the least pain at her heart. She could not understand him; he had seemingly condemned the mercenary woman, and yet was inclined to scoff at herself because she was nothing of the kind. After a pause she looked up again. 'Theo.'

He answered her with a slight movement of his head, turning his face towards her, and commenced to roll another cigarette.

Then she began again, with a desperate effort to find a clue to his present temper, with persistent little digging questions, which seemingly did probe a little deeper than she intended, for when she asked, 'Did you meet her before you met me? Where did you meet her? Do tell me,' he made a sudden plunge of his body as if he had been pricked, and his long, white, muscular fingers crushed the cigarette and rendered it useless. With a smothered ejaculation he threw the thing from him and proceeded to busy himself with the manipulation of another before he spoke, and then, as if with sudden compunction, or probably a wish to erase the effects of his implied annoyance, he laughed rather artificially, and told her that he quite expected to see her dwindle down to a mere interrogation point very soon if she did not cease plying questions.

She did not laugh too: his action and words, as he plunged and anathematized, had startled her. Ignoring his attempt at wit and amiability, she said quietly:

'I would like to know all about her, if I am to be an acquaintance, that's all.'

'Well, that's natural,' he replied, still anxious to be amiable. 'I met her after I had met you, and if she had not married four months ago, you would have met her too at Aunt Jessie's when you first called there with me. She was her companion.'

It was now Priscilla's turn to start, with a new excitement.

'What?' she cried. 'Isabella Gimp! You don't mean Isabella Gimp!'

'You evidently know her already,' he said, throwing a side-glance at the flushed face and that rounding of the eyes which meant surprise. 'I do mean Isabella Gimp.'

'No,' she replied, still with rounded eyes, 'I don't know her; but I have seen her—and only this afternoon.'

'Oh!' Another side-glance, and then: 'You will permit me to question now, I presume? Where did you meet her?'

'I never met her; I saw her in the carriage, outside Aunt Jessie's door; she was about to visit her, and I saw her first through the drawing-room window, wondering who she was, until Aunt Jessie came and looked too, and said, "That's Isabella Gimp."'

'My aunt might have done her the honour of calling her by her married name.'

'She was too excited just then, I suppose, to think of the change of name.' Then, after a little pause, 'So she is Mrs. Goldwin?'

'Exactly,' and Theo bent forward to ignite a match at the fire, and then lit his second cigarette.

The surprise faded from the young wife's face, and quite a sad expression took its place. She was silent and full of thought; so silent, that her husband, wondering of what she was thinking, looked strangely at her as she sat at his feet, her hands clasped in her lap, and a pair of sad brown eyes fixed on the fire, which was losing its ruddy glow, needing fresh fuel, and corresponding with her own condition just then in her dejection, and the lack of one kind word from him to renew the vivid pleasure and delight always felt in his society before. She was miserable because of this Mrs. Goldwin—*née* Isabella Gimp—with whom she was to open an intimacy so soon; because even Theo had hinted that she had married the millionaire and not the man; because she was so beautiful, and was no stranger to her husband; because Aunt Jessie had once thought there was something between the 'goddess' and him, and had called her 'that person,' showing that contempt had been excited. These reflections begat within her a feeling hitherto unknown, and made her disturb Theo somewhat by suddenly turning her face to his and meeting his eyes studying hers, to which there came a melancholy tenderness and shining unshed tears. She thought she saw love in his look, and with that she rose from the stool, and perching herself on one of his knees, she put her arms around his neck like a child, and pressed her cheek lovingly against his, as she whispered: 'She is very beautiful, Theo.'

He could not resist this clinging. He twined a responsive arm about her, and his face softened. It pleased him to be caressed, and perhaps a momentary pang of remorse, a pricking of conscience moving his features to show pity and warmth, impulsively nerved his arm to hold her closer to him for a second as she nestled confidingly.

'Do you think so?' he asked, more gently than he had yet spoken this evening.

'Don't you?' she asked.

'She is passable; but women don't always see another woman's beauty with men's eyes, or most likely they won't.'

Now, if 'Cilla had been wise she would have said no more of Mrs. Goldwin; but the subject had a fascination for her, and so she went on, still clinging:

'Theo, it is a wonder, isn't it? that you did not fall in love with her.'

He puffed at his cigarette; his arm loosed its hold about her waist, and his knees began to shift as if her weight was cumbersome.

'I am tiring you,' she said, resuming her lowly position, and then, continuing the subject: 'She is beautiful, but not good, I think. Aunt Jessie dislikes her, and not unjustly, I'm sure; and though I can't help saying she is beautiful, neither can I quite help disliking her. You mustn't be angry with me.'

'Aunt Jessie has been prejudicing you'—he spoke with the old hard tone again; his brows were knitted, and sullenness came back to his features—'and you swear by Aunt Jessie, of course?'

'No, she did not say much; but there's something about her which is not pleasant, that makes me wish you did not want me to go and see her.'

'How was it you were so late this afternoon?' he asked,

desirous of changing the conversation, and letting her understand it to be objectionable.

'Chatting and not heeding the time.'

'Listening to aunt's lamentations, if the truth were told.'

'I like her, for all her "lamentations," as you call them, Theo; and you do, too, but you won't admit it. You must—you should, after all she has done for us.'

This was not the happiest turn she could have given to the dialogue; it was a step only from quicksand to quicksand.

'Has she done so much?' he asked, with the sneer uppermost; 'I was not aware of it.'

She looked at him in some surprise. She believed Aunt Jessie to be thoroughly good and generous, and especially towards themselves, so she gently reminded him:

'She was a mother to you, in the first place.'

'Indeed!' very sarcastically. 'You seem to know more than I do. Yes, she was good enough to send me off to school, and pay for my education and maintenance with my own money, though she was married well, and could have borne the expense; but her sense of justice, to herself, was keen. I never cost her a farthing until I lived with her when a lad, and that was a *quid pro quo* affair. She was lonely—a childless widow—and my presence under her roof supplied a want, that's all, for which she paid in kind with meat and drink and shelter.'

'But, Theo——'

He jumped up from his chair and began to pace the twelve-foot square room in wrath and excitement, unable to sit quietly any longer, and next spoke in raised tones:

'I say she has done comparatively *nothing* for me; but you side with her—you encourage her in her whims and caprice, and run me down together!'

'Oh, don't say that! Why get angry?' she pleaded. 'You know she came out to Australia for your sake.'

'For her own sake; she was glad to hurry me out of England. I was a seedy, unlucky nephew, no credit to her, so she came away where she and I would not be known. There was self underlying all her actions.'

'And kept you here in Phillipia?' she rather boldly argued, in the firm belief that she would make him think as she did.

'For the same reason as before—for company's sake.'

'Ah! you are out of temper to-night,' she further ventured to say, 'and it makes you unjust.'

'Unjust! You are unjust—she is unjust. No doubt she has told you a string of falsehoods about me, made me out a prodigal son from her point of view, not from mine; the fatted calf has never been slain, and I have deserved it.' He spoke an octave higher now, while making the room vibrate with his passionate strides. 'You can run me down with her as much as you like; you can believe what you like—and you may believe this too, that I should have been a rich man this day but for that false motherhood which she rams down my throat and yours—the mean, unnatural conduct of one who should have befriended me.'

'Oh, Theo!' she cried, in a voice ready to break with suppressed sobs. 'She loves you dearly—dearly! You——'

Theo cut the sentence short by striding through the door out of the room.

She heard the street-door slam to with a force which made the room shake, and she knew he had gone out. She experienced a sense of suffocation, stretching forth her arms as if to grope through smoke and escape from fire—the fire of domestic broil. The task of guiding an unreasoning, obstinate nature with an invisible chain was totally unfitted for her, and she was learning to understand this: she had succeeded only in vexing him and driving him from home with angry feeling at his heart, and his displeasure was more than she could bear.

With her throat swelling and her eyes filling she made a mental vow to let him have his own way in all things; she would not employ any chain whatsoever, unless to put it round her own neck for him to lead her; she would be Katherine, and allow him to be Petruchio, if he chose to be Petruchio.

He had been looking at her very lovingly, she thought, and she had caught him in the act when he least expected it. The look which she construed into an amorous glance had impelled her to rise and make that active demonstration of affection towards him—that clinging caress which had gratified his vanity, that tenderness not to be suppressed even by his withering, cynical blasts of temper.

And again she wondered why he had not fallen in love with Isabella Gimp's bright beauty, which he had called 'passable,' and if she, Isabella, had cared for him at all, and why Aunt Jessie should have thought something had been 'between them,' and what it was in the beautiful face—which she had observed rather closely as she stared through the window into the carriage at her aunt's door—that was repulsive to her; but no answer came.

'Perhaps,' she told herself, 'Aunt Jessie has prejudiced me, as Theo says, and I must try to like her, because he wishes it; and it is for his benefit, after all, and I have blundered, as I always shall and always have, in attempting to make him think differently. He must have his own way and be happy, for in his unhappiness I shall be the most miserable woman in the world. And, oh dear, he did look angry!'

Thus for the sake of peace Priscilla Lockstud sheathed a very blunt sword of contention at once and for ever, and slipped quietly into a nonentity. She looked about her for something to do to keep her mind from dwelling on her husband's anger, and so she opened a small book-case, which fitted into a recess on one side of the fireplace, to let her hand hover about this book and that, hesitating in her choice, and ultimately selecting a yellow-back, which she carried to the chair just vacated by Theo.

Again she sat on the stool, and, resting the book on the seat of the chair, she opened it and tried to read, but she never turned a page; for her intelligence was at work struggling to read her husband's character and his trouble. Her queries had led to nothing but contumely, and the desired clue was as far off as ever. He was to her as a foreign tongue which she was powerless to master. It was a study that made her brain dizzy and her heart sick.

When he returned about an hour after, his temper having been subdued somewhat by the out-door air, it was to find the fire dead and his wife asleep. Her head had fallen forward on the book with her right arm arched about it and a cheek pressing the open page. Had he stooped to kiss the upturned cheek, he would have found it damp with unrestrained tears. He did not kiss it.

CHAPTER IV.

SHOWING HOW JERRY WAS FAVOURED BY MAMMON, BOWED TO CUPID, AND TROUBLED FIDUS ACHATES.

VIRGINIA BAY was one of those pretty broad nooks which Phillipia offers now as suburbs. It was laid out in clean wide streets, metalled roads, and flagged pathways, mostly inclined to steepness, where private homes unpretentious and houses lordly were linked occasionally, and sometimes stood alone—houses towering many feet with double balconies, from which the harbour could be revelled in when the sense of the spectator was appreciative enough of Nature's glories to become enthusiastic. Even its streets commanded a view of the distant waters: here a glimpse—there a broad expanse, twinkling in the sunshine, rippling in the breeze or frosted or glass-like according to atmospheric influence, but ever enchanting.

One of its most imposing structures rose proudly within an emerald semicircle of stately trees erect as a bodyguard, and bore on the entrance gates—front and rear—a brass plate whereon was inscribed GOOLGUN. The approach proper to Goolgun led from a side street—lane-like—known as Washington Avenue, and was a succession of terraces all dotted with flower-beds and intersected with gravelled walks leading to a handsome lawn, where a fountain of stone stood in the centre, its base supporting four sturdy cherub boys, winged and nude, and grouped *dos-à-dos*, the cheeks of each puffed with the seeming effort of sending forth a fine spray through a stone trumpet to fall and splash with gurgling melody into the basin below.

Flights of broad stone steps, where a sphinx at each side apparently mounted guard, led from terrace to terrace, and lastly to the house itself, on to the broad veranda encircling it, with its massive pillars supporting the balcony.

One afternoon a lady sat on the veranda of Goolgun. She was quite alone, and her beringed fingers were interlaced and resting idly on her lap as she in bodily idleness stared before her with thoughts active and eyes seeing nothing. She wore a robe of olive-green plush with a train curving at her feet with a

graceful sweep. There were soft ruffles of costly lace at her throat and wrists, where jewels gleamed. Her hair—a fair mass of floss—was worked up into an elaborate arrangement of rolls and curls, and brushed upward from a marble-white forehead until it formed a pale golden arch, rippling and shining. The whole face might have been chiselled out of marble for its Minerva-like straightness and correctness of feature, its rigidity, its absence of colour, excepting where the carnation mouth gave a dash of warmth, and the glittering green-tinted eye imparted life.

It was not a happy face; Elizabeth's might have worn just such an expression when Essex's ring was not forthcoming and his hour of execution at hand; for in spite of its pride and power it was shadowed with pain, and disappointment, and bitterness. Its profile was turned towards the house, and opposite a French light leading to the drawing-room within.

Then quite suddenly a figure appeared at this door, the tall burly figure of an elderly man, well dressed, whose whole bearing implied satisfaction with himself and the world in general. His eyes, full, rather bleared, but by no means dull, were bent upon the beautiful creature—who was thoroughly unconscious of his proximity—in admiration and reverence.

The eyes belonged to Jeremiah Goldwin. He was not a man given to sentiment or poetical rhapsody, yet was his heart full of a quaint poetry of its own at that moment—a dumb poetry which, if finding voice, might have cried out in rapture:

> 'I am monarch of all I survey;
> My right there is none to dispute.'

With the thoughtless antics of a schoolboy, he trod noiselessly until he stood exactly behind her, still unheard, and then, bowing his head, he brought his face swiftly opposite hers, and kissed her full on the scarlet mouth. She started up with a little stifled scream, and, falling back from him, swept a dainty handkerchief—hastily withdrawn—across her lips with a passionate hand. It certainly looked like an attempt to sweep the kiss off.

'Well, Belle,' he began, as she rose to her feet, 'I am back, you see, as you told me to be, punctual to the minute, ready for the torture of our first day "at home." What's up?'

The question was elicited by her manner, which was unusual, the whole serenity of her countenance showing disturbance.

'You startled me so,' she replied with a little petulance and a pout; 'I don't like people to steal about me as if they were ghosts.'

He did not notice or heed the impetuous flourish of the handkerchief, but looked at her still with all the pride of possession burning within him tenfold. She was so beautiful even in her irritation, more beautiful with that queenly physique and attire which were hers. In spite of his years his soul swelled as ardently as that of any young Lochinvar, and his gnarled broad fingers caught at her slender jewelled hands to raise them to his lips, where a sort of apology formed itself at once, the action being more refined than the words.

'What a bear it was to frighten the poor dear, the pretty darling! Shall it be kicked?'

'Sit down and don't be stupid, Jeffrey.' 'Jeffrey' was a substitute of her own for the commonplace 'Jerry.' 'Remember we are on the veranda.'

She had recovered herself quite, and spoke gently.

'Well, what of that? May not a man kiss his own wife? Let anybody look who likes; they will only envy me—me, lucky Jerry.'

With this he kissed her again on lips and forehead, with a rough defiance and an emphasis of proprietorship.

As soon as she could she retreated from this osculatory onslaught through the French light into the drawing-room, where he followed her with the idea of repeating the attack, when a knock at the door opening to the corridor made him suddenly collapse and sit demure enough in the first chair handy, as his wife said 'Come in.'

A footman entered bearing a card on a silver salver.

'Show the lady and gentleman here,' said Mrs. Goldwin, while she examined the card, and her mouth fixed itself in a hard line, with her pallor, if possible, increasing.

'Oh, there's a gentleman, is there? I'm glad there's a man to hit the thing off with,' said Jerry, as the footman disappeared. 'How many of these tickets are to be handed over this afternoon, I wonder? I'm not used to them.'

The bright blood had fled from her lips, and the card was

suffering a wrench at her hands, and, noting it, he added in all good faith:

'Why, old girl, you don't seem to cotton to it very much, either. It is a kind of *noblesse oblige* for us both, I see, but we'll get used to it in time, I suppose, eh?'

'Yes,' acquiesced the lady, looking towards the door through which their visitors were to be ushered, 'these ceremonious calls are a plague sometimes.'

She felt that a plague of a kind was assailing her as she waited for the reception half in dread, half in longing.

'Mr. and Mrs. Lockstud,' announced the footman according to instructions, as he held the door open, and that lady and gentleman passed through.

Had Mrs. Goldwin been less self-occupied, she would have noticed that her husband sent a swift glance towards the door. She did not see it, nor did she hear him mutter, 'Lockstud again! confounded coincidence! and just at the start, too! Pshaw! what a fool I am! there might be a score of Lockstuds in the world.' And then, as he stood up at his wife's side, ready to receive, he saw a young man enter, whom he had previously met, and for some reason only known to himself he was relieved to find that this Lockstud was not a total stranger. He also saw a dot of a woman, as yet quite unknown, a shy, sweet, delicate-looking little woman, whom he greeted with brusque heartiness, putting out his strong hand to grip hers as if it belonged to a long-tried, well-known friend.

'I'm very glad to see you, ma'am. I've had the pleasure of meeting your good man before,' he said.

The 'good man' at that moment was standing face to face and hand to hand with Mrs. Goldwin, whose back was turned to her husband; not for long, however, for she wheeled round swiftly as Lockstud said shortly:

'Mrs. Goldwin—my wife.'

And then the two women shook hands, while Priscilla, though quivering with nervousness, could not help noticing the deathly coldness of Mrs. Goldwin's hand, which struck chilly through her glove, as if it were ice.

It was an unpleasant clasp, and altogether an unpleasant experience of making an acquaintance, for she felt herself shrinking into comparative insignificance. Her self-esteem was

small enough to fill her with painful humiliation in the presence of so much feminine beauty and wealth of adornment.

Her gaze, sent upward into the Minerva face, met a frigid look from the glittering eyes, and then the introduction was over, with a few formal words from each side.

'Sit down, Mr. Lockstud, sit down,' said Goldwin, ready and willing to forget that unpleasant association with the name of Lockstud which had set him muttering at a coincidence. 'We have had the pleasure of meeting before,' he repeated, 'and it won't be my fault if we are not the best of friends.'

'Nor mine, sir,' answered Lockstud, with the respectful deference of one addressing a senior and—a millionaire.

Then followed a general conversation, in which Priscilla, shy and nervous, took little part, contributing monosyllables merely. She was not sorry when the visit was over and she and Theo stood outside Goolgun. She now spoke openly, and though she would not disparage Mrs. Goldwin, her words implied that she was more prepossessed with the host than the hostess, and might have irritated Lockstud if he had heard them; but he did not: for he was temporarily unconscious of his wife's presence and voice, and she, taking his silence for unanimity of opinion, began to rejoice inwardly as she walked on at his side somewhat elated.

In the meanwhile Mr. Goldwin was doing his best to acquit himself creditably as host, and so win his wife's praise.

Jeremiah Goldwin, or Lucky Jerry, as he was commonly called, was not an 'Admirable Crichton,' but, possessing certain qualities which were probably of a more widespread recommendation, he was in a fair way of becoming almost as popular as that exceedingly well-favoured but most unfortunate young man.

Was he not a millionaire, with a beautiful young wife and a palace of a home?

Money alone created for him a distinction, especially when its distribution marked the wonderful length of his purse; the wife, much inclined to hospitality and entertainment, excited approbation; the magnificence of his house called for eulogy; the whole evoked a popular enthusiasm.

Yet there had been a time when he was sans wealth, sans palace, sans wife, during which period the foundation of that

enthusiasm had still to be laid—was awaiting the first pat of the trowel. Who is enthusiastic over a hard-working, patient-plodding man—be he never so industrious—if success stands aloof? But Jerry plodded on, indifferent to censure, praise, or general opinion.

He had been in Australia for a number of years, and but a few knew of his antecedents, or why, with his possessions, he remained so firmly grafted on Australian soil. The main fact, freely discussed and accepted by those who knew him personally or by repute, was his monetary value, which was an equipoise to mannerism or idiosyncrasy. Harmless eccentricity and hail-fellow-well-met characteristics—which in the days of struggle and toil might have been called bluntness and lack of dignity—were now sturdy props for a daïs whereon to mount a jovial popularity.

He was in truth a crude gem, and as it is well known that diamond-dust friction alone can produce the real brilliance of the diamond itself, no doubt his especial diamond-dust was the active agency forcing all his better qualities to the surface.

His wealth provided a glittering polish, pleasant in the eyes of his admirers. Jerry was as well known in Phillipia at the time of which I write as St. James's steeple or Captain Cook's statue is known in Sydney this day, and, like them, being elevated, was to be looked up to. He was lucky almost from the outset of his colonial career. Lucky when, in an encounter with the blacks — who were inclined to hostility, and were furious against the whites in some portions of the colonies in their rough-shod early days, believing them to be usurpers and despoilers—he was saved from the blow of a tomahawk, which might have bared his skull but for the intervention of a friend in need, who received it on his forearm instead, with a fell crack splintering its bone, a service which Jerry never forgot; for this friend in need became a sort of *protégé* of his, and was no other than that Washington Larry of whom we have already had a glimpse.

Jerry had wielded his pick and spear perseveringly and to some purpose in the Australian goldfields, his luck as a digger culminating in the finding of an immense nugget of gold (weighing 364 ounces 11 pennyweights) on the Bing-Bong Creek—at

that time a newly-discovered alluvial goldfield in Georgius, for which he received £1,000.

The unearthing of such a treasure-trove was not a single instance in the very early days of Georgius; but, nevertheless, it was not an everyday occurrence, and when it did happen was no secret abroad.

The nugget was called by Jerry himself the 'Jerry Flyer,' a jocular twist of his own name, as opposed to Jeremiah.

It was a most happy appellation, for the 'Jerry Flyer' became a sure stepping-stone to his subsequent fortune. It was as strong pair of financial wings—capital wings in a double sense—wherewith to fly to a still more elevated Crœsus-starred perch. He was not slow in learning to understand the full and free expansion of these new-found pinions, for Jerry was a man of prudence—one of those men who have a wizard-like facility for knocking money out of impossible-looking places, who are brain-filled with forethought, who possess a sort of divining-rod in the glance of an eye, who see the glint of the groat and stoop to appropriate the coin—to grovel for it, if needs must—while others walk over it blindfold. In a word, he was a man born to make money, and he certainly fulfilled this cast of his nativity. His large head, with its great breadth from ear to ear, was a direct manifestation of his energies, combative, cautious, and acquisitive.

Nor was he devoid of real moral and manly sentiment. With a strong tenacity of purpose, he never forgave an injury; by the same rule he never forgot a kindness rendered, and if vice at all soiled his past life, it was surely due to certain exasperating conditions.

He was quite a young man when that £1,000 fell to his lot, and he was determined to invest a goodly portion of it.

Phillipia at this day was, though not youthful, yet far from anything like a perfect development; but her budding maturity was in full action. As yet, the spring of her railroads had not begun, and her extent of city covered but a small area in comparison with what it does now, with the close of the nineteenth century coming on apace.

Suburbs now were accounted country then, and were only accessible by vehicular traffic, or on foot or horse.

Scrub and marsh and rock and gully, upon which fortunes

have since been reared, were ignored, or gazed upon with indifference as to their future merits, or with little or no foresight for the possible fatness of the land to come. Over the said rocks and scrub Jerry began to flutter those wings of his. He bought certain craggy slopes and jungle-capped hills, and—if one may be pardoned for the wilful perversion of a Scriptural text—he cast his bread upon the waters, to return to him after many days in rich loaves; for thirty years later the jungle had disappeared, the hills were cut down to an easy ascent, and the craggy slopes became streets, forming a pretty suburb, bay-embraced, and known as Virginia Bay.

Here Jerry's bread assumed the shape of bricks and mortar in about half a dozen of its principal streets. Several of his allotments had been disposed of to others on a ninety-nine years' lease for the erection of homes which loomed in the dim hereafter as inheritance for his unknown heirs.

Phillipia, maturing, had been pushing forward with mighty strength over the years since Jerry unearthed his nugget, and was now broadened out enough to gather within her outstretched arms the outlying lands and make them all her own, of which Virginia Bay had become a prominent feature.

But long before the unfolding of this particular suburb, and soon after his investment at Virginia Bay, Jerry was pushing his way over new roads to fortune and on other shores. It was when a rumour reached Phillipia of the flourishing prospects of North Flindersland, where stations were established, and from whence wool was being shipped south, and where, owing to one man's almost prophetic conviction and well-directed zeal, a seaport near the stations, and more advantageous for the transit of the wool, had been discovered, and a town secured and established—when the Government, already stirred to some interest in the new township, had forwarded a surveyor to lay it out—that Jerry made up his mind to hie to the new land, to the new township known as Robsville, the new port called Kennedy Bay.

He did not go alone, for Washington Larry, his sworn mate, accompanied him, and so they discarded spade and pick and wended their way to North Flindersland.

Robsville at this period of its existence was a straggling place of scattered wooden shanties, humpies, and small square

one-windowed shops on one side of the principal street, with an amphitheatre of mountainous hills and rocky heights, and a profusion of wild foliage, prickly pear, and mangrove springing indiscriminately in street or gully from rocky beds.

It was a sort of ugly gosling to Jerry; but, his divining-rod beginning to dance in his brain, he looked ahead and beheld the gosling a prime goose prolific of golden eggs for himself and many others.

'Wash,' he cried to his mate, 'I'm going to buy up wherever I can.'

Larry scratched his head and looked dubious. He felt it was his duty to protect his friend, who had treated him like a brother.

'You've thrown away enough money on that property down in Phillipia, I think.'

'Not I,' laughed Jerry. 'I'm a young man and a strong man. I can work for food and a roof while my money is set like dough to rise over-night. It *will* rise, mate, and I can live well enough and wait for it.'

Larry, who was not of a sanguine nature, not speculative, not long-sighted, shrugged his shoulders only; he knew it was useless to argue, but felt that Jerry was doing a risky thing.

Jerry was not influenced the least by anybody's doubts and fears. He did buy up wherever he could, through Government sales and private individuals. Several allotments he sold again at an increased value, putting the necessary cash in his pocket for fresh investments in taking up country for plantation-grounds. The Land Act of the time offered facilities for this purpose through a regulation by which any person planting a certain acreage of specified plants might secure the freehold of land at ten shillings per acre—a measure serving to promote the culture of tropical products.

These plantations, like everything he touched, prospered in the course of years, and he found himself a wealthy man. Ultimately he left them, with Washington Larry as manager *pro tem.*, and visited the far interior, where he bought a couple of stations at a low figure, owing to the owners being glad to realize upon them because of losses through drought and disaster. Thus it came to pass that Jerry stood with several irons in a financial fire, and all red-hot since the fire began to

blaze so high that its light travelled some distance, and glorified the man who had built it. Herein lies a rough chart of the road he had mapped out to riches, and which he reached so faithfully.

After a long residence in Flindersland, he and Washington went to the south to enjoy life in their own way, for Washington was as Jerry's shadow, and by him in all things treated handsomely. Had he not saved Jerry's life? The broken arm that had saved Jerry's head was the knitting of Larry's fortune too.

Subsequently the two men resided permanently in Phillipia, occupying one of Jerry's own houses, known as 'Bachelor's Nest,' in Virginia Bay. Goldwin had offices in the city, and a large staff of employés. His stations and plantations—little mints for him—were in trustworthy hands, and Washington Larry was appointed simply to make himself useful when called upon, and received a splendid allowance, upon which he might have supported a wife and two or three olive-branches, and set up a decent home on his own account, had he chosen; but he did not choose.

He was satisfied. His occupation was a sinecure, he had no anxieties, had enough to eat, enough to wear, and clung only to three dear friends: to his benefactor firstly, of course, with the fidelity of a woman—to the man who had lifted him from poverty, and done away with for ever his 'ne'er-do-well' days; to his cat, and to his meerschaum.

But if Larry was grateful to Jerry, Jerry was more than grateful to Larry, and no matter how or in what way he heaped favours upon him, felt that the debt of his life could never be fully repaid; so their lives were intertwined, and a link as bright and indissoluble as that which knit the friendship of the embryo shepherd-king and the reigning king's son united their hearts.

Up to a certain time Washington Larry smoked his pipe in peace and contentment at the office or at home, facing his mate and discussing current topics, perhaps sipping occasionally at the flowing bowl; his life was very even, more so than his friend's.

Goldwin was more in demand socially, and, while conscious of his social weight, was averse to being lionized, the tendency

that way being strong. He was pointed at as the richest man in Phillipia—the modern Midas, turning everything he touched into solid gold.

Invitations from all directions assailed him, and of divers kinds, some of which he was compelled to accept; but he was not a society man, as Theodore Lockstud had justly observed to his wife, nor was he a man of words.

Lacking eloquence, he spoke as little as possible, but generally spoke to the purpose. He was president of half a dozen institutions, and a liberal subscriber to all.

It may be said that it is an easy thing for a millionaire to be a liberal subscriber, that a river cannot miss a pitcher of water, or the earth a dozen grains of sand: that may be true. He did not miss what he offered, but the offering itself was as a rose highly perfumed, redolent of sweetness, for the essence of generosity and pure philanthropy centred in his great heart impelled his hand to give for the love of giving and making others happy, and not through the pride of possession or gross ostentation. Let us do him justice. It was not his fault if his scattered pounds created worldly incense; but his gold fell in unseen corners too, from which there emanated a sweeter savour to rise higher than earth and over the heads of men.

From politics he held aloof, and was never so happy as when alone with his mate, smoking, yarning, and dressed in well-worn, easy-fitting clothes, and was never so miserable or fidgety as when, arrayed in evening dress and starched linen, he was bound for an evening out somewhere.

Larry felt sorry for him at these times, and almost wished he was not so sought after, or that he would resist the seeking. But if Goldwin had obeyed his impulse to remain at home, it is impossible to say what might have happened; but what did happen is the main thing, the hinge upon which this story hangs, for one evening in particular he met Isabella Gimp.

A dinner-party was given for him especially, but later on some young people were expected for a dance.

It was when dinner was over and, cigar in mouth—an unpleasant substitute for his homely pipe—he sat with several gentlemen on a trellised-in balcony, where coffee was being served, that she first appeared before him.

He was stationed by a window which commanded a full view

of the drawing-room within, and saw her enter there arm-in-arm with a gentleman. Her toilette was severely simple—a dress of some soft cashmere material of dark hue, contrasting with her flaxen coils and fitting her splendid figure as closely as wax, with its bodice cut square and low on the chest, and sleeves short, exposing the shapely, round white arms unadorned.

He pulled his cigar from his lips, held it at arm's length, and shot the smoke from his mouth, which remained open in silent wonder and admiration for a few seconds. He was lost in rapture over so much enticing beauty concentrated in one form, from the golden crown to the tapering toe of the silver-buckled, bronze-kid little shoe.

Suddenly there came an ecstatic muttering:

'By the Lord Harry, what a stunner!'

Some few moments after, having flung his cigar anywhere out of hand, he was in the drawing-room, procuring an introduction.

He stood before her, with his right arm slung behind him across his waist—his usual position when standing—and he found that she would bear a close inspection.

The young man who had led her into the room, and seemed never to have left her side since, was sitting closely by her, and both were rather apart from the rest of the company.

This young man's eyes, dark and piercing, were on the lady's face too; but their expression changed from tenderness to hauteur as the millionaire advanced with the hostess, as the young lady's face perceptibly flushed with apparent pleasure.

'Will you bring a chair over here and sit down?' she said to Jerry, the formality of presentation being over. 'I have heard so much of you, and seem to know you quite well.'

Whereupon the young man, with flashing eyes and a sarcastic mouth, jumped up and said, with stiff politeness and grave bow:

'Mr. Goldwin need not trouble; he can take my place with pleasure.'

Jeremiah Goldwin, engrossed then, gazing after the retreating figure and thinking, 'There goes a courteous, praiseworthy young fellow,' did not see, 'the stunner' smile and slightly toss her head; and, as the gentleman's back was turned to him, he likewise failed to see the scowl that sat on his countenance. He was grateful to him, and approved of the action of the

offered seat as one of respectful attention, and, still looking after the abdicant, he asked, without a glance at the lady:

'Who is that?'

'A friend of mine—Mr. Lockstud.'

'Lockstud!' repeated Jerry, with a strange eagerness and increased interest—'Lockstud! That's strange!'

'Why strange?' she asked, smiling up at him.

He sat down in Lockstud's chair and began to rub his forehead with his broad fingers as if trying to think or remember something.

'Do you know anything of him, then?' she asked, seeing that he still pondered.

'I knew some people of the same name years ago, and far from Australia, that's all. Let us talk of something else,' he added abruptly.

Miss Gimp was clever; she at once concluded that the subject was oppressive, and obeyed his demand for 'something else' immediately. She glided into conversation easily, and laughed and talked, and laughed again, till her companion began to feel rejuvenated and to wish he was young once more, and an Adonis meet to worship her.

She told him she was staying with Mrs. Calliport, which was quite a piece of pleasing information for him; for Mrs. Calliport was one of his tenants, and almost a neighbour, and he at once expressed some contrition for not having called upon her, since she was an invalid, at the same time making a mental vow to do so as soon as possible.

'I am sure Mrs. Calliport will be delighted to see you at her house,' said the fair Isabella.

'And Miss Gimp?' he asked, getting daring enough to begin a flirtation.

'Certainly,' she replied, with a ripple of mirth which set his old heart beating.

Her apparently simple, confiding nature, her peerless beauty, were arrows which he, though advanced in years, was not tough enough to resist, and he returned to his bachelor's home that night a veritable lion in love.

Mrs. Calliport thought him a considerate, kind-natured old gentleman indeed, because he apologized to her on his first visit for never having called before, and because from that date on

he came several times, and even drank tea with her and Miss Gimp in quite a friendly fashion.

Mrs. Calliport did not praise him altogether beyond his merits in pronouncing him to be kind and thoughtful, although her companion was the primary attraction to her house; for in truth he was sorry for having missed her acquaintance so long, and with that honest, rough simplicity of his, brightening his words and atoning for manner, he stamped his sympathy for her infirmity as genuine, and all unconsciously won an esteem which her own characteristics excited for herself within him.

So Jerry had a great respect for Mrs. Calliport, while suffering keenly through wild infatuation exercised by the personal charms of her companion.

While Jerry was going through this phase of his existence, Washington Larry still smoked his pipe of peace not two hundred yards away, ignorantly blissful of the matrimonial mine about to be fired under his feet to shatter his general complacency; but the bliss stood only for a short period. Jerry wore a grizzly beard at this time, until one day he rather startled his mate by coming home clean-shaven.

'Thunder! what's that for?' exclaimed Larry, who did not consider the loss of beard an improvement, leaving alone that it was a sinking of personal individuality. 'Clean-shaved! What for?'

'Don't approve?' began Jerry, with the least suspicion of a twinkle in his eye as he walked over to a square, unpretentious mirror hanging above a mantelshelf which was adorned with pipes, pouches, and tobacco-jars—as dear to the owners as the choicest *bric-à-brac* to my lady.

After an examination therein, he laughed quietly, and admitted:

'Well, I do look a funny chap.'

'Not like yourself,' growled Larry in reply.

'No use crying over spilt milk,' quoth Goldwin. 'It isn't torn out by the roots; the grass'll grow again.'

And this was all the satisfaction to be had for the present. But when Jerry began to sport his broadcloth every day, and to coax his great hands into kid gloves, and walk out always dressed like a dandy—when Larry found himself left a great deal more alone than usual to read his papers and miscellaneous literature, over which he got considerably mixed, to smoke or sip or yawn in solitude, why, he would have been as dull as a fish not to have felt the rumbling of the mine.

One night when Goldwin had been home about a quarter of an hour, it being near eleven o'clock, when he, having cast his fine clothes, was happy in his old ones, and sat opposite his mate smoking a well-stained pipe, Larry, sitting as small boys do when converting a chair into a toy-horse, with his long legs crossing the seat, his arms folded on the back, his meerschaum dangling from his fingers unheeded, with its fire dying in the bowl, pushed his head forward, and peering into his friend's face curiously with his ferret eyes, put a question quite unexpectedly:

'Have you slipped your moorings, mate?'

'What does that mean?' Jerry asked, feigning a cloudy perception of the metaphor, and trying to look as unconcerned as Larry's pet cat, Cicero, lying coiled at his master's feet. 'You don't generally sneak round a bush when you've got anything to say. What do you mean?'

Jerry, still smoking, began to help himself to a glass of the beer which was set on the table before him, ready as it always was for their consumption at this hour. He spoke with an assumed carelessness, and though he filled up his glass, he left it untasted, standing till it got flat, while he listened to what his mate had to say:

'It just means this: I want to know the whole truth. I've got eyes in my head, but you're your own master, and it ain't for me to interfere; but all the same, it ain't too late, maybe, for me to give you a bit of advice, just because I can't stand by quietly and see you in danger without giving a hand.'

'It wouldn't be the first time, old boy, that you had given me the hand,' said Jerry very gently, with his eyes turned upon that arm of Larry's which had been splintered in his service.

'Pshaw!' cried Larry; 'drop that! You've been over-grateful for that business, and I'd have done the same for any feller; but I tell you what I wouldn't do for every feller: I wouldn't trust him like I trust you, and I wouldn't expect to have his trust as I do expect to have yours, after all these years; because it's brothers we are, you and me, and not a bit else; and I say you're not trusting me.'

There followed a pause, Jerry smoking, his beer spoiling, getting headless, and Larry still leaning on his arms over the chair-back, peering into his companion's face, and letting his pipe go out, all his thought being for his friend.

'You're right, Wash,' Goldwin asserted at length. 'You're right. I've got something to tell you, and I might have let it out before, but didn't know exactly how you'd take to it.'

'Is it as bad as that?'

'Bad! Confound you! what are you talking about? It is GOOD—good for me and good for you. It won't come between us a bit; she is certain to like you.'

Jerry puffed away, doing his best to be calm and cool, but succeeding in neither; for he was really nervous about wounding his friend with a reference to their future changed relations. He raised his voice as he hurled his 'Confound you!' but it sank to gentleness again with the succeeding sentences.

'Ah!' sighed Larry; 'it is a woman, then—I am right.'

'Yes, Wash, old fellow, it is a woman. I'm going to be married. Wish us joy.'

There came no answer for some little time. Larry evinced no surprise. Congratulations stuck in his throat. Maintaining his inelegant position for a few seconds only, he turned and sat on the chair properly. He put his pipe in his mouth to puff mechanically, forgetting it was not alight; his lean hands moved spasmodically, caressing the stem; then he moved them from that to the cat, stooping to stroke its head; all the while his back was turned upon Jerry. Cicero, roused by the touch, stretched himself, yawned, arched his back, and lastly rubbed a cold nose against the fondling hand.

Larry's ferret eyes watered, his features contracted, his throat swelled—not because of the cat's responding caress and token of affection, but because of his friend. He seemed to see him slipping gradually further and further away, the slave of an attraction—slipping to his own ruin. He had nursed a hope that Jerry's age would protect him from matrimonial ventures, would be as an armour against woman's wiles and enticing smiles, and fondly believed that his own companionship and sure friendship would have sufficed to the end of his days; and now a woman had come between them, and the armour was no armour at all.

Goldwin eyed him askance, and then said rather reproachfully:

'You might wish me joy.'

Larry turned quickly; his eyes were glistening.

'Don't I wish you joy? Thunder! I wish it you every hour of the day. You've been a good friend to me, and I ought to wish it. I've been expecting this ever since you took to wearing your fine feathers every day, ever since you lost your beard; but when it comes from your own mouth, you see, it strikes one a bit of a heap, and I've got to get used to it, that's all.' He turned again and bent over his cat with a fondling hand, before he added, 'I knew there was a woman at the bottom of it.'

'An angel,' corrected Jerry.

'Angel or devil as it suits them,' mumbled Larry, not daring to speak out; then aloud: 'It ain't likely that a man of your position could escape being collared by one of 'em—one of your angels—sooner or later, though you're no chicken; but I did think you would have dodged and slipped the noose. Now you're caught at last. No offence, mate, but I hope your angel is as fond of you as she might be of your tin, and will make you happier than we have been together all these years.' He paused, cleared his throat, and before his mate could answer he went on with emphatic earnestness, 'By thunder, again, I say, I wish you joy!' Then his right hand was stretched across the table. 'Put it there, mate, put it there!'

Jerry did 'put it there.' For a second or so they gripped hands in silence, and Jerry resumed his former position much relieved because the breaking of the ice to his friend was well over. Presently he began, half in apology:

'Wash, don't you know, it is a sort of duty for a man like me to marry, and I've been wary of widows and old maids; but here, when a beautiful young creature may be mine for the asking, now tell the truth, wouldn't I be a dolt not to make her Mrs. Goldwin? Wait till you see her. You'll be falling in love with her yourself, and be plotting how to get me out of the road'—this with a chuckle. 'Now light your pipe, and we'll drink our beer in the usual way; and don't look as if I had invited you to my funeral and was going to hang myself.'

'She might be as beautiful as a—a columbine,' said Larry,

taxing his memory for a comparison, and not knowing any female beauty to reach as high as this standard offered at the pantomine. It may be observed that the female portion of humanity ranked very low in Washington Larry's estimation. 'She might be as beautiful as a columbine, and I'd still be love-proof. I haven't got a heart, perhaps, or if I had it was a woman as soured it for all her kind; but never mind that. You've got one sound and warm enough, and, besides, you're as rich—as rich as Methuselah.'

Jerry shot a quiet glance at his friend, wondering if this latter comparison was meant for a sly joke at his expense—a quiet hit at the ancient bridegroom; but no, Larry had no sense of humour, and had never made a joke in his life. His reading was varied and his memory hazy, which led to some comical errors on his part sometimes.

'When is it to be?' he asked, as he struck a match on the sole of his boot and relit his pipe.

'This day week — St. Patrick's — and you're to be best man.'

'Me?'

'Yes. Who but you has a right to that place?'

'Won't another feller do?'—this pleadingly.

He did not want to stand by and see his old friend given up to the sacrifice—the angel.

'No,' decisively. 'I must have my way in this. You shall see there's some excuse for me. Your heart will come back to you, and, by the Lord Harry! it would beat, and jump, and swell if you had her snowy arms about your neck, her wonderful hair touching your cheek, her lips at yours. I fell right away in love with her at first sight, old bloke as I am; but old or not I'm lucky—in love as with money.'

A pained look came into the other man's eyes—a compassionate, sorrowful tenderness was there as he turned them on the infatuated bridegroom-elect. It was as if he were listening to the delirious ravings of a man struggling with fever. He made no allusion to it, but said:

'And you'll come back here to live with her, I suppose?'

The accent of resignation in these words was not lost upon Jerry, who replied immediately, with his characteristic generosity forcing itself from heart to lips:

'Oh no, old boy; this is *your* nest now and always. Nothing shall be changed. I will take her to the great house in Virginia Bay—Goolgun. She shall live like a princess; it is her right.'

Larry here made a gulp indicative of emotion before he could reply clearly:

'Jerry, you're a brick; you make me your debtor over and over again.'

'Bosh! don't talk to me about debt; I shall never be out of yours; only look less dismal, and be my best man, and come and see us sometimes as if we were sister and brother to you, and be as happy as we shall be.'

'I'll get used to it, I suppose, and if I don't see you miserable, *I* won't be; there! But I say, Jerry'—here he leaned towards him, and lowered his voice—'will you tell her about the other affair?'

'No,' answered Jerry, almost with a snap; 'that's dead and buried. Where's the use?'

Larry looked pleased. Here was something between them solely—the privilege of a secret which not even the 'angel' was to share with them.

'There's only one besides you who really knows everything about me; one or two know a few things, but not everything, eh, old man?'

'And that one and me will stick to you through thick and thin.'

'Don't I know that?'

When Larry was endeavouring to sleep that night his slumber was disturbed at the outset with doubts and fears concerning the future of his friend. He mentally said, 'No woman will ever love him as I do—as I must. He deserves the angel, but angels don't marry old men like him; only women do, for the life of the "princess." And what a brick he is! so good, so generous! Who's the angel he's going to make a princess of? I never asked. Well, I'll see her sooner than I want to. I'll go to the wedding; oh yes, I'll go and stand by the good old chap, and then afterwards, why, "Farewell to all my greatness," as Don Juan says somewhere. Washington Larry, you're nowhere; your day is done. But I'll stick, I say, through thick and thin to the best feller living,

I will.' Gradually his mind refused to conceive clearly; his thoughts ran riot; his eyes closed, and at last he slept, dreaming that the bride had thrown her arms about his neck and was slowly throttling him.

CHAPTER V.

THE MILLIONAIRE'S WIFE AND THE MILLIONAIRE'S FRIEND.

On the day after Mr. and Mrs. Goldwin's return to Phillipia, it being Sunday, Washington Larry, as the privileged friend of the bridegroom, not waiting for the general reception, called upon him and his bride at Goolgun.

He, like Priscilla Lockstud, was ready to sacrifice his own especial feeling of repulsion on the altar of love, for he had likewise been repelled by the bride.

He might have been a mangy mongrel sniffing at his master's heels for the aversion displayed on her wedding-day.

She had glanced at him, and in that glance of arrogant indifference and cutting contempt had as decisively conveyed her estimation of the 'best man' as if she had deliberately hissed in his face, or lifted a dainty satin-shod foot to vulgarly kick him for the worst she had ever seen. He was compelled to acknowledge that she was a queen of beauty, and could better sympathize with his infatuated mate, who had lost himself in the glare of her magnificence.

And now she was about to become the wife of that mate, and it behoved him to submit to her humour for the present, while his loyalty to the bridegroom forced him to hide the pain she had inflicted.

Nevertheless, he made no attempt to address her directly or indirectly, before or after the ceremony, which had been a private one; not followed by any junketing, but only a modest sipping of wines and disposal of wedding-cake in the saloon of the yacht chartered by Goldwin for his honeymoon tour, where the bridal party gathered to wish him and his bride a temporary farewell.

He had taken care to ensure as much privacy as possible, to avoid after-dinner speeches and wholesale flatteries, to be washed down with champagne, which they resembled in their sparkling effervescence, so temporary, in losing relish with overmuch airing.

His beautiful Belle, who desired nothing better than a grand wedding with its accompaniments of wealth—a string of coaches, ribboned whips, flowers, wedding presents, the rustling of silks, satins and velvets, glare, publicity—did not oppose his wishes, because she understood that he was a man not to be opposed; and it was her policy to give way with a graciousness sweet enough to be worthy of Priscilla Lockstud.

Larry felt some compunction, when he first beheld the bride in all her splendour, for not having presented himself more in keeping with the surroundings. He had consented to be Jerry's 'best man,' but when the day of trial arrived there was so much mourning in his heart that it perforce was worn 'on his sleeve,' was declared in his attire—his black cotton gloves —and every feature of his face.

After the departure of the yacht, and in his solitude, he had ample time for reflection, and he determined to make amends for shortcomings. Pondering on the evident displeasure of the bride, it did occur to him that his manifestation of sorrow was somewhat *mal apropos* for the occasion, and that there was perhaps some excuse for her treatment of him Accordingly, he quite expected, when he made his obeisance in her own drawing-room in a brand-new broad-striped, large-patterned suit, fashionably cut, with his shining boots, gloved hands, and a tall chimney-pot hat, held in his left hand, as he extended his right, cased in canary-coloured kid, and exclaimed heartily 'How do you do? Welcome to Goolgun, and may you be happy!' that some kindly words and looks would have been elicited; but nothing of the kind happened. Mrs. Goldwin merely vouchsafed a coldly polite 'Thank you' and a formal bow; she did not even seem to see his hand or his clothes, or anything but the bracelet on her wrist—a broad band of gold, with a diamond snake curved and nestling in it—which she was twisting and admiring.

He drew back his hand and fell to stroking his beard with it, while his back stiffened, and his face underwent a variety of

expressions under this second sting. Humiliation made it wince, indignation made it angry, pity for the man who had undoubtedly caught a tartar made it sorrowful. It was more than he could bear without flinching of any sort, even although Jerry's eyes were on him. The fact of a woman, no matter how beautiful, having the power to torment him was a stab in itself, and from the stab there issued black blood.

Now, Jeremiah Goldwin was an infatuated husband, but infatuation could not blind him where his friend was concerned. It was perhaps the first time that his wife's lack of perfection was revealed, Larry's own face being the mirror which reflected her grace of feature and manner a little awry to him. He could so well interpret its workings from long association, that he quite understood it now, and though the annoyance of it was heating his blood, he did the wisest thing to be done under the circumstances by feigning an ignorance of the proceeding, and before Larry could find words to cover his confusion—for he was struggling for speech that instant—Jerry linked his arm through his friend's, and said, as if the proposition were not a sudden inspiration :

'Come out on the veranda, Wash, and see our view.'

And Wash went with him gratefully, deceiving himself that he was practising deception, and mopping his head and face violently with a scarlet pocket-handkerchief as he vented his temper in a good round oath at the 'darned hot morning,' 'the smart trot he had been at,' while the crisp cold air of a July day played freely on the veranda, and made havoc with his beard in wanton ridicule of these statements. He did his utmost to look quite unconcerned, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to expect that the wife of his one loving friend should treat him as a stranger—should refuse to see his hand.

Mrs. Goldwin was left to twirl her bracelet, or amuse herself in divers ways, while her husband and his mate took their seats on the veranda. Jerry made no reference to the temperature of the day, but both men felt their own abnormally high, and neither seemed to appreciate the glories of the Phillipia harbour. They talked for a little while, and subsequently left the house for a walk together.

Not one word was said in reference to Mrs. Goldwin on

either side, though she sat like an imp on each man's mind to make their converse erratic in their efforts to smother the memory of her insolence. Goldwin had left her without any clue to his movements, and Wash had omitted to make a ceremonious departure, at which her husband forgot to take offence.

'Now, look here, old fellow,' he said at parting, 'you're to dine with us every Sunday after this. I don't ask you to-day, because we're not quite settled yet; but, remember, that's the rule in future.'

He spoke in that tone which Wash understood as defying resistance, and as if nothing had happened to disturb his equanimity. He succeeded perfectly in convincing Larry that he was, and ever would be, hopelessly blind to his lovely Delilah.

How should Larry know that Goldwin meant to go home and actually lecture her? Unwilling to betray by sign or word the aggravation he was enduring through the woman his friend had taken to wife, he grunted something in answer to the invitation, which was neither acceptance nor refusal, and went his way towards his solitary nest.

Arriving there, he began to tug at his yellow gloves—bought especially for the visit—to split them at the thumbs as he tore them off impatiently, to roll them into a ball, and next send them sure and swift into the fire.

'That's where she ought to be pitched,' he mumbled in his beard, 'for a witch as she is!'

He pulled his chair before the grate and watched the little bundle of kid smoulder and crinkle and burn, and then he laughed for the first time that day — a choking, broken, hysterical laugh, as he tried to picture her yellow hair frizzling in the blaze; but Jerry's burly figure came between him and the fire, and the laugh was swallowed like a gulp, and left him sad and pitying again.

'Poor old Jerry!' he cried; 'he's been and gone and done it; he's caught a tartar, and I've got to stand by and see it and hold my tongue, because I know if I said a word agen her it would set him agen me; and how should I be paying him back for all he's done for a fossil like me?'

Then a fitful flicker of passion cried out in spasmodic soliloquy:

'Serves you right for a darned fool! What did you want to run there in such a hurry for? Jezebel! to refuse an honest man's hand! I'll be quits. I'll keep my eye on her for Jerry's sake. *She* married the old boy for love! Bah! If she did, would she snub *me?*'

He glared at the fire from his sunken sockets, and shook his fist at what remained of part of the perished 'war-paint and feathers' donned in her honour.

'Catch me wearing them things agen for her, unless at her funeral!'

He spoke aloud here, and his voice awakened his dumb friend, whose existence he had momentarily forgotten. Cicero bounded across the room from a cosy corner, where he had been coiled in slumber, and began to rub himself against his master's legs.

'Ah, Cicero, there you are! I was forgetting I had you,' he exclaimed. 'You are worth half a dozen yaller-haired witches, you are!'

Cicero, accustomed to license, leaped on Larry's knees to be fondled and stroked, and to acknowledge his appreciation by a loud and strong purring.

'Poor old puss! poor old Cicero! what's all that row about, eh? No cold looks, no hard words, from you. Don't you pity me?—pity Jerry? Purr, purr away. I know that's what it means. Shall we have a smoke, Cicero, and forget her? I declare you're a comfort.'

He held the creature to his bosom within his lean, long, encircling arms. He rubbed his cheeks against the soft fur, and felt soothed with this strange companionship. Presently the soothing process was in stronger force under the benign influence of tobacco. He filled the room with fumes, and literally smoked the image of the 'yaller-haired witch' out of it—out of his mind for a time. If he could have been in hiding at that moment—concealed in Mrs. Goldwin's boudoir—the wound to his vanity would have found a salve, for Jerry was as busy as he could be taking up the cudgels for his outraged mate.

Having returned to Goolgun, he found his lady alone, reading a novel, and reclining on a silken couch in a perfect nest of downy cushions in her boudoir, which represented

her own luxurious tastes, and declared opulence in every nook.

There were rose silk curtains on its windows, a dark, rich grounded crimson velvet pile carpet on its floor, a dainty suite of rose plush with ebony and pearl inlaid frames, unique tables here and there, bearing vases of flowers and albums, showily bound books, and charming knick-knacks. There were elegant pictures on its gold and cream papered walls, novel brackets holding statuary in marble and bronze, a collection of Oriental and Japanese art scattered in pleasing confusion, and the whole apartment was filled with a soft pinky light, tinting its fair occupant as she reposed there like an Indian princess for fantastic luxury.

She did not close her book as Jerry entered, or make any sign that she heard him when his heavy footstep creaked at the threshold. She knew something of that episode in her husband's early life when Washington Larry had defended him with his own body; she knew something of the broken forearm which had saved his otherwise doomed head; but it did not occur to her that it was necessary for her to remember it, or that Jerry would dare to resent her coldness towards an individual with whom she had nothing in common; nor did she think it incumbent upon her to maintain an intimacy with all Mr. Goldwin's friends or associates, considering them as chaff, which she meant to sift from the social grain meet for her own fastidious acceptance. He had entered a new life with her, and it was only right and proper for him to leave his old life and plebeian habits outside the Goolgun gates if she was to succeed in gathering within her own domain the *élite* of Phillipia. Would they not be scared away, ousted, if allowed to once suffer contamination from contact with non-cultured, ill-dressed, rough-mannered creatures, such as this friend of her husband's? Moreover, had he not offended her on her wedding-day with his mute-like appearance, his lugubrious countenance, and added to his offence by his unceremonious visit that day, and—as she deemed it—familiar advance?

She had married for position, and how was she to maintain it if her coterie was to be marred with a mixture of the Washington Larry kind? She exacted obedience and constant attention from her husband; he had given both ungrudgingly

hitherto. But when he left the house without a word of apology for his absence prefacing the action, left without even a 'good-bye,' and with that horrid man—preferring his society to hers; a gorilla-like fellow, she called him—she also felt her temper rise, and was piqued. So Goldwin found her.

He walked up to her couch and drew a chair close by; then, with his eyes set on the beautiful, disdainful profile, he began:

'You are mightily interested in that trash.'

Mrs. Goldwin turned to him suddenly, as if his words alone had made known his presence.

'Is that you? I thought you were not coming home for some time longer—that you were lost in the congenial companionship of Mr. Larry.'

'Some people are interested in trash like that,' he said with ire smothered, and muffling his words as they escaped through set teeth and sullen jaws, and he pointed with a forefinger at the book in her hand. 'Trash!' he repeated, 'and lies from beginning to end. And some people are interested in their friends, which are truth every inch of 'em. You understand?'

'I'm afraid I do not,' she answered, with a provoking smile turned upon the book, while she trifled with its pages, running them off from under her thumb. 'You must be very unintelligible, or I must be very dull; which is it?'

'Maybe it is both,' he replied, getting very red and heated as he watched her; he was holding a very tight curb on that violent temper over which he did not always have control. He did not want her to see him in his worst lights, and if his passion were once allowed to come to the surface there was no knowing how he might degrade himself in her eyes. All the same, it was breaking through his words like the smoke that heralds the eruption. 'Maybe I should have reminded you of that skirmish with the blacks when I was nearly knocked into kingdom come; maybe you have forgotten that it was Mr. Larry who held me back and got an arm cracked for his trouble; maybe you have forgotten that until now he, amongst the whole kit of those who know me and run after me, is the only one who would stick to me if I hadn't a penny to-morrow. He is one of the few loyal friends I have in the world. I don't want to quarrel with you, my girl, but you have stirred the blood up in me, and it is just as well for you to know now and

always that I will not allow anybody—not even *you*, my wife, the woman I love and honour, and who has sworn to love and honour me—to treat that friend with disrespect; for if you do, you will perjure your vow to me, and I say he *shall* be treated by my wife with the respect which is his due.'

His voice trembled with the last sentences, so quietly yet forcibly spoken. And then he rose from his chair to walk off to a window and turn his back on his wife, while he desperately struggled to keep the full strength of his wrath at bay.

The rosy curtains enveloped him with a soft reflection as they fell in thick folds, through which the golden sunlight partly penetrated the sunlight which, flooding generously the city, glittered on the rippling waters of the harbour, almost opposite, and played on the foam-crested, silvery white, leaping waves, dashing for ever at the rugged feet of two towering cliffs miles ahead, gigantic portals of a lovely haven.

Mrs. Goldwin's eyes followed him to the window; she was totally unprepared for this championship; it set her thinking of possibilities not acceptable. She was almost as white as the foam at the rocks, and knew that, like the foam, she would be beating herself against stone in thwarting his wishes. She was not grateful to Washington Larry, though through him a man had been spared who was to endow her with all she held dear in the universe—wealth and luxury; but there was something in Jerry's manner which inverted at once her prescribed *rôle* of the dictatorial woman; the docile wife arose in her stead.

Goldwin was presently agreeably surprised as he still stood at the window, his arm slung behind him, across his waist, to feel the light touch of five soft fingers nestling against his open palm, to hear a voice just at his shoulder, no longer scornful or rebellious, but tinged with repentance.

'Don't be angry with me, Jeffrey, because I am jealous of the hours you give to others,' it said. 'I am sorry to have vexed you. I will try to like your friend; I am grateful to him. Won't you speak to me?'

Jerry swerved round with a wonderfully quick reversal of position and disposition towards his wife, and he caught her to his broad strong breast with an oath which he could not repress, and which was but an ebullition of delight, as he exclaimed:

'That's my own true lass, my glorious Belle! You raised the devil in me, but you've cowed him again.'

Mrs. Goldwin had observed rather an alarming smoke, and, like the fisherman and the genii, after tampering with and opening the vessel from which it issued, she succeeded by strategy in imprisoning it in its old quarters again, and so became master of the situation.

When her husband released her from his arms, she rearranged her dress, which had slightly suffered, and said smilingly:

'And now we are friends once more, I hope.'

'Friends—by the Lord Harry, that we are! Only treat him as he deserves, and we'll never fall out.'

'Love me, love my dog,' said Mrs. Goldwin, and then she laughed outright.

She had made an excellent move in her own game; she knew that he would be more of a slave than ever now, and she fully intended to make him fulfil the services she required of him.

That same night she wrote and posted the letter which Theodore Lockstud had received at the bank and burned at his own fireside.

Washington Larry was somewhat confused and conscience-stricken one afternoon, the same week of his visit to Goolgun, when, returning from the city, he took a short-cut through City Park towards the busy hilly street leading to his home.

Once a week a band of skilful musicians discoursed sweet music in this park, and this was band-day. But the band had departed, with the crowd following suit, and only a few stragglers remained, of whom he took no notice; but when he came within about fifteen yards of a chair, in an oblique direction, he spied, sitting thereon, a lady and gentleman certainly offering especial attractions for him. They were conversing with much earnestness, as evinced by sundry nods and gestures from both; and although he could not distinguish the features of either clearly, he yet could recognise one in particular. There was no mistaking the slender, elegant form of the lady so wonderfully decked, or the pale golden hair—of which he had never seen the like—as it pushed its way through a crownless bonnet in luxurious rolls and twists. The gentleman was a stranger to him, and only demanded his notice because of the lady at his

side. He was a young man, with a long straight back, square shoulders, and of soldierly bearing; he could see that much.

'I'd know her yaller hair anywhere,' he muttered to himself; 'but who the deuce is the feller? Thunder! I'll just try and find out.' Saying which he altered his course, so as to pass the chair and obtain a front view.

He sauntered by them, shooting a side glance, which was almost a squint, and wishing them to think themselves unobserved. He did not want to have to salute the lady who had insulted him; but it was his duty, he said, to keep an eye on her for Jerry's sake.

'Good-afternoon, Mr. Larry.' Before he had time to recover his breath, Mrs. Goldwin stood before him without her companion. She had followed him, and thus arrested his footsteps—his very thoughts. Her hand was outstretched; her lips were smiling; her eyes were flashing with mischief; and Larry stood dumb, even while he took her hand and raised his hat. 'I thought I was right,' she began with rapid accents, 'and ventured to follow you and see. I'm so glad to have met you, for now, as your road is also mine, you can escort me to the carriage which awaits me, and I can drive you home. Quite mutual advantages unless you prefer walking.' He looked down sheepishly at his ungloved hands and his dusty boots, and she not giving him time to frame a reply, rattled on in artfully artless fashion: 'Oh! never mind your dress; old friends should not stand upon ceremony, and you are such an old friend of Jeffrey's you must be mine, too. Come on.'

'Thank you!' faltered Larry at last, unable to refuse, and not wishing to do so if he could, but not quite sure whether he was awake or dreaming; 'but where is the gentleman?' He looked about him then, as he put the question, to the right and to the left. 'It wasn't Jerry,' he added.

'You did see me, then,' she said quickly, 'and would have passed me by.'

'Thunder, she's tripped me up!' mentally ejaculated Washington, and then mustering courage, he smiled grimly as he answered, 'I thought you didn't want me to see you, Mrs. Goldwin, or yourself to see me.'

'You are mistaken; I wish to see you always, Mr. Larry,

especially at Goolgun. Now escort me, if you please, to the carriage.'

'But the gentleman?'

Again he looked right and left, with curiosity still alive.

'Oh! he has gone another road. That was a friend of mine; I have heaps of friends, old and new, and have met so many this afternoon.'

He was not quite satisfied; but she lapsing into silence, as if the fountain of her quick spurt of talk had suddenly dried up, he set to work at his own poor spring of converse as they walked along together to meet the carriage, in strange contrast—the would-be aristocrat and the honest democrat. A poor spring, but refreshing to him, since he poured forth to his heart's content a gush of thanksgiving, of eulogy, of affection, dedicated to her husband, which should have interested her, but did not.

He told her of the old times—of Jerry's exploits, of Jerry's cleverness, of Jerry's goodness to himself; and while he thought he was contributing to her pleasure and repaying to the best of his ability her graciousness vouchsafed that day to him, she was listening with an effort; and in his desire to please, and his satisfaction with the attempt, he did not notice her random replies, her 'Yes' for a 'No,' and *vice-versâ*, or the mere interpolation of a monosyllable.

When they reached the carriage, after a walk of quite seven or eight minutes, the footman stared as he held the door open, and Washington Larry—shabby, old-fashioned, dusty, ungloved, and grim—handed his mistress in, and next followed at her repeated invitation to take the seat next to her.

In a few seconds the imposing equipage which had dashed up to Mrs. Calliport's door, and given a first glimpse of Mrs. Goldwin to Mrs. Lockstud, was rolling through the busy, steep street leading to Virginia Bay, with the millionaire's wife and the millionaire's friend seated side by side, apparently *tête-à-tête*.

That night Larry sat at his fireside, his cat in his lap, his meerschaum in his mouth, and with his thoughts somewhat troubled. He was too wary a bird to be fascinated by a snake, and yet something of this kind had happened to him. Mrs. Goldwin had drawn him to her with the sure swiftness of the magnet irresistibly attracting the needle; but the magnet once removed, the needle fell back to its wonted place unaffected. Though his self-love was, to a certain extent, appeased by her altered action towards him that day, she had not wholly healed the stabs previously given, nor had she eradicated the seeds of suspicion which her too ready acceptance of Goldwin's wooing had implanted in his mind.

'She was as sweet to-day as she was sour on Sunday,' he told himself, and naturally he wondered why.

Shaking his head gravely, as if to knock a solution of the enigma out of it—which he failed to do—a doubt of her sincerity compelled him to adhere to his original intention of keeping an eye on her. Yet, with a sluggish kind of gratitude for smiles bestowed on him, he refrained from anathematizing 'yaller-haired witches.'

CHAPTER VI.

WATCH-DOGS.

Mrs. Goldwin did not intend to exert herself so much to please Priscilla Lockstud, because it was a struggle even to tolerate her presence. She had found it quite a task to speak to her and act courteously towards her the first day they met; that she had done so was from mere force of will. There was no need here for Jesuitism, as there had been with her husband's friend. She was the polite hostess, and no more.

Priscilla, who was not a woman of penetration by any means, was still aware, by some intuition, that she and Mrs. Goldwin were not, and never would be, congenial souls. In her deficiency of self-esteem she was abashed and nervous in the presence of the haughty Isabella.

She felt at a disadvantage, and lost what little self-possession she had. Who cares to remain in that artificial, garish, searching light, which misrepresents the complexion or exposes every personal flaw? Something of this aversion and shrinking may express the discomfiture which she experienced, but could not analyze. When she sat in the Goolgun drawing-room for the

first time, her heart sank at the thought of an intimacy with Mrs. Goldwin. She trembled like a dove with an eagle hovering dangerously near. So Washington Larry was not alone in the troublous reflections excited by the millionaire's wife.

Priscilla having hinted to her husband, on their way home from Goolgun, her dislike to Mrs. Goldwin without arousing his displeasure, because he did not hear her, owing to temporary abstraction of which she was not aware, ventured later on to give a full and free opinion, which was met with a stern antagonism that surprised her painfully, and determined her to make no further reference, good or bad, to the subject.

Certainly her honeymoon had departed, and she, so sensitive to the loss, wore sackcloth and ashes for it; but wore them in silent, patient suffering.

Theo seemed to be drifting from her, while she was powerless to hold him back; for since that miserable visit to Goolgun he was frequently from home, leaving her to her own devices or amusements. One night he came home, however, in a merry mood. Whistling as he entered the house, and flinging back the little parlour door noisily, he strode into the room like one triumphant; there was elation in his eyes, in his attitude, in his whole expression.

Priscilla, half asleep with weariness—for it was late—had all her drowsiness scared away by what he had to tell, with a flourish of his hand in the air, and perhaps a pardonable, if a wild, enthusiasm. He had done with the bank for ever, he hoped, as he was appointed manager for Jeremiah Goldwin, who was a 'prince,' 'a liberal old fellow,' etc., etc., who, having hitherto managed for himself, had now given up the management to him for a handsome remuneration of £1,000 a year.

Priscilla hailed these tidings with a very weak attempt to respond to his excitement. She was not hungering for money, but for the one-time lover-like husband; and if they pleased her at all, it was because she was eager to look upon his brightened prospects as a possible means of his redemption from cynical humours and capricious moods, which had presented themselves too often to her of late.

'How did it come about?' she asked very naturally, in her utter ignorance of his sayings and doings out-of-doors.

He laughed.

'Oh, with a fairy wand.'

'A fairy wand,' she repeated, like a child half credulous.

'Never mind,' he said, with a show of impatience at her want of intelligence, but arousing her wit with his next words. 'All you have got to do is to put prejudice away in reference to Mrs. Goldwin, and be civil to her.'

'Is *she* the fairy, Theo?' she asked, with less calmness than she had hitherto displayed.

He gnawed at his moustache, and vouchsafed an affirmative with a mere nod of his head, without looking at her.

He knew that this supplementary information would be less pleasing—would, in fact, take the gilt off the gingerbread for her; but what did that matter to him? He was lifted from the bank, with its paltry salary, to be the recipient of £1,000 a year, and in his greed for wealth he was ready to lick the hand that bestowed it—ready to forget that the same hand had dealt him a blow which a man seldom or never forgives. But Lockstud was not a hero, and never had been, excepting in the sight of the girl who had resigned herself to him for better or for worse—who had elevated him to a pedestal which even now was beginning to totter before her eyes, threatening to throw him to earth.

When no response to his nod came, he spoke.

'You have made up your mind not to like Mrs. Goldwin. Well, I do like her, and I am grateful. She can make him do anything she likes, and for the sake of an old friendship for me she has turned his attention in my direction; and as she is the primary cause of our good fortune, you ought to be grateful too. If you want to get on in the world, you must put sentiment aside and be practical, or get under everybody's feet to be trampled on.'

Jeremiah Goldwin was more than satisfied with his manager. He believed him to be not only shrewd and energetic like himself, but experienced as a business man, with the advantages of a superior education, and with the additional qualities of fluency in speech, courtesy of manner, and admirable tact.

Goldwin, as a married man, and under his wife's influence, retired from the labours of his office; it left him more time to devote to his lady and to his multifarious duties as a useful citizen. He was undergoing a subtle change unconsciously.

Mrs. Goldwin did her breaking in very gently, very deftly. He was her slave and adorer; he loved to clothe her in rich apparel and shining gems; he felt proud to walk into any drawing-room or ball-room with her arm drawn through his. He was as anxious now to go out and exhibit his treasure as any young mother with a first baby in her arms; for this feeling of pride was new to him, a delight never experienced before, and its repetition was an exquisite sensation, the more ardent, perhaps, because of his years, which he delighted to think had not interfered with him as a claimant for the possession coveted by, but denied to, others.

Goolgun was the house of houses in their world of gaiety, entertainment and hospitality. To be in Mrs. Goldwin's set was, to many of the socially ambitious of Phillipia's damsels, debutants and questionably aged ladies still on the matrimonial hunting-grounds, to dames and granddames, to old and young, the summum bonum of social advantage offered in Phillipia, short of Government House. Mrs. Goldwin ought to have been one of the happiest women in existence; most people thought she was, and in not a few did she excite covetousness.

For the first twelve or eighteen months she was a queen in her own little kingdom, and Jerry was only consort or the man behind the organ at the bellows, to set the harmony of her life afloat; and he was quite satisfied, providing she continued to show him tenderness and consideration of his whims, which she did very cleverly, in sweet imitation of nature, to throw a veil before his eyes.

Upon one occasion he remarked to Larry, who since that drive with his wife from the City Park steps to Virginia Bay, had become a frequent, unceremonious and presumably welcome visitor at Goolgun:

'Now, look here, old boy, the man who won't marry stands in his own light. There's only one thing that keeps me from regretting the waste of years spent in just turning money hand over fist, and that is, because I've got it to give her, after all. My biggest haul never made me feel as I do now when she smiles at me—when I kiss her beautiful face. A fellow who spends his life hauling in and hoarding up, without a wife to help him to spend and enjoy, fools himself.'

Larry's reply was characteristic, if irrelevant:

'Ay, ay, mate. Handsome is as handsome does.'

The faithful Larry, who had many opportunities of quietly taking note of Mrs. Goldwin's conduct in Jerry's absence, was still harassed with doubts respecting her love of her lord and master.

He went in and came out of Goolgun *ad libitum* as an inmate of the house; he sat quietly in any corner, unobtrusive, often unobserved, but always with his eyes in active service. This peculiarity of his led him to take note of trifles which escaped others, and prevented him from divesting his mind of misgivings concerning his hostess, who, having given him *carte blanche* to come and go as he pleased, did not think it worth while to test his conversational ability again to any extent; so she seldom entered into converse with him, considering she was doing her duty well in admitting him as a member of the household. In this she was false to her own tact, and sharpened Larry's observation. He treated her respectfully, but was not insensible to her indifference, and was proof against her charms, at which he snapped his fingers.

'They ain't worth a cent if she doesn't care for Jerry,' he thought.

Hence his remark, which had its bearing on his own meditations, and so little in connection with Goldwin's eulogy on married life.

Mrs. Goldwin, with her blooming beauty, brilliant attire, and bright flow of speech, was naturally courted and flattered, especially by gentlemen.

She always had half a dozen or more around her, at home or elsewhere.

Washington Larry, sitting, as already described, perhaps ostensibly reading or looking through a volume of engravings, seldom speaking, unless addressed—he might have been a pet hound asleep on the hearth, for the slight notice he attracted—heard a vast amount of small-talk and some clever nonsense and repartee, which he could not always understand in its sense of fun.

More often than not—when a crowd was gathered especially—the manager Theodore Lockstud, was present, sometimes with his wife, frequently without. Washington knew now that this manager was the square-shouldered, soldierly-looking man

whom he had seen for the first time at City Park in earnest conversation with Mrs. Goldwin; and herein lay a second propeller to his observation—he thoroughly hated the manager.

Lockstud looked upon his employer's mate as an oddity, and sometimes an encumbrance at the office. He had asked him upon one occasion, when there was a stress of writing to be done, to help in some clerical work. Larry had to refuse because, as he said, 'he had no fist for writing.' Whereupon Lockstud, with his cynicism to the fore, congratulated the office for having obtained the highly invaluable services of Mr. Washington Larry, who was not in receipt of the remuneration deserved.

Larry understood the irony, and gave back a retort. It was not his fault that he had so little to do. He had been industrious enough at manual work in the old hard-working days, and Jerry wished him to lead an easy life now; so what could he do, since he was no penman, no book-keeper, but superintend occasionally shipping matters, or the arrival and discharge of cargo?

The words rankled within him, and Lockstud made a dangerous enemy. It irritated him to see this favoured manager hovering about Mrs. Goldwin; he was jealous of his reputation with her husband.

Larry was not one to suffer reproach unavenged, not one to turn a second cheek to the smiter. He had as many good points as most men—a conscience that pricked him when he erred, a heart that for gratitude was only next to Jerry's, and a rough honesty of word and action, against which anything like falsity and arrogance grated enough to set his teeth on an edge.

Lockstud had set his teeth on an edge, and to relieve himself of the sensation he longed to bite, and so prepared for a spring when he saw his chance.

There was company nearly every night at Goolgun, if the Goldwins were at home; there was card-playing, there was music. Goldwin sat down to whist or euchre with those willing to take a hand. Mrs. Goldwin sat at the piano to warble a ballad or gather a band about her for the practice of a quartette or a simple operetta, or to listen to musical lady friends rattling off waltz, or overture, or fantasia. As a rule, Larry joined the card-table, for he was averse to music. But

one night he gave up his place to a stranger, and walked to the piano end of the drawing-room, where Mrs. Goldwin was practising in the early part of the evening, awaiting a small musical contingent for rehearsal. Larry did not go near her, but walked to a rose-wood filigree whatnot to take up a book from it. The whatnot was located in the alcove of a bay-window, shut off, but not quite concealed, with its heavy and rich draperies festooned on each side. The light from one of the chandeliers, though subdued, still fell generously enough upon this elegant recess to admit of studying pictures, if not books. It was a nice little niche for Washington, and into it he went, unknown to Mrs. Goldwin. He had a habit of fixing himself there, of studying engravings and illustrated periodicals scattered on the whatnot. He took a periodical, and tried to shut out the din of music by putting his hands over his ears, as the book lay open on his knees. He still heard it, but presently it ceased, and he removed his hands with real relief, looking up, at the same time, to note why the piano had stopped. Mrs. Goldwin had risen to greet an arrival—the arrival was Lockstud. Larry forgot the pictures, and watched, unseen.

Mrs. Goldwin's face and Lockstud's back were opposite the niche. The wax lights of a candelabra just above the piano set them both in brightness. Mrs. Goldwin stood hand-locked with the manager, her face upturned to his, her lips moving, conveying sound, but not words to Larry's ears. Washington Larry could only see, as he crouched and spied, that her laughing lips were not there, with the smiles usually presented when she wished to appear most affable; that her eyes wore a new and strange expression, which enhanced her beauty; that her features had lost their haughtiness; that she was altogether a new being in that moment. Lockstud's position prevented him from undergoing a similar scrutiny. He stood straight and square before his hostess, with his head slightly bowed, as if in earnest attention to what she was saying. They only stood thus a few minutes, when part of the expected musical contingent—composed of gentlemen only—made an entry into the drawing-room. Mrs. Goldwin's countenance immediately took up its company mask of affability and smiles, and her tongue gave forth its attractive garrulity.

If Larry's loyalty to Jerry were not as strong as Mrs. Goldwin's

was weak; if he had not made up his mind that she was a fraud from the beginning, that she had married for position; if she had been politic enough to have continued to show him that she wished to be friendly for his own sake, and not treated him like a pet hound of the master of the house; if Lockstud had not set his teeth on an edge, and if her reception of the one man had not revealed to him that difference in her manner of greeting the few men who followed, he might have fallen asleep in the alcove and subsequent painful events would never have transpired.

He did not go to sleep, but he brought a closed fist down on his knee, and with a prefatory oath he muttered, 'I knew I was right; she's flirting with that scoundrel, and Jerry's blind as a bat; but I'll open his eyes.'

It was this much penetration of his which worded a reply—being no reply—to Jerry's acclamation of marital blessing, 'Handsome is as handsome does.' Once he said to Jerry by way of 'opening his eyes,' much in the same way as a mother treats a wilful child to a homœopathic dose, which it swallows readily as an innocent drop of water, but which it would reject if the fact of medicine lurking within it were made known:

'Your wife is growing more beautiful every day.'

Jerry smiled and nodded.

'I can sit and look at her by the hour.'

Jerry smiled again, and said:

'You're welcome, mate.'

'And so can half a dozen chaps,' Larry continued. 'She is young, and can say pretty things, and look very sweet. If I was her husband, I should be jealous.'

'Once in a life-time is enough for that complaint,' responded Jerry, with a meaning not lost upon Larry. 'And you are not her husband.'

'Nor anybody else's, I'm glad to say; but if I was hers, I say, I should choke with the "green-eyed monster" that Tennyson or somebody else talks about. It ain't a thing that Holloway's pills is good for, or can cure.'

'Leaden pills, perhaps,' quoth Goldwin grimly.

'Dangerous,' came the laconic response.

'Not more dangerous than a fight and a fall.'

'You won't try that on again.'

'Not likely.'

And then Goldwin shook himself as if to throw off something unpleasant, and laughed at his mate, and his hints about 'green-eyed monsters' disturbing him now in his security of married life. He accepted this intimation of his friend's as so much incense to his wife's enticing charms. In a word, he rather relished the draught, but the dose was not strong enough, for his bat-like tendency stood unchanged.

In the meanwhile Mrs. Goldwin lived her butterfly existence, and gathered around her numerous friends or acquaintances, and was perfectly ignorant that Mr. Washington Larry had a pair of double lens microscopic glasses set in his vision and directed at her to magnify her every look, her every action, into overpowering evidence against her and the man whom he conceived to be a second Launcelot. There was yet another pair of perhaps more powerful focus bent upon them when opportunity offered, and they belonged to Mrs. Calliport.

Mrs. Calliport could not make one of the Goldwins' guests, but Mrs. Goldwin since her marriage frequently visited Mrs. Calliport.

'You took me from her house, you know,' she averred to Jerry; 'if it had not been that she employed me, you and I might never have met, and I am grateful enough to her to like to sit with her and cheer her up sometimes.' And Jerry thought his wife an angel indeed.

Perhaps she would sit with her for an hour in the afternoon, and even ask to read to her as of old. For all these attentions Mrs. Calliport was none the less distrustful, not the more cordial.

It did happen now and then that she would spend an evening there, sometimes with her husband, sometimes without him, when he was engaged elsewhere—at a meeting, probably. And it mostly happened that Lockstud with Priscilla would drop in on such occasions, for they lived now—of course in accordance with their improved circumstances—in a fine house also situated in Virginia Bay, not far from Mrs. Calliport's. This was very convenient for Mrs. Goldwin, who, when alone, called upon Lockstud to escort her home, but a couple of streets distant. These apparently casual meetings and the subsequent

escorting to Goolgun at first instilled a sensation of disquietude —not doubt—in Mrs. Calliport's bosom, and that was only evoked by Priscilla's wistful face as she saw the two quit the room together, and heard them on the staircase as they descended, talking and laughing, and evidently so contented in each other's society.

When this sort of thing had taken place about half a dozen times, Lockstud began to come without his wife, excusing her absence on the plea of delicate health.

One night he sauntered in as usual when his aunt had visitors, but did not count Mrs. Goldwin among them, and only remained for half an hour. When he said 'good-bye,' she remarked:

'You are off early to-night.'

'Yes,' he answered; ''Cilla is alone, and she is not strong.'

Now, this was most exemplary, and one or two smiled at him, and all agreed that he was a model husband. Aunt Jessie did not smile, and an hour hence, when she was alone, she despatched a servant to her nephew's house with a message that she wanted to see him at once particularly. She was not surprised when the servant returned to say that Mr. Lockstud was out.

'Mrs. Lockstud said she was very sorry, ma'am,' explained the servant, 'and she would give your message to him as soon as ever he came home.'

'Very well,' said Mrs. Calliport; but in the solitude of her room she soliloquized: 'I must put a stop to this,' for Priscilla's face rose before her with its oval contour lengthening, and colourless and saddened. 'Is that siren at foul play?' she asked herself. 'If she is, he is scarcely responsible, for men will be fools when beautiful women are rogues. I must put a stop to it, if only for that poor child's sake.'

Theo came the next morning, having received his aunt's summons the night previous, when it was too late to attend. It had nonplussed him at the first, as he had distinctly told her he was going home, and the lie would be apparent; but he rose equal to the occasion, and went to her before going to the office. Having had a bad night, she was not yet dressed, but, donning a dressing-gown, she received him in her bedroom.

'Good-morning, aunt,' he began, as he went up to the couch where she reclined and gave her a dutiful kiss. 'Had a bad night again? You sent for me. What is the matter?'

He looked so handsome and strong as he stood there, hat in hand before her—even noble, she thought, with his upright figure and elegant proportions, his patrician bearing—that she for the moment shirked a lecture which had been diligently prepared for his benefit over-night, and smiled as usual in his face. 'Surely,' she mentally said, 'he could not stoop to such deceit—he, my adopted son, the only living creature left to me from my kin.'

'Yes, I sent for you,' she said aloud, and then hesitated, not knowing how to prevent him thinking she had laid a trap to catch him tripping in his truth; 'sit down.'

He obeyed, putting his hat aside, and holding a thin cane with a silver kangaroo-headed top erect between his knees, its head at his moustache. At this point he helped her.

'I am sorry I was out when you sent for me last night, but when I left here for home, instead of stopping there as I intended, I changed my mind, because 'Cilla was not alone after all; her mother was there. Perhaps I'm not in love with my mother-in-law; at all events, I knew 'Cilla was in good hands and would not miss me. Do you want me to do anything for you in the city?' He spoke with the utmost candour, and stroked his moustache with the kangaroo's nose.

'No, Theo, I want nothing from the city, thank you; I simply want a confidential chat with you—nothing more.'

'Oh! is that all?' He leaned back in his chair, and a look crept over his face as if he were in expectation of a dentist immediately exercising his craft with the forceps at his jaws. 'Well, aunt, it is a long time since you called me over the coals,' he said, on the defensive already; 'but I don't think you have any reason to complain of me now, so I am safe; and, besides, I am getting a thousand a year, for which I am indebted to strangers, and not to relatives, who might have helped me to something better than a clerkship at a bank.'

This was meant for a hit at his sole relative, and was not unlike a challenge to arms. She had stroked his fur the wrong way with the expressed desire for a confidential chat, because he knew what it meant—what it would lead to. Her confidential

chat was but a synonym for a sermon, which invariably led to a moral *cul-de-sac* when addressed to him.

His manner and speech offended her enough to crust at once the tender mood with which she had greeted him.

'You are as touchy as ever,' she replied coldly; 'but I shall chance that, believing it to be my duty to speak to you of something which troubles me.'

He pulled out his watch and consulted it.

'It is nine o'clock. I have not long to give you.'

'I once fancied,' she went on, unheeding the hint, 'that you were fond of Isabella Gimp, and she of you; subsequent events went to prove that I was wrong; recent events, however, make me think that I was right.'

His lips curved downward at the corners; he leaned back in the chair still, and said but one word, chillingly polite:

'Proceed!'

'I intend to.' The blood began to mount to her temples; his coldness fired her. 'I demand an answer to a plain question. Am I right or am I wrong?'

'Both,' he said quietly: 'right in thinking we were fond of each other once; wrong in your present interference. I will trouble you to let me move my own way. I know what I am about.'

'May I ask what you are about? It seems to me that I have a right to know—to interfere.'

'Do you think I have not yet arrived at years of discretion?—that I must be advised at every turn? I am only doing what the whole world is doing for itself; if you must know—feathering my nest.'

'I don't understand you.' Aunt Jessie's eyes were flashing like his own, but where he was pale she was flushed. 'What has feathering your nest got to do with the subject?'

'Everything,' he replied shortly, beginning to drum at his teeth with the stick-head and staring at the opposite wall, avoiding a glance at his aunt.

'For heaven's sake, don't torture me with riddles!' she cried angrily, even with her voice raised. 'This is too serious a matter to talk over lightly. Why can't you speak out like a man?'

'I shall speak like the most dutiful of nephews, *ma tante*,'

he answered, never once showing loss of temper, but concealing it beneath a tantalizing nonchalance. 'I don't wish you to think me worse than I am, else I shouldn't trouble; but if there is any badness in the thing, it may strike you—it does me—that you are not wholly blameless. You were good enough to keep me grinding at the bank to the tune of one hundred and fifty a year, with the most motherly and creditable intentions no doubt; but it did not suit me, and when I see my way to getting into a good thing with a leap, you should praise me for my energy in availing myself of such an opportunity. If I failed to dance attendance on Mrs. Goldwin the way of the leap would be blocked, because—well, to put it delicately, she wishes to help me. I owe my present billet to her—not to her husband—entirely.'

'You mean, she cares for you as she should not?'

'Perhaps.'

Again he drummed at his teeth.

'And that you care for her as you should not?'

'I did not say so.'

'You imply it, then?'

'No; I have done with sentiment. I might have been maudlin once, but not now.' He looked at his watch for the second time, and was about to rise as he added, 'Are you satisfied?'

'Satisfied!' she exclaimed; 'I am bewildered—in a nightmare. You are not faultless, oh no! yet I loved to believe you only a wilful, headstrong lad, who would grow better and worthier with years; and now——' She stopped to turn her head away: she could not speak.

Theodore rose to his full height, shouldering his stick as if it were a gun, and spoke again.

'You were always addicted to making mountains out of molehills, and putting things in their worst light. She ought to have married me; but she played me a common trick, and is only anxious to make amends to which I am entitled. If I like her society, and she likes mine, I don't see what business it is of anybody's. I don't see why a man can't be attentive to and on intimate terms with a congenial companion without having ugly constructions put upon his actions——'

'Upon his motives,' interpolated Aunt Jessie under her

breath; and then she stood up also and faced him, not gazing upon him with motherly pride and tenderness as she was wont to do. 'You are playing a base game,' she cried, 'a double game, feigning to be in that maudlin condition you deride in order to hoodwink a woman who does not act up to her vow at the altar, but feeds you from the hand she dishonours. You are enriched at her husband's expense, yet through *her* influence. She is bad enough, but, of the two, she is better than you. She would like to be true to one, and you are false to all—to yourself, to the wife who is a thousand times too good for you; though she says nothing to me, your neglect of herself and attention to that other creature is bitterness to her—is agony, and,' she added, as she drew herself up proudly to confront him with something like a threat, 'let me tell you that for her sake—for the sake of avoiding a public scandal—I am only withheld from going this very day to that infatuated, generous old man to expose the whole matter, to tell him to look after his young wife, who is not to be trusted.'

'I know you would like to ruin me,' he said sulkily, and then with confidence, 'but fortunately for me, the scandal would touch you.'

'You know me better. I am not thinking of myself. I would expose that woman's deceit and perfidy if I could without implicating you.' She folded her hands and laid them on his breast; her voice fell to gentleness as she continued appealingly, 'Theo, for the sake of your good name—no, for the sake of all that is right and proper, I implore you, stop at home with your loving wife, comfort her, tend her, and leave that other woman; it is not too late.'

'Impracticable,' he asserted, with his long fingers playing nervously now on his cane.

'Mr. Goldwin is pleased with you. He has told me you are invaluable; be beholden to him alone.'

He made an impatient twist of his body.

'Do you know what you are talking about?' he asked.

'Every word,' she replied.

She sat down again, overcome, apparently exhausted, and lay back against the cushions with her eyes closed, her breathing wheezy and laboured, after her long speech. He made one turn down the room and back before he explained what he

meant by 'impracticable.' He prefaced the explanation with a bitter laugh.

'You don't know—you don't know. If she swore that snow was black and grass was blue, he would believe at once that everybody but his wife was colour-blind, and that she alone had perfect sight. If she chose to tell him that I was mismanaging his affairs, he would straightway send me about my business, and then I should fall to the ground between two confounded stools. And she would do it if I faltered in my allegiance.'

In these latter sentences he forgot to control nature, which bubbled freely to his lips in passionate accents, as he struck at his unoccupied chair rather viciously with the cane.

Mrs. Calliport raised her lids at the thud of the stick on the seat of the chair, and looked up at her nephew. He was very dear to her—this sister's son, the baby boy she had promised to take for her own: to nurse, and train, and shelter; and she had tried to do her duty.

Fully alive to his faults, she yet thought she could see the subtle glittering of worthy traits in his character. He had been wild and profligate. What of that? A great many young men were wild and profligate. He would sow his oats and become an average good man, controlling his evil impulse in struggling to be better. But now this lust for gold was like an incurable disease, withering up all that was good in him. Had she failed in her duty, then? she asked herself, as her eyes were riveted on his face. Ought she to have given way to him, and offered him all the money he desired from her? It was a mental debate, and the ayes settled it. Better for him to be a spendthrift—to waste in speculation—than be what he was, a dishonourable man, an indifferent husband, a false friend. She had withheld a loan of £1,000, thinking it the wisest course, and not from those miserly instincts with which he was so ready to credit her. She gave lavishly, but her charity was always guided by prudence. Prudence had forbidden an extensive liberality to her nephew, and now she thought she must have erred on the side of prudence. Her lips trembled, her eyes grew misty, and, with an effort, she rose to her feet for the second time during the interview, and putting her hands on his shoulders tenderly, she said with a beautiful earnestness:

'Give it all up; give up that woman first, and, if needs

must, give up the position which comes through her. You shall still have a thousand a year; you shall enter into a business of your own. No, you shall be an independent man; you shall not fall to the ground. I will do anything for you if you will be a true gentleman.'

'Your offer comes too late,' he replied ungraciously, and with undisguised bitterness, as he shifted uneasily beneath her two plump hands. She removed them quickly and reseated herself. 'Help under such conditions,' he said, 'would make Phillipia too hot for me. Your "true gentleman" would be subjected to those nods and winks and frowns, so trifling in themselves, and yet each, like a grain of gunpowder in its way, would go towards making a heap which, being fired, would shatter a fellow's reputation; and Mrs. Goldwin herself, if provoked by bad play of mine, would be the first to set a lighted match to it. I know her, and it is but a harmless flirtation.'

'What an exalted opinion of one you honour with your attentions—of one congenial to you!'

Mrs. Calliport was forced into irony.

Theodore laughed derisively.

'I have much the same opinion of her as of most women. She simply likes her own way—don't you? And it is easier for a young, clever, beautiful woman to enforce it than for dolly-faced, feeble-minded creatures, such as you and I are acquainted with.'

Here he examined his watch for the third time.

Aunt Jessie, noting it, responded to the action, and while she looked upon him as a hopeless case, she said, with a ring of despair in her tones:

'Yes, it is late. You had better go. We have both lost time.'

His manner reflected hers at once. He carried his head high after bowing to the wisdom of her last words with freezing politeness.

'You are right, aunt. We have wasted time. Good-morning.' Thus they parted.

This was just the end he had foreseen to the confidential chat. He walked rapidly to the cab-stand near by, and was soon driving at double speed to the city—to the office.

As soon as Aunt Jessie was alone, she hid her face in her hands and reproached herself—not her nephew.

Her maid was rather surprised, about two hours later on, when she was told to send for a hansom. Mrs. Calliport did not keep a carriage, and this was also put down by Lockstud and many others as an effect of parsimony. He would have much preferred that his aunt should be driven through and about Phillipia in a style befitting her means; it would give him a certain prestige. But Mrs. Calliport did not go out often, and when she did preferred a hansom, with its closed doors, and hood lowered, and curtained windows, where she could sit nicely boxed up and all enwrapped in shawls and muffs.

'Are you going out this morning, ma'am?' asked the maid, who knew that her mistress was generally shut up best part of the day after a bad night.

'Yes; it is a lovely morning.'

'But you will be fatigued,' continued the girl, who, with the privilege of long service, could speak her mind at times.

'Go quickly, and do as I tell you!' said Mrs. Calliport sharply, not inclined to argue the matter.

She was obeyed instantly.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FOSTER-BROTHERS.

PRISCILLA LOCKSTUD was at work that morning of Aunt Jessie's sermon to her husband, sitting, as usual, plying her needle industriously, and occupying an apartment which was more arbour than room, and where she should have been not so entirely opposed in her temperament to her bright surroundings.

It was a cosy, snug little bower, portioned off from a side veranda, and with three of its walls composed of trellis-work, and decked with thick creeping vines flowering in purple and crimson, and climbing baby roses, blooming within and without at their own sweet will. It contained only necessary furniture, but was alive and glowing with the beauties of God-

creation, represented in luxuriant vegetable and animal life. Handsome dome-shaped gilt-wire cages were suspended from the ceiling or attached to the nature-curtained walls, with each imprisoning a bird remarkable for plumage or song. In a far-off corner there stood a square aquarium, set within an artificial grotto of coral, seaweed, ferns and grasses, grouped harmoniously, and where gold-fish leaped and dived and floated continuously.

It was a divine arbour, full of fragrance, warmth, life, and colour, with the trilling and the twittering of the birds, the foliage and the perfume; and here Priscilla loved to bring her work. Theo had given her the birds and the fish. They had quite a handsome home now from garret to basement, and he had hinted something about getting a nice little phaeton and a pair of ponies—not so anxious to load her with luxuries as to flaunt his social position in the eyes of the world whose good opinion he courted.

She had quietly, apathetically, slipped into a nonentity, to whom he seldom opened his heart, whom he cloyed with sugar-plums, in the shape of pretty things for household or personal adornment, providing she was good and obedient, never resisting his wishes or interfering with his plans, which meant, 'Let me do as I please, go where I please, and ask no questions. Make no scenes, and you shall want for nothing.' He even went far enough to ask Mrs. Glade, his mother-in-law, to share his roof—quite a piece of self-abnegation on his part, but which he determined to soften by more frequent flights from home than before. But it was not necessary, for Mrs. Glade declined, preferring to live alone.

Eve, sitting in solitude in Paradise, would perhaps supply another exalted conception to a Miltonic mind—a Paradise more gloomy, more desolate, than the island where Sindbad was cast, to thrive as best he could—a Paradise with a lonely disappointed Eve pining for a twin-soul to save her from oppression in the midst of Nature's glories; to open her ears to the melody of the tiny feathered songsters; to give her nostrils breath to inhale the fragrance of flowers and shrubs; her feet strength to tread the velvet sward; her hands and knees desire for prayerful attitude in spontaneous thanksgiving.

Priscilla was an Adamless Eve, sitting in her bower stitching at some diminutive garment of finest lawn.

She sat on a low arm-chair, and her needle went clicking in and out, out and in, with mechanical precision; the flowers, stirred with the gentle breeze, rustled softly; the fish sported, while the morning sunbeams thrust their way through the network of foliage to fall in golden spots and broaden into circles of glittering light on the water of the aquarium, illuminating the red-gold sheen of its lively occupants as they curved and glided so gracefully and swiftly to and fro, as if dancing to the wild, sweet song of the merry birds. And, alas! Priscilla was indifferent to it all; she saw and heard, but with no quickened sense of rapture, with no leap of gratitude.

So indifferent was she, so fixed upon her work, that when the doorway leading from an inner room was filled with a portly figure and its threshold darkened, when even a heavy tread mingled discordantly with the bird-concert, she was not roused until a voice said:

'How busy we are!'

'Aunt Jessie!' cried 'Cilla, delighted and surprised, as she dropped her work on the floor and almost ran to embrace the welcome visitor. 'Come and sit down. It is just the right temperature here this morning for you. Oh, I am glad to see you!'

While she spoke, she led Mrs. Calliport to an easy couch, removed her gloves, her wraps, and then added, 'How did you come?' her whole expression beaming welcome.

'The usual way, my dear—in a hansom. The girl told me you were here, so I walked right through and found you. But I am not fit to be out, only I was too miserable to stay in the house. I want cheering up.'

'And I think I want cheering up, aunt, so we can just help each other.'

'Are you miserable too?' asked Mrs. Calliport, well aware that she was putting a superfluous question, and looking at her niece with those eyes which were so much like what Theo's could be at times, what they had been when he had only to woo to win her.

Priscilla reseated herself and took up her work again.

'Not exactly miserable,' she amended. 'It is because I am

not contented, not pleased with all the things I have; I am out of temper with myself, and that is wrong; but I can't help it.'

'Poor child!' said Aunt Jessie soothingly. 'It is a pity you should feel so, and in such a pretty home.'

'Yes, indeed; and Theo has such excellent taste. Oh, that recalls your message to my mind. He said he would call upon you this morning; did he?'

'Oh yes.'

'Did you want him very badly last night?'

'No.' Aunt Jessie with difficulty here repressed a sigh, and asked: 'Will he be home to lunch? if not, I will stop with you, if you will have me.'

'Have you?' This brought a smile to Mrs. Lockstud's lips. 'I would have you here every day, selfishly speaking. I feel better already for your company. Theo always lunches in the city since he came to Virginia Bay. In our little house we were near mother's, and she could come to me when I could not get to her. Here it is all different; I am so much alone, with Theo away all day.'

'Why do you let him be away—not only all day, but very often of a night, too? Why do you let him go out so much without you?' Mrs. Calliport spoke almost snappishly, so much so that Priscilla looked up at her in surprise and saw tears in her eyes, which made her unheed the question, and say in sweet simplicity:

'You are not strong this morning. What can I do for you? Shall I order some light wine and a biscuit? Perhaps you are faint.'

'No, no, child; I want nothing. Let us talk quietly. It is this horrid complaint; it takes my breath away sometimes; don't mind me.' Mrs. Calliport's breath was not affected that instant, but her heart was beating faster than usual, and she tried to hide the sympathy that was exciting it. She repeated her question in a different tone. 'I asked you why you let your husband go out so much without you.'

'Why? I—I don't know,' faltered 'Cilla. 'But should a man, because he happens to be married, always have his wife hanging about him wherever he goes? It hampers him; it makes him wish himself unmarried, perhaps. I like him to feel perfectly free.'

Her head bent lower over her sewing; her button mouth was not so rosy as formerly, but more set; her face was pale and much thinner. 'When he is sick he is glad to stop at home. I am of use to him then, and nobody else, he says, can nurse like me. He knows then that I care for nothing but his happiness.'

Mrs. Calliport made a gesture of impatience. It seemed to her that Priscilla took things too easily, that she was the feeble-minded creature alluded to by her nephew; that with more self-assertion and a stronger spirit on her side, he might have been influenced to better habits.

She had reproached herself, and now she was ready to condemn his wife. Where she herself had not been lenient enough, the other was too mild; between them both the threads of his character had been badly held and woven, the result being what it was—so many flaws in the woof.

'You are a perfect child, 'Cilla, in some things,' she exclaimed. 'You are altogether wrong.'

'That is what Theo often tells me,' replied 'Cilla very quietly, but with a shrinking from her aunt's censure, which, directed at her, was something quite new. 'I am sorry that you should think so too. Am I a child?'

'Yes—in some things,' reasserted Mrs. Calliport, with emphasis on the two last words; 'and you must not be a child any longer. Remember, you are a woman, with present and future responsibilities. You are a child in your submission. You are wrong in giving him so much freedom—in letting him spend his time, as he does, with that Isabella Goldwin. There! now it is said, and I must speak for his sake and for your own.'

Mrs. Calliport paused for breath, and Priscilla, exhibiting a flush on her face which passed like a dissolving view, immediately to give place to more than the original paleness, said nothing, but sent her needle flying quicker.

'You don't like it,' continued Mrs. Calliport; 'I know you don't—I told you once before I could read faces, and I can read yours easily; and yet you sit down contentedly—I should say submissively—and let him dangle after her. Not a woman in a thousand would allow it, or take it passively, as you do, outwardly, not inwardly. You can't deceive me: you are

fuming and fretting, and think you are hiding the fact. You are not. You think you are screening his faults from me—you are not. My dear—my dear,' Aunt Jessie clasped her hands here, and her voice quavered a bit, 'I see more than is good for me to see. I want to help you if I can.'

That feeble citadel of Mrs. Lockstud's own erection, wherein she thought to lock away all the shortcomings of her husband, fell at this moment as flat as the walls of Jericho before the warrior blast. It was taken before she was aware of it. Her work now lay idly in her lap, and she trembled from head to foot as she asked:

'How do you know? You never go out. Has anybody told you?'

Here was a tacit surrender.

'How do I know?' replied her aunt; 'because I have eyes and ears and senses. Have I not seen you sit still at my own house, and let him take her home over and over again? If you had anything but the spirit of a mouse you couldn't sit still; you would go with them, and guard him from the breath of scandal—counteract her baneful influence.'

At this Priscilla gave way entirely, and, hiding her face in both hands, she cried silently.

Mrs. Calliport thought it best to let her alone; though in a measure impatient with her evident apathy, she was full of commiseration for the neglected wife, and felt sure that a confidant would soothe, if not remove, her trouble.

Presently poor Priscilla lifted her head, and, oh, what a pitiful white face, what pale lips, were turned to Aunt Jessie! Next she spoke with a little difficulty:

'He never should have married me. I know I am only a simple woman—no companion for him. I can nurse him when he is ailing at all—can look after his house; but I can never, never be what *she* is to him. She is clever, she is beautiful and attractive to all men who, like Theo, are not proof against her fascination. I don't blame Theo. I can't blame him, because he is more attached to her than to me. She is not only beautiful, she is clever and can talk well, where I can't. He tries to be good to me in his own way, and if I suffer it is because I am so different to her, so unable to suffice him. Don't blame him, aunt.'

'She is a wretch!' boldly asserted Mrs. Calliport. 'Cilla did not contradict this, and allowed Aunt Jessie to continue. 'And I can give you this much comfort: Theo's attentions are diplomacy from beginning to end, but, all the same, scandalous—wicked!'

'Well, aunt, child as you say I am, I also am diplomatic. If I spoke to Theo about his constant attention to Mrs. Goldwin, I should bring down twofold misery on my own head, because when he is angry with me it kills me, and when I leave him to do as he pleases he is never angry, and so in that way we get along peacefully. Don't ask me to try another way, aunt; if you did a thousand times I could not try. I shall—I must—make the best of it, since he has married a woman not suitable to him. His diplomacy, aunt, is not a burden to him, and it is not, surely, all diplomacy that keeps him continually at her side, but it is because I am the wrong woman "to counteract her baneful influence," as you say. Perhaps when baby comes it will do what I can't do—keep him more at home.'

These latter sentences were distinct from all the rest, because of a tender ring of hope breathed through them, which sent tears again to the eyes of the elder lady.

'When baby comes' were words which were as the refrain of a hymn which Priscilla had set herself to learn the latter months. 'When baby comes!' That period of her life was expected to bring to her a Messianic beatitude. When the heart of the husband should be turned to the wife, when baby hands and baby voice should work a miracle, even as the prophet with his rod smote the rock and brought forth a rush of life-giving water. The child, like the prophet, was to be but a divine agent, and by a touch to create a love-stream for her.

But five or six weeks before the arrival of this anticipated olive-branch, another little messenger of gladness was ushered into the world, the gladness being almost of an individual character, and breaking into sunshine over the grateful heart of Jeremiah Goldwin, for to him was born a son and heir.

How quietly he crept to his wife's bedside, and watched her admiringly as she slept, with her face camellia-white, and lips paled to coral pink; her wide, heavily-fringed lids closed in slumber; her hair, a golden tangle of soft-spun silk, all astray over the pillow—an aureole about a small shapely head; her

arms and hands thrown carelessly over the silken coverlid ; her slender fingers still glistening with diamonds !

If ever Goldwin prayed in his life, an unspoken prayer framed itself now—a mute thanksgiving from the depths of a soul capable of strong and mighty love. How reverently he turned to the infant in its long lacy robes, as it was carried to him in the nurse's arms ! How lovingly he gazed at the puny, pinky face ! How tenderly he lifted a tiny hand, with its Lilliputian shrunken fingers, so helpless, so soft, so velvety, to let it lie on his broad palm like a daisy on a slice of bark, while he marvelled at its perfection.

He had never seen a new-born baby in his life, and never thought to see one of his own, and now this mite before him was actually his son—the son of an old age—more than his Benjamin —neither eldest nor youngest, but his only one. He would have liked to take it in his big arms, but felt sheepish in the presence of the motherly old nurse—capped, spectacled, and slippered—as she crooned and purred and mounted guard over her precious charge, appealing in its sweet helplessness to all that was womanly in her, yet as the son of a millionaire, exciting all that was worldly.

But alas for poor Priscilla ! The advent of her longed-for babe brought her none of that indescribable joy which the mother's heart should know.

Instead of a new-found bliss there came chaos—chaos of mind and body, and a rush of fevered blood to drive reason from her brain and strength from her limbs. She was desperately ill.

As for Lockstud, if paternity invested him with new-born pride, it was not strong enough to break through his supercilious dignity, and excite such an emotional whirl of sentiment as that which was upheaving and overflowing from the soul of the jubilant millionaire, whose fatherhood struck off a tithe of his years.

Under the circumstances, perhaps, it was natural that the first-born—usually the harbinger of blessing to young hopeful parents—being but the herald of sickness and misery, could make no happy stir in the household. Indeed, it was of quite minor importance, and, moreover, was not in the house at all, which needs some explanation.

Mrs. Goldwin's son at this time was six weeks old, and though she was in fair health, and not altogether a stranger to maternal affection, yet a devotion which was likely to interfere with social duties and daily pleasures was for her decidedly objectionable. Therefore was she desirous of seeking a substitute to relieve her of an office which should have been her pleasure.

Mrs. Calliport's philanthropical characteristics have already been alluded to, and owing to them there existed many petitioners the better for her bounty. It is with one of these we have to do—a young woman who had been in Mrs. Calliport's service, and married from her employer's house.

She was a Mrs. Dripper, recently widowed by an accident, and left almost destitute, with two children, one being an infant of six weeks, and dying.

She would have fared badly enough but for Mrs. Calliport, who, learning of Mrs. Goldwin's wish for a foster-mother for her son, secured the place for the widow, while undertaking to give the remaining child to reliable care during her service at Goolgun.

So Mrs. Dripper was duly installed at Goolgun when her charge was but three weeks old, and her own little one had departed to join the band of seraphim. And when it came to pass that the infant Lockstud cried out in vain for the solace of the young mother, when doctors advised its complete removal from the house to ensure perfect quiet until Mrs. Lockstud could be pronounced out of danger, Mrs. Dripper, hearing of it, and anxious to earn as much as she could for herself and orphan, pleaded to Mrs. Calliport and Mrs. Goldwin both to let her have this second child also, since she was strong and hearty, and could attend to both children well.

Mrs. Calliport would have preferred Theo's boy to be nursed at her own home, that she might watch over him ; but, willing to assist Mrs. Dripper all she could, was overruled by the force of charity, and made no objection.

Mrs. Goldwin was perfectly indifferent in the matter, as to whether Mrs. Dripper had half a dozen children to nurse, providing it did not interfere with the proper management of her own child. Two babies in the nursery would effect no change in her life, would never block her pleasures, so why

should she put any obstacle in the way of Mrs. Dripper's interest?

The nursery was at the top of the house, so that cry or scream could scarcely assail her ears, or if reaching her at all, would be too much mellowed by distance to cause nerve-irritation.

Sometimes—but very seldom—she did mount the staircase to visit the infant domain; but as a rule the child was brought down to her daily after its morning bath, and nursed by her for half an hour or so, and, this duty being performed, she was free of motherhood's claims for the ensuing twenty-three hours.

In this way Mrs. Dripper found no difficulty in doubling her wages and responsibility, and Priscilla's son was nourished at Goolgun away from the mother whose embrace he was yet to learn, whose warm lips he was yet to feel, whose smiles and utterances of thanksgiving, and whose soft cooing baby language of holy love, were all alike lurking behind the fell hand of fever, which shadowed her home like a pall.

It was a gloomy house for all concerned. It irritated Lockstud, filled as it was with whispers and sad faces, nurses and stealthy-creeping footsteps.

He missed the hundred and one comforts which money alone cannot buy—the true heart that mostly anticipated his wants, the hands that ministered to his pleasures ungrudgingly.

It was a hateful house to him, with Aunt Jessie's sighs, and Mrs. Glade's eyes red with constant weeping. He felt only in the way at home, so he absented himself, and spent most of his leisure at Goolgun, where there were no tears, no lamentations, to weary him, and where his child was located.

'Which is which?' he once asked Mrs. Dripper, smiling in jest, and yet puzzled in earnest, as she stood before him with a child on each arm; and Mrs. Goldwin, standing by, looked on with an amused expression.

'Lor, sir!' came the reply, 'I don't believe I should know them myself, only your boy is double-jointed, so I'd tell them in the dark.'

'Upon my word!' put in Mrs. Goldwin, 'they might well be mixed, and each given over to the wrong parents.'

'In that case,' said Lockstud, 'Mrs. Dripper would spare us advertising for a Solomon to pick the right mother.'

He glanced from one child to the other, and back again, as his long fingers stroked and twisted his moustache. He observed in each the same blue eyes; the same undecided prominence in a tiny dab of flesh, bearing twin holes, representing a nose; the same soft, pure, flower-like skin; the same dimensions; the same almost bald, round heads, save for a slight growth of fair silky down; and neither child was robust.

Sometimes days would pass, and he would never ask to see his son, content to hear from Mrs. Goldwin, who heard it from Mrs. Dripper, that he was doing nicely. Nevertheless, he would remain some time talking to Mrs. Goldwin, or waiting to see her husband, before going to the city to give or receive information or instruction relative to business. Sometimes Goldwin kept him waiting a long time, while he, unlike his wife, was in the nursery fondling his boy, or watching the process of dressing, with unsophisticated delight.

'I have been having a few words with the future Premier of Georgius,' he remarked one morning on entering the breakfast-room by way of apology for detaining his manager, and added: 'What are you going to do with your boy?'

'Oh,' laughed Lockstud back, 'the Premier shall decide it. He shall give him a portfolio.'

The 'future Premier' had been christened, and there had been feasting and revelry. His name was Roland Kovodel.

His mother had wrinkled her aristocratic nose in disgust at the name of Kovodel, but as she knew that her husband was not to be moved when he had once resolved to do a thing, she gave way amiably by allowing that to be his second name, while she should choose his first. Goldwin consented to this, saying she could have any high-flown gimcrack name she liked, so long as he could back it with Kovodel.

Lockstud's boy was also christened, but without joybells of any kind; and Goldwin, for some inexplicable reason, was averse to the name chosen for him by Mrs. Calliport, and accepted by her nephew without question.

'It belonged to one who was very dear to your poor mother,' she told Theo, 'and should be bestowed in her memory.'

So the child was received into the Church as Cecil. But it was a very remarkable thing that Mrs. Calliport was also strangely moved over Goldwin's decision to call his son

Kovodel. It aroused sad memories, and she wondered why of all the names to be selected he should have picked out one so uncommon, and yet so painfully familiar, to her.

The solution belonged to the far-off future.

CHAPTER VIII.

WASHINGTON LARRY TAKES A CROOKED AIM AT THE FOE, AND BRINGS DOWN THE FRIEND.

'THEY have called him Cecil.'

It was Goldwin who spoke. It was nine o'clock at night, and he was sitting opposite his quondam mate, with one arm resting on the table, where glasses stood together with a decanter of whisky and jug of hot water, a plate of cut lemons, a bowl of sugar, and teaspoons. It was almost like old times, thought Larry, when no 'yaller-haired witch' or fussy baby had wedged in between him and Jerry. Goldwin often came to him like this, bringing in a breath of the happier days, because he, Larry, had gradually ceased visiting Goolgun; and when his friend asked why, the answer was that he loved his own nest too well. Jerry was not going to quarrel with him for this, because he had once shirked going out visiting himself, and he knew quite well that the Goolgun society which he indulged in for his wife's sake could have no attraction for such as Larry; but he did not know that the true answer was withheld.

Washington's hate for Lockstud had by now reached such a pitch that he sickened when compelled to remain in the same room with him; and as Lockstud was constantly at Goolgun, it seemed to Washington that there was no room for him there. He entertained the same opinion of Jerry's wife as ever, but somewhat modified, for, with all his viciousness directed at Lockstud, he considered him to a great extent responsible for her conduct, and for craft and devilry a Mephistopheles.

This hate was perfectly mutual between the two men. Lockstud, occasionally obliged to come into contact with his employer's *protégé*, used domineering tones towards him, or

treated him with contempt. Washington in return gave snarls, and by gesture or action token of his deep set abhorrence.

Longing to show him up to Jerry in his true colours, he had not yet determined how best to set about it; but the Fates decided it sooner than he expected.

Goldwin was talking of Lockstud's child, not because of any particular attention it had attracted to itself from him, but because of the name it had received. It was with quite a disconcerted expression he remarked to Larry:

'They have called him Cecil.'

Washington, with his cat on his knee, and putting his pipe from him to lie unheeded for awhile on the table, answered briefly:

'Coincidence.'

'Of course,' said Jerry, 'but it is queer, for all that. There might be fifty Cecils in Phillipia, but for me to be asked to stand godfather to a Cecil—that's the rub! It took my breath away when Lockstud told me of it, and asked me to stand. Belle was present, and I forgot myself, and bawled out: "A thousand devils! can't you fork out any other name but that?" Afterwards I could have knocked my head against the wall, for Belle was vexed, and I just said the first thing that came to my tongue without thinking, and felt lowered after, you see, before her and Lockstud, who never forgets himself. He only bowed, and said, like a gentleman, he was sorry it was too late; the child was registered Cecil. Hang me! but that fellow is a gentleman, every inch of him. I wish I was more like him.'

Goldwin, for the sake of his wife, had been doing his utmost to emulate the gentlemen she extolled as examples of good breeding, but he was everlastingly the victim of a *faux pas*, saying things better left unsaid, and treading unwittingly on other people's toes, though his blunt honesty and generous principles made him many friends. He felt shamefaced after having decried the child's name for no especial reason given, and in such unpolished vulgar terms of expression, and he felt shamefaced now as he alluded to it; but sudden surprise chased anything like remorse completely away.

Washington's hand was lifted from the cat's back, and, being converted into a fist, came down on the table with the force of

a falling brick, to make his pipe dance, the glasses jingle, and to send Cicero leaping in terror from his lap.

'A gentleman, you call him!' he cried, his voice actually shaking with passion; and he was not a violent man, but for the nonce it seemed that he and Jerry had exchanged tempers —'a gentleman! May all such gentlemen be hanged, quartered, and pitched into the sea, to rid the country of pests.'

Goldwin, having recovered the shock of seeing the calm Larry suddenly frenzied, answered coolly:

'I know you're not in love with him.'

'No, I'm not; but'—he felt urged to say—'but I know who is.' Yet, feeling this to be premature, he stopped short. This allusion to Lockstud had quickened his desire for a shot at him—had stirred a smouldering fire to blaze. With a creditable effort to control his wrath, he allowed his voice to fall before he continued: 'See here, mate; I want to ask you a question.'

'Ask away, Wash; it is just nine. Belle is sitting with Mrs. Calliport to-night; she's given up a party to sit with her, and she's that unselfish she won't hear of me troubling to go for her, but says the footman can escort her home; but I am going to give myself the pleasure—not the trouble—to call instead of the footman. She will stay till ten, so there's time for a hundred questions and answers.'

Washington, unheeding this rambling allusion to Mrs. Goldwin's self-denial, made no reference to it, but put forth his question:

'What would you think of a chap standing by, and seeing a serpent at another man's feet, in the grass, unbeknown to that man, just on the point of running his fangs in his heels to do for him, if that chap didn't do his best to throttle the serpent, and call off that man, the man, mind, being his best friend, too —now what would you think, or what would you do?'

'I'd lynch him,' decided Jerry at once, with a pull at his glass for a draught of hot toddy.

'You'd lynch him. Very well, now you have said it. Whatever happens, remember, you urged me to do it, or sent me to be lynched.'

Here Larry sprang from his chair like a Jack-in-the-box, and began to pace the parlour for a few seconds, his hands under

his coat-tails, his face full of contortion. Figuratively he was shouldering arms, and about to level a musket at Lockstud, with a preliminary poke of its bayonet in Goldwin's sides. Cicero, who had been hesitating whether to spring into his lap again or not, now walked after him, stopping when he stopped, and rubbing his whiskers against his beloved master's boots. Larry turned his ferret eyes on Goldwin's broad rosy self-satisfied face, now expressing curiosity, and something stuck in his throat.

Presently, with difficulty and not altogether in his natural voice, he spoke again:

'Jerry, old fellow, you know—you must know I'd hold my right hand in a blazing fire, and let it scorch to powder, to save you from harm. And thunder! I'm scorching up now, but I can't hold out no longer.'

'What's up, Wash?' asked Goldwin, with the self-satisfied expression giving way to anxiety. He quite made up his mind that something was wrong at the office, and Lockstud at fault. 'What's up? Don't beat about the bush. I know if you talk like this it is no light thing.'

Larry thought he would let the truth fall more lightly by circumnavigating this way, so he continued, levelling his musket to strike at his enemy far off, merely grazing him, however, with the bullet, which made an unexpected canon to lodge in the bosom of his friend.

'Did you ever hear of the chap in the play? Joseph Surface was his name. I remember that. Shakespeare it was that wrote of him—no, it wasn't him; it was—Dickens. No, it wasn't him, either—never mind; whoever it was, he knowed a thing or two of human nature at its worst when he made up Joseph Surface. He was an oily-tongued, double-faced villain, and you have him in your "gentleman," Mr. Theodore Lockstud.'

So part of the truth began to ooze and relieve the suffering of the speaker through the bursting of a sort of mental ulcerous affection, a clot of bruised unhealthy blood, an ominous swelling ripe for the knife.

Goldwin's praise of Lockstud had severed it as the keen edge of a lance; it broke and disgorged itself in a loathsome flow, which meant mitigation and a certain deliverance of stifled pain.

The cat, receiving no encouragement from Washington,

walked over to Jerry, his next best friend, and, standing upright on his hind-legs, let his forepaws rest on Jerry's knees. Jerry's big hand stroked the dumb pet mechanically, while his impatience was manifested in a quick 'Well, go on, can't you?'

Larry's blundering musket-pike was pricking him a bit.

But just then Larry could not go on; he was mute for another few seconds; for shooting at Lockstud meant a shot at Jerry's wife, too; to expose one meant to expose the other; and perhaps he began to feel like Virginius did with the weapon raised to plunge into the bosom of his sweet young daughter for honour's sake.

'Go on,' repeated Jerry—'out with it, man. I'm ready to hear anything you have to tell me. Say there's a deficit somewhere in the books, and that Lockstud knows all about it. Only prove your words—prove your words.'

Cicero, tired of standing, jumped confidingly on to the arm of Goldwin's chair, to have his coat brushed rather roughly, Goldwin's hand now working with an agitation which ran through his body and gave sharpness to his accents.

Larry could not prove his words—that was the worst of it—and he stood stock still and silent, knowing Jerry to be on the wrong track, and that Lockstud, if a thief of a kind, was no money-pilferer. After a painful pause, he began again:

'There ain't a deficit in the books that I know of. I can't prove anything—I only know I'm right. I tell you there's a serpent up to mischief, and its name is Lockstud. You are too fond of him, and he is too fond of—of somebody else.'

'Come and sit down, can't you?' exclaimed Jerry, his temper beginning to mount and fly off in sparks. 'And don't stand there like a ghost!'

There was a suspicion of violence in this demand, while his fingers all unconsciously vented their quickened pulsation in a fierce grip on poor Cicero's neck, which the animal resented in double-quick time with his weapon of defence, a strong claw, thus inflicting a gaping scratch on the offending hand, for which swift retribution came in the shape of an angry kick, preceded by a push from lap to floor. Cicero went whining away to coil himself at a respectful distance and forget his injuries in slumber.

Both men, always humane, were so absorbed with the subject

under discussion that the dumb creature's wrongs evoked no indignation or sympathy from Larry, and excited no remorse in Jerry, on whose hand there was an ugly wound of which he took no notice after the first sting. Larry obeyed. It seemed to him as if he were in a burning building with red-hot timber, glass, and plaster about to envelop him, with dense smoke at his eyes, nostrils, and lungs, and with arms outstretched to rescue his friend from débris and disaster. That Jerry's temper would rise he felt to a certainty, and was ready to forgive him for any harshness.

He sat down, put both his arms on the table, leaned across it, and with nervous fingers began to roll the stem of his pipe to and fro till the bowl rocked like a boat in a squall. Larry himself was in a squall, and getting giddy.

'There's nothing wrong with the business, old man. Don't be hard on me because I want to put you right; there's a heap gone wrong with your gentleman.'

Another pause, broken by a warning oath from Goldwin, and a ferocious command to be 'out with it.' Larry knew that the squall was in his teeth now, and almost gasped for breath while trying to rally his failing courage in throwing Lockstud overboard.

'I want you to see for yourself,' he said at last. 'I want to warn you—I have been waiting for you to see things, and as you don't, why, it is my duty to speak, ain't it? My blood has been boiling for a long time; now it is boiled over. I want you to watch that scoundrel, because he is always at your wife's elbow, not only at Goolgun in your presence, but other places. And she——'

Something in Goldwin's face caused Larry to hesitate here. A fierce bull-dog look had settled about the mouth, and his hand was clenched—the hand that bore the angry blood-line of Cicero's claw.

'Well, what else?' he asked, not loudly, but with stifled passion, as he bent forward to hear more. '"She," you said—she what?'

'She encourages him, that's all. He is the worst. He won't let her settle down into a sedate party; she is young, and she likes young men.'

'It is a lie!' thundered Jerry.

'I hope it is,' answered Larry.

Trembling at the storm he had conjured up, he leaped from his chair, and turned his back upon his friend, so tortured with the agony he saw on his countenance that it compelled him not to witness it as he gave the rest of what frail evidence he had to bear him out.

'I don't say she is false to you, mind that; but I will say, she likes him best—I haven't watched her for nothing. I've heard your friends, your aristocrats, a-whispering and nodding over it, when they never took no notice of an old figure-head like me. And I think it right you should know of it and keep a tighter hand on her, and send him about his business.'

Jerry never speaking, and Larry's head turned from him, he went on with less shrinking:

'He's been coming and going a goodish bit while his poor wife is about dying. Coming to see his son, you think. Well, you're wrong. *I* never heard him ask to see him yet. He follows her everywhere, I tell you, and makes appointments where you ain't likely to join them.'

Larry was a rattlesnake before Goldwin that minute, and his words the rattle of it.

Goldwin could have throttled him.

Larry was prepared for violence—for a terrific explosion of some sort; it was best to get it over, he thought, as he waited to hear the smash of glasses and the crashing splintering of the decanter against a wall. He began to cower like a faithful brute who is ready to caress the hand holding a whip above his head—to crouch before the stern 'Lie down, sir.'

But none of these anticipations was fulfilled. Goldwin had risen certainly with a desperate desire to hurl something at Larry's devoted head, but remained standing and holding on to the edge of the table, as if paralyzed and dumb-stricken—so dumb that Larry was forced to face him again and see that all the ruddy colour was banished from his cheeks and lips, to see his face set like stone.

He would have preferred the natural explosion; or was this a fatal calmness heralding the hurricane? He went over to him, and placed a hand on his shoulder.

'Mate, if you look that way, I'll go and hang myself! By thunder, I will! Come, stamp, kick; be yourself!' He

shook him, and added: 'Do you mind Cecil Kovodel? None of that, now.'

'Ay, Cecil Kovodel!' cried Goldwin, at last finding speech as if with a magic touch.

When the wretched slave-driver of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' wished to revive a fainting female slave, he did not resort to the usual restoratives, but prodded her temples with a pin. Much in the same way did the utterance of that name revive poor Jerry, smarting and sore, but fully conscious.

'Ay, Cecil Kovodel!'

Repeating this, he fell, rather than reseated himself, in the chair, threw his arms upward, and next fell forward over the table in an abandoned position, with his great grizzled head bowed between his arms and his burly frame shaking.

Washington Larry turned away again; he had not expected this. A distant episode of his life was recalled strangely, and he experienced a weird sensation that had come to him but once before, when a boy standing at a newly-closed grave. He heard distinctly the 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust' of the parson, over what remained of the mother he had dearly loved. His throat began to swell and his eyes to float; even a wild, husky sob escaped him. The sob smote Jerry's ears, and made him rise once more to walk to Larry's side with an unsteady gait, and catch at his arm.

'You have done your duty!' he cried. 'Why do you fret?'

The voice was not Jerry's, nor the bitterness of the irony which could not escape his perturbed mate.

'You have vilified my wife; you were always dead against her!' Here a curse fell like a stone for weight upon Larry's head, and made him wince. 'You have done for Lockstud. Now, what more do you want, eh? Do you fret for me? Well, don't.' His voice quavered high as he rang out his next words with a wild defiance. 'I don't believe it, say your worst. If you were anybody else but who you are, if it wasn't for what you've done for me, if it wasn't for the memory of Cecil Kovodel, maybe I'd forget myself and strangle you for a liar! Do you think I'm going to be fooled twice—swallow the things you've tried to ram down my throat and nigh choked me with? I don't—I won't believe you, Washington Larry!'

He loosed his hold on Washington's arm, and with harsh conviction gnawing at his soul, and refusal of belief welling over from his lips, he turned away and walked quickly but unsteadily out of the house and into the street, leaving no kindly word or look behind, but a sense of suffocation in the air for Larry.

So, our David and Jonathan clashed for the first time in their united lives.

Larry stood aghast and gaping. Realizing now that his laudable intentions to insure the peace of his benefactor had only sown discord between them, and not the seed of the fruit desired—the disgrace and expulsion of the man he hated—he swore and pulled at his beard, and banged a chair upon the floor before he sat down sideways upon it and collapsed with his head upon an arm curved over its back, and with his heart as full of grief and despair as Jerry's had been but a few moments previous.

Cicero's slumbers were not disturbed by a peculiar low whine in the room which otherwise would have probably excited in him a sense of danger and created an abnormally erect tail. He slept, and his master groaned; for Jerry had broken his word, and all but lynched him for a duty not left undone.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH MRS. CALLIPORT FAILS AS MONITRESS, AND JERRY STOOPS TO SPY.

MRS. CALLIPORT, whose soul was exceedingly troubled over the critical condition of Priscilla Lockstud, had been drawn from her warm rooms more frequently of late, if only to look on the dear face of the innocent, affectionate, suffering girl who had won her heart so thoroughly. Mrs. Glade was always at her daughter's side now, and both she and Mrs. Calliport were so absorbed in their anxiety for the patient that her little son still lacked that infantile worship which reversed circumstances would certainly have kindled for him. It seemed only necessary at present to know that he was being well cared for.

But owing to unfavourable weather Mrs. Calliport had to give up going out for a time, and was obliged to be content with daily bulletins from her nephew concerning his wife. Asthma was troubling her less than Priscilla, although it was bad enough to confine her to the house and make her an invalid.

Mrs. Goldwin paid her particular attention, and now and then forfeited a sociable and pleasant evening elsewhere for her sake.

Mrs. Calliport was inclined to be indifferent, and not over-grateful, if courteous, in receiving these favours.

She was sitting well propped up with pillows in a throne-like chair, set before a grate of glowing coals in the drawing-room, when Isabella Goldwin came to her one night to keep her company.

Mrs. Calliport's pink face was less pink than usual, and wore a decided look of worry as it apparently emerged from a heap of shawls, and her hazel eyes were restless, and went constantly wandering to a square marble clock which stood on the mantelshelf almost immediately opposite to her. Mrs. Goldwin was as bright as a skylark, her accents clear and loud, with rapid utterance, as she gave forth a stream of gossip to cheer the invalid; and Mrs. Calliport was made to understand all about the latest style in bonnets, the latest fad of society, the last fashionable novel, the new fittings of Mrs. Geebung's drawing-room, the private theatricals of Mrs. Somebodyelse, the dress of this one, the manner of that one. She was not disposed to exercise her lungs in a similar way, so had nothing to do but listen, and was content in that she was not called upon to talk, and could cast furtive glances at the clock, which was just about to strike nine. Mrs. Goldwin, noting this anxiety about the time, at last ceased her babble to say:

'I am tiring you, perhaps.'

'No,' affirmed Mrs. Calliport, rather feebly as regards heartiness; 'but I am anxious about 'Cilla, and expect a message every moment to let me know how she is. I like to hear of her every morning as soon as possible, and every night as late as possible.'

This was half the truth. She was waiting for the message, but did not think it necessary to tell her that Theo would be

the most likely messenger, and she was wishing that Mrs. Goldwin would take her departure before he should arrive.

Since that morning of her confidential chat with him, which he chose to call a sermon, he, not wishing to offend her, for reasons of his own, and not willing to give up his attentions to Mrs. Goldwin, had been doing his best to maintain peaceful relations with both women; for his aunt, he told himself, would always be a friend in need, whereas the caprice of the other lady compelled him to be less sanguine about her leniency towards him, did he once incur her displeasure. So, to propitiate the former, he never by any chance appeared before her in company with the latter. But gossip was rife, and his aunt's ears were assailed with rumours which irritated her, and it was none the less annoying to think that he would probably meet Mrs. Goldwin this very night and again become her escort to Goolgun.

While thus troubled, it occurred to her that as Theo's aunt it would not be amiss for her to throw out a few hints to this woman, just in a friendly way, to acquaint her with reports, and beg her to stop them if possible by some action of her own. And, again, she believed that Mrs. Goldwin, being young and beautiful, spoiled by adulation and wealth and a blindly indulgent husband, might really need a friendly hand held out to her in warning; and why should not her hand go forth on the mission?

She thought she might have time to say a few words before her nephew's arrival, so after that intimation relative to the expected bulletin had been given, she added:

'It would be ungrateful for me to be tired, knowing you have given up cheerful company for my sake. And why? I don't know. To tell you the truth, it never struck me that you really could consider me as a friend—in the deepest sense of the word, mind—it doesn't strike me now. You must be actuated by sympathy, for which I am bound to be grateful.'

'And why not by friendship?' asked Mrs. Goldwin, as she reddened ever so slightly, and shook out the soft folds of her skirt to settle herself more comfortably, as one who prepares to listen with interest. 'Why not for friendship? I desire to be friendly, and perhaps I am grateful, too. Through being with you I met my husband.'

'And my nephew,' thought Mrs. Calliport, with a mild cynical look which did not please Mrs. Goldwin, who was noting her features, which changed quickly, however, subsiding into their usual sweetness as she spoke in reply. 'I understand the friendship as you mean it; but I said friendship in the deepest sense of the word. I think honest friendship does not imply the blindness of love, for instance. If one whom we take a very deep interest in should err unwittingly or wilfully, we should not be true friends to look on without endeavouring to check or quietly counsel. Open rebuke is honest, and secret censure despicable. It is because I want to be a true friend I feel impelled to speak to you as I do this minute, and am anxious not to offend. May I speak?'

'To me?' asked Mrs. Goldwin, with some surprise and a little vexation, yet not without a lurking amusement, as she remembered Theo's allusions to his aunt's provoking tendencies for preaching. 'Oh, certainly; go on. I am all attention.'

She turned her face to the 'preacher,' and stared at her, not without an impertinent hostility flashing from her eyes and puckering her lips.

Mrs. Calliport was twisting nervously the fringe of her shawl, and did not observe this cross-fire as she unconsciously plaited the threads and was considering her next words.

'Well, I don't feel able to talk much, and am not going to preamble. You think, perhaps, because I go out so seldom, and see so few, that I hear nothing of what is going on around me. I assure you I hear a great deal more than is pleasant—much that is painful. I hear your name coupled as it should not be with my nephew's, and you may not be aware of it; therefore, as a friend, I advise you to be more cautious.'

'Yes!'

Mrs. Goldwin elevated her eyebrows as if surprised.

'Yes,' continued Mrs. Calliport; 'and you are young, and may not be aware, either, that a married woman cannot encourage the constant attention of one man more than another—excepting the one who has a right to be her favoured attendant—without exciting comment.'

'It is very good of you to put me on my guard,' said Mrs. Goldwin, with a little mock humility; 'but perhaps *you* are not

aware that you are alluding to a crowd that will stretch its neck and cackle like a flock of geese without a notion of what it is cackling about.'

'I don't know anything of the sort. I do know that smoke indicates a fire.'

'And some fires are not only harmless, but wholesome,' laughed Mrs. Goldwin unpleasantly. 'Hearth fires as per sample;' she nodded her head towards the blazing coals. 'You see, it keeps the chilly air at bay for you to-night.'

'And fire burns more often than not, remember, if you play with it carelessly—if one is imprudent enough to forget its power for mischief and ruin,' came the quick retort.

Mrs. Calliport looked her visitor full in the face now, and did not relish the cool resistance she saw boldly written there, to tell her that the desired guiding hand was being rudely thrust away, that the silly frivolous creature would not be persuaded to stop digging a pit wherein to sink her own reputation.

'Well, don't alarm yourself,' replied Mrs. Goldwin. 'If I choose to warm myself at a fire, I'll not burn my hands; and I don't see why your nephew and I should forego the delight of each other's society to stop the cackling, especially when my husband thinks quite as much of him as I do.'

Mrs. Calliport was not so ready to believe this latter assertion, but she only remarked:

'Delights should not include defiance of public opinion.'

'Our delight *does*, then.'

Mrs. Goldwin here made no attempt to disguise her real feeling beneath a mask of chilly meekness. She bridled up, her eyes began to gleam, her delicate nostrils to dilate, her fingers to interlace.

'Do you consider it prudent,' asked Mrs. Calliport—'we won't even add kind—for him to be ever at your house when his sweet young wife is lying sick to death, as I hear he is when chance offers, instead of being at her bedside?'

Again her eyes sought the dial of the clock, and then moved back to her companion's face, where the lids almost curtained the eyes as they were lowered, seemingly examining the rings on her fingers.

'If he could do his "sweet young wife" any good,' came the answer, given in low but emphatic tones, without any raising of

the wide, ivory-tinted lids, 'by gluing himself to her bedside and weeping and wailing, it would be more than unkind—it would be sinful; but as it is, it would be sinful for him not to make the best of his life if he can, and go where he can find consolation and some happiness.'

This reasoning was peculiar, and was not acceptable to Mrs. Calliport, who began to look upon Mrs. Goldwin as upon a handsome untrained colt planting his legs as stiff as iron rails on the ground, and refusing to budge an inch, even with the slashing of the whip at his back, and the frantic 'Get up!' roared in his ear.

'Your sophistry would be amusing were it not so painful,' replied Mrs. Calliport. 'It is not only since his wife's illness that he has sought "consolation and happiness" elsewhere; it has always been the same, almost from the time your husband appointed him his manager.'

'Well, and if your nephew is not happy in his married life, what has that to do with me?'

This with a toss of her head upward, and a glare at her hostess, whom she was inwardly condemning as an officious and disagreeable advocate for propriety. It had more to do with her than Mrs. Calliport could possibly suppose, so she only said:

'He has no right whatever to be unhappy with such a wife as he has, and you know it.'

'You are mistaken: I don't know it. She is too good for him; he has said so himself. It is an unfortunate thing when a man finds he is mated to an angel, and not a woman—a woman whose ideas will not be entirely built upon his, whose opinion will clash with his at times to give the companionship a piquancy, and save it from dull uniformity. It would be better for Mrs. Lockstud never to rise from her bed. She is not meant for this wicked world, and would be better out of it.'

'Are you serious?' asked Mrs. Calliport, with a shocked countenance.

'Perfectly.'

Mrs. Goldwin now began to study the clock also, and compare it with her own watch. She was quite cool and collected again as Mrs. Calliport, roused to indignation, said with vehemence:

'Better would it be for the world and all men did such angels fill it, instead of the worldly, frivolous creatures who are not worthy of the name of woman.'

Mrs. Goldwin calmly smiled as she immediately fitted the ugly cap to her own head, and thought it becoming.

'It will be better for the world,' went on Mrs. Calliport, 'that Priscilla should live, and become the mother of boys and girls who shall develop in the future all the virtues of the mother, without the evils of the father. He is my nephew, and dear to me, but I can't remain blind to his faults; indeed, my eyes are rudely opened to many things.'

'My enormity included,' put in Mrs. Goldwin lightly.

Mrs. Calliport gave no answer. She had failed to impress upon her guest the fear of that danger which she was courting or attracting by imprudent steps. She was somewhat offended, too, and disinclined to speak another word.

Mrs. Goldwin was likewise nettled, but it suited her to dissemble and dawdle, although she rose ostensibly to take her leave, and gathered her wraps, which she had carelessly tossed on to a chair beside her on her entrance.

'I don't like quarrelling, Mrs. Calliport,' she said; 'and for fear we might I had better go, but before I do I wish you to understand that I don't care a fig'—here she filliped a dainty thumb and finger—'for people's talk, and don't intend to let them annoy me or prevent me enjoying myself my own way. Don't let them annoy you; that's my advice. I will not wait to be called for, as intended. Perhaps you will be good enough to allow one of your servants to take me home; it is only a stone's-throw from here.'

Mrs. Calliport was too willing to comply with her request, as her hearty 'Certainly' betrayed; but the word had scarcely left her lips when the street-door bell pealed, and Mrs. Goldwin, with an assumed astonishment, exclaimed:

'Company—at this hour?'

'It is the message I am expecting.'

Mrs. Calliport feared it was Theo, but, as she could not prevent this meeting, had to make the best of it.

'I will wait and hear it, then.'

Both women, worked by different emotions, turned anxiously towards the drawing-room door as it opened and Theodore

Lockstud entered, to spread a smile of satisfaction on Mrs. Goldwin's face, not reflected by any means upon his aunt's.

The night was cold and cloudy, with drizzling rain, and Theo came in unceremoniously with his great-coat on, but unbuttoned, and flying open as the draught through the opened doors followed him into the warm room, and made Mrs. Calliport draw her shawls closer about her.

He shook hands with his aunt and his friend, and remained standing, warming his hands in his coat-pockets; but before Mrs. Calliport could ask how 'Cilla was, he turned to Mrs. Goldwin and said:

'This is really kind of you, to come and sit with aunt and cheer her up.'

They were looking at each other, and of course did not see Mrs. Calliport protest against this statement by gesture only.

'And you are very good just to turn up in time to take me home,' said Mrs. Goldwin, with her wraps over her arm, and sealskin cap in her hand ready to don, as she gave a little mischievous smile. 'I believe I have tired out your poor aunt, and will be more than good to take myself away. Please take me away.'

She set the cap jauntily on her yellow hair, and began to enroll herself in cloak and sables.

'How is 'Cilla?' at last asked Theo's aunt, as soon as this incorrigible woman would allow her to speak.

Theo shrugged his shoulders, and replied:

'Just the same.'

'It is something to be able to say no worse,' responded Mrs. Calliport resignedly.

'That is a right way of viewing it, aunt, and that is all I have to tell; so, as you are tired, I will take Mrs. Goldwin away, with your permission, and bring, I hope, a better bulletin in the morning before I go to the office.'

Saying which, he bent down to give her a dutiful kiss, and Mrs. Goldwin, with an audacity all her own, followed his example by coolly placing her lips on the elder lady's forehead with a little speech meant to be conciliatory:

'Difference of opinion should never divide friends.'

And then, passing her arm confidingly through Lockstud's, she left the room with him, her whole attitude and bearing

declaring as plainly as words: 'For all that, I defy even you.'

Instead of ringing for her maid and retiring when they were gone, Mrs. Calliport got up from her chair and began to walk the room. It was nearly half-past nine, but the time was unheeded now, even as her physical annoyances.

She clasped her hands, and looked up to heaven, and wildly asked what was to be done. It is difficult to say how much longer she would have gone on talking and walking and praying for help, but for a second loud ringing of the street-door bell.

'Can they have returned, or is it dreadful news about that poor child?' she thought.

It was neither, but her agitation was none the less when Mr. Goldwin, having forgotten all the Chesterfield hints with which his wife had been trying to reduce his roughness of habit, having asked no questions of the servant who had admitted him, and had been passed in silence, pushed open the drawing-room door from the hall, and abruptly asked of the lady of the house:

'Where is my wife?'

Now, Mr. Goldwin was allowed to be eccentric occasionally, and was known to indulge moderately enough to steer clear of bacchanalian improprieties; but this minute he presented no Rechabite exterior to Mrs. Calliport's startled vision, for his walk was far from steady, his eyes were swollen and glazed, his general aspect was one of intoxication, and she shrank from him in alarm, as from a drunken man, and yet his breath had not the taint of the drunkard as he, standing before her, peered round the room, and asked gruffly:

'Where's my wife?'

'Gone home,' said Mrs. Calliport in fear and trembling, 'and you had better go home, too.'

'Gone home,' he echoed, and then: 'With—not by herself?'

'No; with my nephew.'

'With your nephew?' he echoed again stupidly, and next, as if he had suddenly realized the meaning of the words, he added, 'Yes, yes; I see. Good-night,' and staggered out of the room with as little regard to etiquette as he had displayed upon his entrance.

The door closed on him, to Mrs. Calliport's relief.

Once outside in the street, away from the glare of the gas-lamps, nobody could see him raise his hands to his head—seemingly on fire, and ready to part with every throb at its brain—to hold it tightly between his horny palms while he tried to think.

Mrs. Calliport's distant manner and cold looks did not affect him in the least, simply because he had not noticed either. He only sought his wife, and being told she had gone home, and with Mr. Lockstud, he intended to follow.

His faith in his friend was so strong that it grappled with the love of his wife, though he had attacked him to defend the accused and shield her from anything like calumny.

Unpalatable truths are mostly resented, yet must be accepted. Shut the door in truth's face, and probably it will creep through the keyhole and every available crevice; for had not Jerry violently slammed the door against it, and yet all the same it began to wriggle through like a reptile, to coil about his heart with the strength of a boa-constrictor?

There were two fierce currents surging within him, rushing from opposing sources, to embrace in mad fight, to seethe and roar in hot antagonism—worship of wife and faith in friend.

The latter urged him to watch for himself; it had mesmerized him against his will, had forced an imaginary disc before his mental sight.

Staring at it, he saw his Belle changing rapidly before him, till her fair head was likened unto that of a Medusa. Every bright hair was writhing and twisting, and then by swift and magical evolution became a living snake, while he, looking on, was turning to stone; and there were niches in his memory towards which every snake of that terrible head darted a forked and hissing tongue, while on each of the foremost tongues he saw inscribed as in flame a letter, and he, unlike Belshazzar, called for no interpreter, for the letters stood arrayed before him in order and blazing with fury, for him to spell distinctly the word RETRIBUTION.

Washington Larry had much to answer for. Goldwin had reverenced his wife as a woman, had worshipped her as the mother of his son. Hitherto her caprice had amused, her vivacity charmed, her loveliness intoxicated him. Her youth made him as lenient and indulgent as an over-fond, unwise

father, who must see his child happy at any cost. It pleased him to see her courted and flattered, and his vanity was bloated with the thought of actual possession of such a treasury of charms—with the conviction that he could inspire love in the bosom of a sweet and lovely woman—a mere girl, revelling in her power of evoking at will admiration and approbation, as most women thus gifted do. It never struck him to doubt her professions of affection for himself; such a face, as he read it, could only index perfection of principle; such lips could never frame falsehood. For him she was veiled in sanctity—a new Mokanna—and now Larry had dared to drag the silver veil from her person and discover deformity. Was it any wonder that his hand had itched to clutch at Larry's throat? What wonder that he had behaved ungentlemanly enough to shock tranquil respectability?

So, staggering still, he bent his steps homeward, irresistibly forced to spy.

CHAPTER X.

OCULAR DEMONSTRATION AND ITS RESULT.

Isabella Goldwin and her favoured chevalier were in the Goolgun drawing-room.

They had not come home direct from Mrs. Calliport's, but had at first taken a brisk walk together through the misty, drizzling atmosphere, rather enjoying it under cover of wraps. Being a chilly night, all the doors, windows, and Venetians were closed. The door leading to the veranda before notified had stained glass framing its panels and no blinds, but there fell before it purple velvet, richly fringed curtains artistically draped, and not so closely drawn as to prevent anybody sufficiently alive with curiosity from peeping and observing through the coloured glass, though each glimpse was bound to take its hue from the tints of the vantage pane. There was a fanlight above this door, which for ventilation was but slightly opened, yet wide enough to admit passage of sound as well as of air, and through it Isabella's laugh floated to the veranda. She had thrown off her cap and cloak and sables, and was resting on

an ottoman. Lockstud sat next to her, still encased in his great-coat, with one arm thrown carelessly over the ottoman and running parallel with her shoulders, and the hand of the other warming in his pocket.

She was telling him of Aunt Jessie's preaching—how she had refuted her argument, and how she had shocked her. The recital created the laugh.

She was a perfect actress, and could imitate to the life. She made her listener laugh, too, with her momentary production of Mrs. Calliport's facial expression of horror and astonishment; nevertheless, he ventured to remonstrate on her lack of diplomacy in thus fencing with his aunt, to which she replied:

'You are afraid of her; I am not. She is one of the flock of geese. She can flap her wings and chase and pant as long as she pleases at shadows; it doesn't hurt; it amuses me. I don't want her money, but I should like you to get it. You always were shortsighted, and it isn't the first time I have had to knock a meaning into your head. It will be all the better for you if I pose as the sinner, and you as the sinned against—you the innocent fly and I the wicked spider.'

The 'innocent fly' laughed quietly, and only said:

'You are really a delightfully wicked little woman.'

'What does your good aunt think?' she asked with mock solemnity.

'If she were a man she would think you an enchantress.'

'As you do. Well, you are wrong; I am not one. If I were, I would beat back this stream of wretched gossip, and in that I am as powerless as Canute with the waves. And give you up I cannot, for we are spiritually mated.'

'Why do you say that now? You should have said it long ago, and would not.'

'Why were you not a millionaire? Why is poverty hateful to me? Why do I abhor stuffy rooms, and cheap dinners, and turned dresses? We should have been wretched, and love, perhaps, would have taken wings through the window.'

Lockstud did not say that so far as he was concerned it had flown already, but that it was necessary to keep on hand a cheap imitation—a false Cupid—a glitter of paste for the lost diamond, too cleverly executed for her detection, because policy directed him to keep up the illusion.

'You were too hasty, too impatient,' he reminded her.

'And so were you,' she retorted, 'to avenge me.'

'Not to avenge you,' he amended; 'to console myself.'

'With a saint who has disappointed you.'

'You were over-hasty,' he repeated, ignoring this latter remark. 'Millionaires are not made in a day; yours was not. I might be one before I'm an old man, if I have the turning of Aunt Jessie's money.'

'Asthmatic constitutions are tough. She may outlive you and me.'

'All the more reason for giving in to her now.'

'What, by keeping apart or meeting as utter strangers?'

'By seeming to agree with her.'

'Come, I don't like that; I am better than you, after all, and will not act more than compelled to. It is a relief to speak out fearlessly sometimes. Why not let her know that we are dear to each other—are affinities, determined to join hands over the bridge which Fate has erected to divide us, and not be wholly parted to satisfy sober conventionality?'

'You are not such a wicked woman, then.'

'Perhaps I am, for if you wavered in your affection, if I thought you really cared for your saint, I would—I think I would—kill you. Lunacy is not responsible for desperate deeds.'

'You know I am your slave.'

This was in a sense quite true. He bowed as he said it, and lifted her hand to his lips.

She looked at him tenderly, with her face turned to the stained-glass door.

'And that you will not desert me to stop the croaking of the ravens overhead and behind our backs,' she added.

Their voices were not loud enough to reach the veranda in words, but fell there in low humming tones, while a pair of eyes, bloodshot and eager, were glued at a blood-red pane and saw from whence the humming proceeded, saw the whole scene within. To a disordered mind it presented a picture worthy of Doré—an infernal fiery region, crimsoned from ceiling to carpet, with two demons laving in a Plutonic, unconsuming fire, yelling and mocking at their victim, who was breathlessly, insanely watching.

'And now'—the female demon's lips were moving in rapid

speech—'I will tell Jeffrey you saw me home, and that you hurried away to your wife. He will think the better of you, of course, for that. He will be here presently, for I told him not to call for me, and that I would be back by ten. You see, I asked after your poor wife at your house this afternoon, and being apprised of your dutiful attentions to your aunt night and morning, I determined to be dutiful, too; *ergo*, I gave up a party for her sake to-night, and got my reward. We have had one of our long talks unwatched, I hope.'

'Now to be cut short'—the second demon pulled at its moustache and showed its teeth—'in order to get a pat on the back from your husband, I suppose.'

'To be continued in our next.' The first demon threw back its head and laughed discordantly.

Then they rose together from the ottoman, and the first demon said:

'Let us say good-night here, and James shall show you out in real conventional, not-to-be-talked-at style. Good-night.'

Both demons now held each other's hands, and next their faces met, and the whole room became a vast moving sea of blood, tempest-tossed, and a low groan of anguish escaped from the victim simultaneously with the sound of a distant bell to summon the footman.

'James, show Mr. Lockstud to the door, and when your master returns tell him he will find me in my boudoir.'

So spake Mrs. Goldwin.

James's master, as it seemed, did not return to Goolgun that night, but was admitted early the next morning, long before the breakfast-hour, when Mrs. Goldwin was still sleeping serenely, her lord's absence not having alarmed her sufficiently to spoil a night's rest. The footman, who had opened the door to his master, came to much the same conclusion as Mrs. Calliport had concerning him the night previous, but made no sign outwardly until in the kitchen, where his comments were received and discussed according to the manner of scandal 'below-stairs.'

Jeremiah Goldwin looked as if he had been in the thick of the drizzling rain of the night. His hair was damp—even clotted here and there with hardened mud-splashes: his hat was battered and soiled, his boots and clothes streaked and

bespattered with mud, and there was a wound on his right hand.

He made no remark to the man, but with a dogged, sullen look walked by him to make way to his own room and satisfy his servant that he not only had been conspicuous in a drunken fight, but was ashamed of it. The room he sought was office, library, and smoking-apartment combined. Arriving there, he kicked the door, shut, and then locked it.

When Mrs. Goldwin heard later on where he was, she, naturally surprised at the unusual occurrence of his absence from home all night, went to seek him.

She found the door secured, and with a Mother Eve impulse she stooped to peer through the keyhole. His back was turned to her, but she could see him sitting at his escritoire and writing, his body bent well forward, his head bowed.

She lifted herself up, and knocked thrice before eliciting any answer.

'Who's there?'

The words were choked as if breathed through suffocating lungs.

'It is I, Jeffrey; open the door.'

'Let me be!' came the second reply, likewise choked.

She thought he must be suffering from a severe cold, and that she had misunderstood him.

What could a churlish 'Let me be' mean?

She waited a second in expectation of his advance to open the door at her bidding, but no such obedience was rendered. It was a remarkable contrast to his former behaviour, all homage and devotion to her wishes, and it made her draw herself up proudly like an offended queen.

'He will wait a long time before I ask for admission again,' she thought, with wounded vanity. And yet she had to ask, and be refused, too, a second time, much sooner than she expected.

Her husband continued undisturbed at his writing, which he kept at till mid-day, never asking for food to be brought to him, never seeking it. At twelve o'clock he rang his bell, and James answered it.

'Where is Mrs. Goldwin?' he asked.

'I don't know, sir; perhaps she is in her room. Shall I ask?'

'No; don't disturb her, and fetch me a cab.'

He spoke gently, but his outward appearance was unchanged—unwashed, unshaven, unkempt, and mud-stained. He was perfectly unconscious of this.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' the man ventured to say, 'but your clothes want a brush, sir.'

'Do they? Well, brush me.'

'And get you some lunch, sir?'

'Lunch!' Jerry asked in surprise, as if a ridiculous question had been put to him. 'I'm not hungry.'

James retired, to return with a clothes-brush and touch his master up a bit to look respectable, and then proceeded to secure a cab, and in it our millionaire left Goolgun never to return.

He drove to his lawyer's office, and was closeted with him for more than an hour.

When he stood up to leave, his burly frame suddenly bent, and then measured itself on the floor. He fell in a swoon.

A dash of water at his head, a drop of spirit at his throat, revived him, and he opened his eyes to see the lawyer bending over him anxiously.

'What has happened?' he inquired, looking about him dazed and giddy.

'Lost your equilibrium, that's all,' replied the lawyer lightly, to relieve his client of any anxiety.

'That's all!' echoed Jerry, trying to rise, and forgetting the lawyer's presence. 'I wish it was more; I wish it was de—— No, I don't; I've got to see Wash—poor old Wash!—and make it up. I've got to nurse my little fellow. My business is done here.' Then he roused himself with a shake, and added: 'I'm dreaming, I think. Don't mind what I've been saying.' His senses were strong and keen again as he got to his feet with help, and said 'Thank you, Tackerline.'

'You have a heavy cold, Mr. Goldwin,' said Mr. Tackerline; 'you ought to go home and nurse it. And what's the matter with your right hand?'

'A cat's scratch,' said Goldwin, making light of the wound, which was more than a scratch now, and adding quickly: 'I'll go now; the cab is waiting.'

Mr. Tackerline, afraid to let him walk alone, took him by the arm, and conducted him safely to the cab.

'Drive to Goolgun—quick!' he ordered the cabman.

'No,' cried Jerry from within—'no; not there. Tell him'—he hesitated, tried to think, and then, as if pleased with some idea working in his mind: 'tell him—Bachelor's Nest, M—— Road, Virginia Bay.'

The cab drove off.

Later on that day word came to Mrs. Goldwin that her husband was lying ill at his friend's house—his old quarters—and could not be moved.

The carriage was ordered at once, and she was driven to Bachelor's Nest for speed's sake, not for distance, which was slight.

Washington Larry confronted her at the entrance.

'I have come to see my husband,' she began.

'Sorry to disappoint a friend,' said Larry. 'You mustn't see him.'

He did not look at her, but over her bonnet, as if at something behind it, and his attitude indicated that disposition towards her which is known as 'crowing.' There was triumph in his face.

'But I say I *will* see him. Are you his doctor?'

She made an effort to cross the threshold, and he put out his arms straight on both sides of the doorway, and said:

'And I say you shan't. This is my house, and he is in my care, and I ain't going to have him worrited.'

She would have killed him with a look, as she gazed at him scornfully from head to foot, from his narrow shrivelled parchment face, with its wild growth of hair and beard, down to his feet, which were cased in Chinamen's slippers—the better for quiet attendance in the sick-room—and up to his head again.

'If I were a man,' she exclaimed, 'I would horsewhip you into good manners! Are you aware, sir, that you are insulting a lady in your own house—the house you owe to my husband—that you are outraging the law of hospitality?'

'I don't want you to learn me what's right and what's wrong. There's crimes a lot bigger than turning you away from my door. You'd better go home and find 'em out, for I ain't going to tell you. But I'll tell you this much: Your husband don't want to see you, so don't trouble to call again. He's willing to keep quiet, but he won't if you worry him with a sight of you this minute. Perhaps you understand now why I "outrage the laws of hospitality," as you call 'em, and will go away.'

Mrs. Goldwin quivered with more than passion, for, with the winding up of this speech, he brought down his arms to his sides, and turned from her to get back to Jerry, knowing quite well that she would make no attempt to pass the open door after what he had said. And he was right; she did not.

She was driven rapidly home, and began to feel that, in warming her hands too closely or carelessly at the fire, which Mrs. Calliport had warned her against, she had in reality burned her fingers to the bone, and she suffered in suspense.

There was no need to doubt that her husband had discovered her more than friendship for the man he had so willingly assisted at her instigation.

She was not in love with her husband, but she had grace enough to feel grateful to him, and to respect all that was good in him, and there was much.

She was in love with his adoration of, and liberality towards, herself. For him to turn from her in anger or disgust was what she had hitherto cleverly avoided by treating her former lover in his presence with the mere cordiality of friendship; and in her dependence upon his belief in the loyalty professed, she walked safely until the croak of the ravens she had despised had sounded a knell in his ears.

Who was the raven at fault now? she thought. Intuition pointed at once to his bosom friend, for he would have believed none else against her.

She began to regret that she had not kept up the farce of her affability with him from the day of their meeting at City Park, to regret her evident carelessness, to wonder what was going to happen next, and to tremble at the prospect of meeting her husband's wrath when he should be better, for she feared him in his anger. She sat back well in her carriage, upright and haughty, but sickening with fear and anticipation.

Washington Larry was not alarmed about Jerry at the outset of his illness; on the contrary, he was jubilant. He looked

upon his return to Bachelor's Nest as an excellent omen. Probably he would part from his wife now, since he had acknowledged that his friend's penetration was not wrong, and had come there to get away from her, and be nursed by him. Washington believed Jerry to be a giant in his strength, despite advancing years, able to surmount ordinary ailments, and crush them, with his Herculean vigour, as pigmies. He had come to him ill and haggard-looking, weak for want of food, bent with misery, and with incipient bronchitis, owing to exposure, creeping to his lungs.

'Give us a bed here, Wash?' he asked as he entered the house, to cheer at once Larry's drooping spirits. 'I've seen enough. You're right. Don't bother me with questions. Let us have the old times over again, and give me my old bed; I'm in for a cold.' He dropped on to the sofa in an exhausted condition, putting his hand in his breast-pocket, to draw from it an official envelope filled to repletion with pages of writing—his work of that morning—and said: 'Put this by, old chap, till I ask you for it.'

Larry took it at once in custody, noting that it was addressed 'To my son Roland Kovodel Goldwin,' and looked at Jerry curiously.

''Tis all right,' said Jerry, in answer to the look. 'You keep it by you, I tell you, until I ask for it.'

He did not say what was uppermost in his mind—that he would never ask for it—nor did he tell Larry how he had spied through the blood-red pane on his own veranda; how the demons had danced in his brain, and yelled and mocked at him; how he had cursed under his breath, and groaned aloud; how he had rushed away to the flight of stone steps leading to the lawn; how, blind and reeling, he had fallen headlong from top to bottom, striking his wounded hand on the stone in an effort to save his fall; how he had managed to rise, bruised and shaken, to totter away, and again fall headlong at the fountain basin, to lie there he knew not how long, not caring to rise, and but dimly conscious.

The raindrops, pattering on his face and bared head, had served to revive him, while the chilled damp air filled his lungs. Half witted, he had almost revelled in the wet, grassy, baneful couch, and cursed at the daylight as the morning sun peered

through a thin, watery cloud to shine in his eyes, and somewhat restore him to a sense of his surroundings, and let loose the bitter truth from its torpor chain—to compel him to at once put his house in order.

He never told this to his friend, or a soul beside. He went to his bed, and lay down, determined never to rise, and protesting against medical advice, physic, and visits from curious friends.

His chest was clogged, his cough hacking, his hand, poisoned with the scratch of the cat—the evil augmented by the blow on the stone steps—was swollen and inflamed; but he would have no unguent, nothing but a cold-water bandage to allay its heat.

If Larry attempted to insist upon going for a doctor, he swore, and lashed into violence that could only be subdued by obedience to his wishes. He had his little son brought to him some time every day to gather him in his arms, and mutter, 'Why born?' He would gaze wistfully into the baby face, and scarcely see him for tears. Once he hugged him so closely that the child screamed aloud, and could not be pacified for quite an hour by Mrs. Dripper, who waited without.

Through Mrs. Dripper it became known that Mr. Goldwin was ill—too ill to be removed to his own residence. It likewise got abroad that nobody was allowed to see him, that his wife, weakened from over-anxiety, could not go to him; yet nobody believed his illness to be serious, because of his robust constitution, not even Larry, until the last few days of his life, when, to the horror and torture of this untiring, devoted nurse, delirium took possession of his brain, and convulsions of his body with relentless strength. Then Larry at all risks flew like a madman for doctors, and cried like a woman at their just rebuke for calling them when the mischief was irreparable, when bronchitis was choking the patient through the unpardonable delay, and tetanus—the result of the scratch and subsequent wound—held him in its vile grip and wrung his big frame with contortion and twist.

There came calls and knocks and messages by the score to Bachelor's Nest. 'How is he now?' was the constant query. Servants from Goolgun, with awed tones and long faces, came to and fro, and lastly Mrs. Goldwin herself.

Larry did not attempt to interfere with her this time. His triumph was transient, giving way to contrition.

Like Christian with the burden upon his back, he was overweighted with misery and remorse, and bowed down, knowing what mischief his too ready tongue had worked; for his more than brother was hastened to his end through him.

If he heard, he never heeded, and Mrs. Goldwin entered unannounced, unimpeded, as he crouched in silent mourning at the foot of the dying man's bed.

Too full of agitation, she passed him without a single glance, to stand at the bedside, heavily veiled, and gaze on the wreck of a vigorous life that, like a sturdy ship sailing confidingly on lake-like seas and beneath clear skies, was now splitting on a treacherous reef.

Not she the reef, she thought, but another, the tale-bearer. Upon his soul should the burden of the sin be laid. She had but favoured one man's society more than another's, but anglers for scandal had caught a herring and blown it into a whale to shock her husband and crush his wife. So she meditated; yet stirred by some compunction for her pretence towards him in return for all he gave, she lifted her veil to set an atoning kiss upon his forehead—the first voluntarily given—by way of expiation for her incapacity for wifely devotion.

With the raising of this gauzy curtain, meant to hide her supposed weeping eyes from the vulgar crowd, she saw more clearly, and the kiss was deferred, for she shuddered at the havoc presented in the drawn features, set jaws, sunken sockets, and hollow cheeks.

She shrank from touching him with her lips as he lay there unconscious, after a cruel spasm. She had never seen death, never felt it on the wing; but she felt it now like a piercing wind that precedes the blast, and it made her heart stand still and her limbs tremble with dread, as if she herself stood in an open grave with loathsome things crawling about her limbs.

The philosopher hath truly said, 'Men fear death as children fear the dark.'

They know not what shadow lurks behind it, and quake at fear-begotten phantoms while crying for light.

Controlling repulsion in a desperate effort for self-satisfaction's sake to make some amends, she bent over the prostrate, helpless

figure, and laid what she thought a peace-offering on her husband's brow with a quick, sharp movement, and then dropped her veil and made a rapid exit from the room, where Death grinned at her from every corner, to hurry home to Goolgun, knowing not that her offence would materially affect her future, and agitated with more than the prospect of mere widowhood.

So Jeremiah Goldwin died after a ten days' illness—died in the arms of the friend who had risked life for him, and had now hurried him into eternity.

Mrs. Goldwin awoke the morning after her visit to learn that the days of Lucky Jerry and his wife's spurious love were no more; that December had left May to a natural season of summer; that she was the millionaire's widow!

CHAPTER XI.

THE WILL TRAPS THE WIDOW AND WRECKS HER SATELLITE.

THE city of Phillipia was startled and disconcerted over the death of one of its wealthiest, ay, one of its best men. Nobody had expected such a crisis until the fiat of the doctors had gone forth, 'No hope,' and then all who knew Jeremiah Goldwin in his hardihood found it difficult to realize that he was suddenly mowed down like this by the all-conquering scythe, to be gathered to his fathers before the infirmities of age had claimed him, or warned of approaching dissolution. But it was true, and Phillipia was excited, though the excitement was but an exaggerated form of the ripple that follows the dropping of a stone in the pool: the spot pierced and instantaneously closed; a wrinkled circle on the surface of the water, widening quickly; and then subsidence into the original condition, untroubled and glassy.

Following the report of Jeremiah Goldwin's death there arose a hum of voices on all sides; in the drawing-room, in the kitchen, at the bar, in the club, in the restaurant, in the tavern,

in the street, the quiver of sensational emotion ran and eddied and whirlpooled.

There appeared in the dailies and weeklies of the press lengthy paragraphs, each giving an interesting synopsis of the career of the millionaire, extolling his merits, and winding up with a pathetic touch upon the affliction of the fair young widow.

After the funeral the great crowd of followers returned to home or occupation, and the bubble and babble ceased, for all things were as they had been, and the grave had closed over what remained of Jeremiah Goldwin—the stone had been cast into the pool. A few outsiders of the inquisitive kind pricked up their ears to catch rumours of the will; but their curiosity was not so soon to be gratified, as the reading was delayed to give time for one individual interested to be present. This was one Captain Timothy Pennacove, an old friend of the deceased, to whom Jerry had considered himself indebted for certain invaluable services rendered in his early manhood, and who, at his desire, had resigned his sea-life in order to settle down for the rest of his days as an overseer of one of his stations of North Flindersland.

Accordingly, he was telegraphed for, and came as quickly as it was possible for steam to carry him. He was a hale, hearty, corpulent, tall, elderly man, with a wreath of scanty snow-white hair and brows to match, but so thick and bushy as to give one the impression that they had originally been intended for moustaches and had mistaken their locality. His face was ruddy and cleanly shaven, with a pair of strong, keen blue eyes, capable of much gentleness of expression, in seeming contradiction to the fierce brows overhanging them.

His arrival was the signal for the assembly of but four people in that very room at Goolgun where poor Jerry had been occupied last in his own house, writing page after page to be given into Washington Larry's care.

All present were alike impressed with the importance and solemnity of the occasion, but each soul was stirred differently.

The lawyer, John Tackerline, for instance, was dreading to begin, yet impatient to be done with the roll of parchment lying on the table before him, for he knew its contents, of course, and chafed at them.

When Mr. Goldwin had instructed him to draw out a fresh

will, that morning of the swoon, he had obeyed, and taken a rough draft of conditions, without comment upon their injustice, because he believed his client to be suffering under a transient vindictive disposition, provoked, no doubt, by some peccadillo of his gay young wife, who was already exciting public opinion against herself. But she was a beautiful woman, young and brilliant, with charms and graces not to be confined in a harem, and he argued that it was but natural she should be enticing, and her husband jealous, but it was also natural that in his calmer moments he should forgive and make allowance for youth.

John Tackerline, therefore, looked upon this new will as so much waste-paper when he carried it to Goldwin's bedside a day or so after the interview; and when, duly signed and attested, he predicted, 'I shall be asking you to sign another will before another month goes over our heads,' he fully believed what he said.

So it may be understood that, knowing what he knew, John Tackerline felt nervous and flurried as he set his gold pince-nez, and coughed and fussed and fidgeted with his handkerchief.

Captain Pennacove—a man of reverence for woman—was not thinking of the will, but of the widow, and the good husband she must be mourning. He, a stranger, had heard naught of her but through her husband, who had filled his letters to him with her praises.

His blue eyes were dimmed, and his ruddy countenance sorrow-stricken, for he bewailed the loss of his friend, and was full of earnest sympathy for the lovely creature left behind so early widowed.

Washington Larry sat in his usual fashion, sideways, on his chair, his arms on the back of it, and his head down on them. He sat in a far-off corner, almost unnoticed, with his heart like lead with the weight of its pain and remorse.

Mrs. Goldwin took her seat by an open window which overlooked the harbour; she turned her eyes to the great cliffs beyond, but with no sense alive that minute but hearing. The window might just as well have been a blank wall as she stared vacantly at it. Her profile alone could be seen by the two men present, in whom she aroused a pitying interest. Her golden crown of hair was capped with heavy crape and widow's

weeds, her figure was draped in crape from throat to waist, from waist to hem, and her face, whiter by contrast with her mourning attire, had no chastened sorrow, but suspense and eager attention, as the lawyer prepared to unroll the parchment sheets, spread them out, coughed again, wiped his lips with his handkerchief, drew his chair well under him, looked towards the window, next at the men, and again at the window, before he proceeded to read aloud the last wishes of his late client.

The will itself, as may be supposed, dealing as it did with a vast property and creating a variety of trusts, was a voluminous document and occupied a considerable time in the mere reading. And when Mr. Tackerline had finished this arduous task, having explained, where required, the passages obscure or confused to the lay minds of the interested listeners, the purport of the testator's wishes might be summed up as follows:

He appointed John Tackerline (solicitor, practising in the city of Phillipia) and Timothy Pennacove (late commander of the ship *Gitano*, sailing between England and the colonies), his executors and the guardians of his son Roland Kovodel Goldwin, unto whom the bulk of all properties left by him, the testator, should revert, together with the land leases of Virginia Bay, and for whom the sum of £2,000 annually, should be held in trust by the executors for maintenance, education, and general requirements during minority.

The will further directed that the business known as Goldwin and Company should be thenceforth conducted under the management of Timothy Pennacove, and that the late manager, Theodore Lockstud, should have no place or position in the business whatever.

To Isabella Goldwin there was a bequest of Goolgun, with plate, pictures, etc., together with an annual income of £1,000, subject to the condition that, should she take a second husband, the bequest should be made null and void.

At the reading of this portion of the will the widow shifted her head, that her face might be hidden, as a wave of rebellious blood made it scarlet, and indignation darted in flashes from her eyes. Her husband had avenged himself, and it was hers now to suffer humiliation and outrage. With an effort she listened to what followed, as John Tackerline read with a singsong drawl:

'Unto Timothy Pennacove I give, devise, and bequeath an annuity of £1,000 (one thousand pounds), and unto Washington Larry an annuity of £500 (five hundred pounds), together with the property known as Bachelor's Nest.'

Washington never lifted his head, but there was a quivering of the narrow bowed shoulders, which told he had heard. Captain Pennacove gave a little convulsive start and a stare, but relapsed into a calm and listening attitude; while Mrs. Goldwin, having controlled her features to suit the *rôle* of sad resignation, now turned her back upon the window, and a full face to the lawyer, who felt himself getting red and hot under the strain of his present office of imparting to her the peculiarities of her husband's will. But, like Balaam, he could only speak the words that were put into his mouth, and was compelled to risk the displeasure of a Balak in petticoats.

So he continued giving out a string of bequests to various benevolent societies and charitable institutions with which his late client had identified himself, and unto which his will promised a liberal scattering of his thousands. Then followed the mention of a legacy to each of the servants to the amount of fifty pounds, next, £100 to Mrs. Dripper, and amongst others, to Cecil Lockstud, the foster-brother of Roland, £500, to be placed at interest for him until of age, or in the event of his death to revert to the general fund.

At this stage of the reading, John Tackerline was obliged to pause, beginning to fidget more than ever and irritate with his nervousness, as he continued to read a remarkable proviso, that should Roland die in his minority and in the absence of next of kin, the whole estate, together with the property known as Goolgun, with plate, pictures, etc., and the annuity of £1,000, bequeathed to Isabella Goldwin, should be given over to Timothy Pennacove and Washington Larry, for one-third to be distributed equally to the charitable institutions he had enumerated previously, and two thirds to be divided equally between Timothy Pennacove and Washington Larry, after the disposal of the business of Goldwin and Company, and the realizing of the estate, from which should be given £100 annually to Isabella Goldwin for life.

Tackerline read it all through from Alpha to Omega with careful enunciation of legal phraseology, and religious dwelling

on all its repetitions—which have been spared the reader—doing the work he was called upon to do with an unerring preciseness.

Winding up with the names of witnesses, the day of month and time of year, he ceased, but remained with his head still bent over the will, under pretence of quietly studying it, as he turned the pages, but in reality afraid to meet the eyes of Mrs. Goldwin, fearful of adding to her confusion.

She had risen from her chair, however, as he gave out its concluding clause. She was perfectly colourless, even to her lips; her face was contracted, as if with pain; her eyes shot forth a gleam not unlike a cat's at the approach of a strange cur; and while one hand pressed the chair-back for support, and the other held an inch-wide black-bordered handkerchief, she spoke with a tremble of that wrath which would not be quite subjected to her will, and was the more violent because of forced suppression. Yet was her tone subdued:

'Gentlemen, with your permission I will retire.'

The lawyer immediately raised his head and bowed to her politely; but the Captain was on his feet in a second, and, hurrying over to the lady, offered his arm to escort her to the door.

All his chivalry was to the fore in the cause of afflicted Beauty; all his indignation was aroused by the churlish conditions stamped indelibly on those parchment sheets; and his manner indicated commiseration and profound respect as she accepted his proffered help, and moved away to hurry to the solitude she desired.

The bluff Captain returned to the room, and walked up to the lawyer, who was tying up his papers and preparing to leave.

'Can you explain this, sir?' he demanded, bunching his white brows severely, and pointing to the will, now rolled up.

Tackerline shrugged his shoulders and shot out his lips before he answered:

'Not to my satisfaction any more than yours. It is queer.'

'It is infamous!' roared the Captain.

Both men were oblivious in that moment of Larry, who retained his original position, whose shoulders had not lost their suspicious trembling.

'It strikes me,' continued Captain Pennacove, 'that the

compass was all wrong that landed you into this business. There never lived a more just, generous, whole-souled fellow than old Jerry. There was nothing paltry about him, nor was he capable of doing a petty thing, and this'—he brought down an open hand and struck at the will as it lay on the table—'is a mean thing—a libel on the man's nature—and ought to be disputed. Why hamper his widow with such restrictions, a mere girl, who naturally may desire to marry again? It beats me hollow, and I wish he had forgotten me. And if the boy dies, she is to come to Larry and me for a miserable pittance. By ——, I won't do it, that's flat; she shall have my share. I'll will all mine back to her as sure as my name is Timothy Pennacove.'

The lawyer now stood up, and, being relieved of his task as well as the widow's presence, was more at ease, and as calm as the Captain was furious. He put his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, and in answer to this tirade merely ejaculated:

'Most extraordinary!'

'Extraordinary, sir; it's downright madness!'

'Not altogether without method, perhaps,' hinted Tackerline. 'My client, Captain, was a man never to do things by halves; but he made a mistake in marrying one so young. Young people like the society of young people, and they say a great deal of Mrs. Goldwin that may be untrue. Goldwin was desperately in earnest about that will, I know, suffering from a paroxysm of jealousy, no doubt, and was determined to prevent his heir running the risk of would-be step-fathers with spendthrift tendencies, yet I really think but for his unfortunate and comparatively sudden death he would have had it altered.'

'And I say neither of you know what you're talking about—neither of you,' affirmed a sepulchral voice from a corner of the room.

The lawyer and the Captain were thus reminded of Washington Larry's proximity.

Larry lifted himself at last wearily from his chair, and walked over to join the men who had been discussing and disparaging Jerry's disposition towards his wife. His sallow face was lined and seamed with grief that refused to be comforted, with remorse that would not be banished.

His eyes were almost lost in dark-circled sockets, as he faced

the self-appointed judges of his beloved friend. His aspect invited sympathy at once, and as the Captain knew how dear the departed had been to him, pity transiently banished all thought of the injustice of the will, and made him lay a broad hand gently on Larry's shoulder, and say, 'Cheer up, cheer up!' for the sake of expressing condolence, and because he could not find anything else to say just then befitting the occasion.

Larry jerked the kindly hand away with a twist of his body, and was not consoled. He had not come there for pity, but to defend Jerry's memory.

'You know nothing,' he began, 'neither of you. I do know something, and wish I didn't. Don't you be blaming him—don't blame the dead. He wasn't mad—he wasn't jealous; he was floored—he was taken in by as big a witch as was ever burnt alive for doing mischief. We can't set fire to her, so it is only what's right for her to get a prick or two if she don't behave herself in the future. He could have left her without a farthing, because he knew at the last that she married him only for his money; and he, as innocent as a baby, thought it was for the love of him, until somebody that stood by saw her taking all he gave with her left hand, while she gave her right hand to a fellow who wasn't fit to tie Jerry's shoes. Somebody, I say, knew all about it, and thought it right to let her husband know, and when he knew, it just floored him—that's the hard part, it floored him—and he couldn't lift his head. She's lucky to get what she does from him, and if she marries again, it is certain to be a love-match on both sides; and if the boy dies, why she'll be well off on her hundred a year. Don't you blame Jerry; blame her, blame me—the man that would ha' died for him, and is left behind to feed on his riches, and wish to be dead, too, and out of a misery so hard to bear.' He dropped his chin on his breast, and repeating, 'So hard to bear! so hard to bear!' he quitted the room hurriedly.

So the millionaire's will was read; so the public were satisfied with an outline, and left ignorant of conditions; so the surface from which Jerry had passed relapsed to its original tranquillity until some fresh matter might be ready to shoot into the stream.

The germs of future disturbance, however, for the few who

may be called the Atlas of this history, were already in the air.

When Jeremiah Goldwin was dead and buried, Mrs. Lockstud was brought back to the world and all its cares—perfectly helpless, and still confined to her bed, but strong enough to cry out for her child. Here arose a new difficulty, for it was understood that the little Cecil was pining away.

Mrs. Goldwin had taken it upon herself to call in a specialist—not her own doctor, but one devoted to the physical study of children. Since the reading of the will she spent much of her time in the nursery. It was she who tended the little patient—she who presented him to the doctor for examination; moreover, she was moved to tears, and strangely agitated when the doctor shook his head, and said: 'The boy will die.'

She blamed Mrs. Dripper; firstly, for working upon her sympathy; secondly, for taking upon herself the care of two foster children when it was evident one child was as much as she could honestly attend to.

It was after the doctor's visit that she apprised the Lockstuds of the boy's serious condition.

Mrs. Calliport and Mrs. Glade were also indignant with Mrs. Dripper and the greed which had urged her to undertake a double duty so ill-performed, and all concerned thought that the sick child should be brought home and attended to under stricter supervision without further imposing upon Mrs. Goldwin, whose conduct towards the tiny sufferer was accounted—by Mrs. Glade and Mrs. Calliport—exemplary enough to partly wipe off old aversion. Priscilla took the puling baby in her arms as she lay on her bed, and, crying over it, felt that it would be wrested from them before it could lift its eyes to hers in sweet recognition.

Lockstud's position at this time was not an enviable one. With an unforeseen force of legal strength, he had been sent adrift—politely dismissed—from a lucrative position, while Mrs. Goldwin, unable to help him, had been trapped like a beautiful bird in a cage, the delicate network of which he and she had certainly fashioned.

Yet for the present she was amply provided for; while he, having revelled in the sun of her husband's wealth, was now

exposed to all the rude winds of chilly poverty, and worse than poverty—debt. He was a man inclined to luxurious tastes and costly habits, and scattered his money lavishly from his hand, careless of a threatening shallow purse. Now his hand was empty, and the safe pleasure he had been experiencing for some time of dipping in the Goldwin coffers for his remuneration to swell that purse to comfortable proportions was a thing of the past. His wife, too, remained sickly, and fretted over the dying child, so that he was wearied with his troubles, and one in particular, which even when others were removed made pure joys an utter impossibility, filled his home with shadows and changed the spring of his life to autumn.

Aunt Jessie drew some comfort from his misfortunes; she recognised a blessing in disguise when he, pushed to extremities, appealed to her for help, and told her how he was situated.

'Understand,' she said, after some discussion, 'why I live and save, and have saved. Give me credit for making your interests mine—for some forethought. If I were as you, with more of the spendthrift and less of the miser in me, I could not aid you to-day. You would have squandered as fast as I gave, and I should now be unable to assist you. Rest your mind, dear; your debts shall be paid, but you must go into a less pretentious house, live quietly, give up old habits, and stay at home with your wife when work outside is done. No doubt the bank will take you back, if I use my influence again as I did before, and I don't know what else you can turn to. Yes, I'll pay your debts to a farthing, and never see you want; but —one rumour of old shortcomings, and I will have no more to do with you. Be a man worthy of the gentle mother who gave you to me, and all mine shall be yours some day, or it shall go to found or enrich some charity as the surest way to invest it for the general good and ensure against its waste. I will not leave it to be fooled away.'

Thus Aunt Jessie, whose threat, like a whip held menacingly over a wilful boy's head to extort a promise of amendment, made her nephew bend to necessity's rod and assume a virtue which could never honestly be his. This assumption sat ill upon him like a badly-fitting garment, and together with that shadow, indefinable to others, begat gloom, ill-temper, and

morosity, sullen brethren indeed and fierce opponents to conjugal felicity, even as the months wore on, and Priscilla was comforted for the loss of her first-born by the birth of a second child.

As for Mrs. Goldwin, she was wise enough to make the best of her trap, and devoted herself assiduously to the care of the embryo millionaire.

Mrs. Calliport was appeased.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER TWENTY YEARS.

It was a wide-spreading garden, brilliant with flowers, redolent with mingled fragrance, and clad in verdure. It was a solemn dedication to the dead, where the cypress thrived and swayed its dark-green, delicate branches, where the winds rustled through the trees, and, sighing softly, sang a requiem of their own over all that remained of perishable humanity—over its last worldly home, where Nature free and joyous burst through the consecrated earth to blossom there and beautify it, to soothe the heart and exalt the soul of those who trod it so reverently, or wept for what it covered.

Let the stone slabs or costly monuments—'the splendour of woe which the children of vanity rear'—the polished marbles and mottled granite fashioned by art, find voice for the imaginative and impressionable, and cry, 'Behold us, a band of grim finger-posts: we point to cold mortality; for here lie your dead, and here shall you in your turn also lie! And the warm blood shall not creep, and the oppression that contact with death so often creates, shall vanish beneath the

benign influence of the smiling garden of roses and lilies—sweet prototype of immortality—whispering, 'Seeds but sown to rise again and bloom in God's-acre unknown.'

'With thy rude ploughshare Death turns up the sod,
And spreads the furrow for the seed we sow;
This is the field and acre of our God,
This is the place where human harvests grow.'

This was Gobong, one of the cemeteries of Phillipia, and connected by rail with the city.

It lay basking under cloudless skies one sunny afternoon, with scarcely a footfall to crunch its gravel paths or awaken it from drowsy tranquillity, until the arrival of the necropolis train.

But it was speeding onward now—could be seen from the distance like a mechanical toy, with its column of smoke and line of rushing carriages. Presently space was lessened; the toy-like aspect was lost, the snort of the iron horse—'the steam beast,' as a writer aptly calls it—became louder and louder, the rumble strengthened, the ground trembled as motor and train darted and flashed on their way to finally slacken pace and glide into the Gobong station.

Out from the carriages there flocked men, women, and children, severally dispersing over the wide corner 'city of the dead,' to visit the graves of relatives and friends.

Three young people separated from the crowd and walked abreast—a youth and two pretty girls. The former was a tall, well-built, gentlemanly lad, more man than lad, and yet not quite either, with a hairless face—save for a faint sprouting of down on his upper lip—round, boyish, and smooth, with a slight irregularity of feature when animated, and honest, clear, dark eyes; with glossy nut-brown hair inclined to wave and ripple, and mouth which, regular enough in repose, in speech or smile, shifted a corner with a sudden upward curve to the right cheek for the pleasant display of ivory-white and perfect teeth. His forehead was massive and marble-like, with a prominence at the temples, and a Byronic upward shoot running into the hair on one side—a phrenological promontory, be it said, of ideality—which marked him at once to the observer as one capable of lofty sentiment and poetical conception.

His companions were girls, differing from each other, but each of a distinct order of beauty.

One was tall, supple-limbed, graceful, and self-possessed; the other was short, almost of child-like stature, but perfectly symmetrical.

One was of the blonde, the other of the brunette type. One was commanding, with a countenance in which power and sweetness were so blended, that the first was toned in its strength by the second which shone and glorified; the other was less assertive, more impulsive, true in affection, clinging, loving, forgiving, and governed by immediate impressions and surroundings.

Both were charming, and each carried a lovely bouquet. They walked on silently until they reached one tombstone in particular—a handsome structure with a delicately carved urn at its summit, and a chiselled wreath twined about the stately granite column, with grasses and flowers springing at its feet, and a cypress at either side, the whole enclosed with iron palisading. It presented an inscription which began—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
JEREMIAH GOLDWIN.

Here the three stood reverently, while the lad lifted his hat and his lips moved, but gave no sound. The girls, waiting till he re-covered his head, seated themselves on the grass at the railings, and he took his place between them and a little to the rear to hold a sunshade aloft to protect them from the sun, while they commenced with quick, dexterous fingers to unfasten their bouquets and draw from one of their pockets a coil of thin wire to form into a hoop of a few feet in circumference, intended to receive the flowers, and ultimately to become an exquisite wreath. Neither of them showed tears or any emotion, excepting one of mingled piety and respect.

'This is the sixth year we have come here so, isn't it, Rol?' asked the little brunette, busy at her flowers.

'Just six years, Mid,' replied Rol.

'And how many more, I wonder?' asked the blonde.

'Don't wonder,' said Rol; 'it draws unpleasant possibilities

too near. I don't like to think that there may come a time when I shall pay this annual visit without your solace—that I shall come without either of you—without flowers, the only tribute I can offer to my father's memory as yet. I like to see you working them up as you both do. No other hands shall ever do the same for me, and mine are clumsy. Without you, I should yearn more than ever for the home affection which is never mine, and for the father whom I have never seen.'

'How is it we strive or pine for what can never be ours?' asked the blonde again.

'The fruitless striving, Una, compels us to recognise our utter dependence on a Higher Will.' This from Rol.

'Yes,' responded the blonde; 'knowing that, I still envy the girls who have sweet mothers.'

'And,' put in Mid, whose baptismal name was Jessie, but whom these two friends had long since christened Midget, 'I—having a father—wish I could love him, Rol, as you could love yours, were he here; but—— Who's that?' Jessie's eyes were directed to the rear of the stone, where a man suddenly appeared, and was almost crouching at the rails there, evidently to escape observation, but without success, for two pairs of eyes now followed the bent of Jessie's as she halted on the point of a remark, and abruptly exclaimed, 'Who's that?'

'It is some poor fellow in trouble,' whispered the blonde.

'Let us move away from here and give him the privacy he seeks,' suggested Rol, also in an undertone.

The girls at once seconded the proposal, and gathering up the loose flowers, with the wire-hoop still awaiting decoration, and hanging over the young man's wrist, they with him walked to a chair set under a tree some distance from the grave, and, reseating themselves there, were soon at work again wreathing the damask roses, clematis, and honeysuckle with ferns and grasses and sprouting buds, picking them daintily from the sweet-smelling heap now piled in Rol's two hands, joined and basin-shaped, as he held them out and stood before his companions.

But the strange man had turned their thoughts into another channel, and interested them enough to make supposition concerning him busy, or imagination weave pathetic history.

When the wreath was completed and ready for its purpose,

when it was necessary to make no delay for fear of missing the return train to Phillipia, the stranger stood at the grave still, but with altered position.

He now faced the inscription bare-headed. His hat of soft felt lay on the grass, his lean body was bent forward, while his hands rested one over the other on a stout walking-stick, as if for support of an infirm frame.

His hair and beard were snow-white, the latter falling almost to his waist, and beginning from his cheek-bones. His attitude and bearing at that grave of all graves excited in the young man a pardonable curiosity, which he would not have so soon satisfied but for pressure of time. But compelled to intrude himself, he bade the girls remain under the tree while he went on his mission to place the wreath over the urn of his father's tombstone. He carried it carefully over his fingers, and arriving at the spot so sanctified, he, stationed at the side of the stone, the better to throw the sacred garland, with his head once more uncovered, his face upturned, bright with its play of intellect and chaste with its filial love, with the sunshine glinting on the ripples of his hair, lifted his arm, and with dexterous aim the white circle of blooming flowers fell like a necklace about the urn—a would-be crown.

'Thunder!' exclaimed the old man, who had not observed the advance of the young one, and only saw him when in the act of paying this tribute to the memory of one he still mourned. He lifted his body as straight as it could go, and made a few steps forward to confront the youth, to put a hand on each of his shoulders, and peer into the boyish smooth face.

'What's your name, youngster?' he asked.

'Roland Kovodel Goldwin,' came the reply.

'Say it again.'

'Roland Kovodel Goldwin,' repeated the youth with some amusement and one of his attractive smiles, to wave his lip upward and make his teeth gleam pleasantly.

The old man's countenance became contorted; he lifted his hands, and dropped them at his sides, walked off a few paces, and returned to renew his stare, and arouse more interest in Roland and the girls—who were distant spectators—than ever.

'Are you in trouble? Can I do anything for you?' asked Roland.

'It runs in the blood,' said the stranger mysteriously. 'That seems the very thing your father's son would say to me—"Can I do anything for you?" It was always, as far as I know, "Can I do anything for you?" with him. I wouldn't know you, youngster, for his boy: you ain't like him; but I'd know you for his boy because of them words: "Can I do anything for you?" If you're not ashamed of a rough old chap like me, shake hands—shake hands.'

The old man put out a lean, shrivelled hand, palm uppermost, and Roland's long white taper-fingered one met it heartily.

'You knew my dear father, then?' he said.

'Knew him!' Here followed a queer gurgle of a laugh, expressing amusement at such a question. 'Did you ever hear tell of them two coves they call, I think, Damson and Peaches? They come in a play somewhere, don't they?'

'Do you mean Damon and Pythias?'

'Eh, is that what you call 'em? Well, it is a long time ago since I came across 'em, and I've got a dolt of a head for names; but you know 'em, and know what I mean. Your father and me was just them two chaps, and not a bit less.'

'And what is the name of my father's close friend?' inquired Roland, with his hand firmly clasped still.

'There has been no call to speak to you of Washington Larry, eh?' was the interrogative reply.

'Washington Larry!' exclaimed the young man. 'No call to speak of the man who saved his life! Why, I know you well, and thought never to see you, and show you that I am grateful, too!'

The tears sprang to Larry's eyes, and, while his hand, firmly grasping at Roland's, began to work up and down as if at a pump-handle, he said with some huskiness of speech:

'Lord! to think I should live to see this day, after all, to see the little baby growed to a man—the little chap that poor old Jerry nigh hugged to death, and cried tears of blood over!'

'You have been a long time over in Flindersland,' said Roland, anxious to divert thoughts which were evidently painful. 'Captain Pennacove will be as delighted to see you as I am.'

'Ay! I've a great liking for the Captain; but it's not to see him I'm here. I had a hankering to see Jerry's grave and

Jerry's boy, and I've just run down for a few months and a spell to see you come into your own, and then run off again. And now to think we should meet here, on the very spot!'

'It is the anniversary of his death,' reminded Roland.

'Don't I know it? I reckoned for it to be when I left. Did your mother speak of me?'

He let go the young man's hand now, and rested on his stick, as he put this question, rather dubiously.

'She may have done so, but it is from Captain Pennacove I have heard of you, and through him that I seem to know you thoroughly.'

This was a pious equivocation on Roland's part, for he had no recollection of the name of Washington Larry ever passing his mother's lips, so he added quickly:

'Come and be introduced to his niece and another young lady; they are waiting for me to join them, and we shall have to hurry to catch the train. Come.'

'Girls!' said Larry, with a grimace at the word, as if it had produced a bad taste in his mouth. He had an aversion to women in general, and avoided them, and he was thinking of the yellow-haired witch he had reason to remember. 'Girls!'

'Come,' repeated Roland, as he made a step forward, and, stooping, lifted the felt hat from the grass, and placed it on Larry's head, to be rewarded with a grateful look and a 'Thank you,' as well as immediate concession to his wish.

'Mother alive?' queried the old man, as he walked towards the young ladies reluctantly, but unable to refuse Jerry's boy anything.

'Yes.'

'Still got yaller hair?'

'Oh yes! She looks girlish even now sometimes.'

'Hum!' mumbled Larry; 'it ought to have turned like mine, I should think.'

Roland heard the muttering, but not the words. In his haste he took rapid strides, with which the old man kept pace at his side, and, reaching the ladies, he cried:

'Una, Mid! this is my father's dearest, best, most loyal friend, Mr. Larry. Mr. Larry, this'—pointing to the blonde—'is Miss Una Pennacove, and this'—pointing to the brunette—'is Miss Jessie Lockstud.'

Una and Jessie bowed, and Larry did the same rather awkwardly, and was about to say something polite or flattering to the Captain's niece, when the name of Lockstud momentarily chased all power of speech from his tongue, and made him positively frown at the guileless little creature who happened to own it.

'There goes the whistle!' Roland called out excitedly. 'We shall miss the train if we don't hurry.'

The necessary call for speed prevented further parley or comment, and the four hastened to the station, to find they had time to stand on the platform in waiting for a few minutes.

Larry drew Roland on one side, and asked:

'Who is that?'

'Roland following the direction of Larry's nod, replied:

'Miss Lockstud.'

'I've got a sieve of a memory for names, but that one don't slip through—it's got too much hanging on to it; I ain't likely to forget it. Got any relations?'

'Plenty,' laughed Roland. 'Parents, sisters, and brothers.'

'What's her father?'

'Manager of the Civic Bank.'

'Called what?'

'Theodore Lockstud.'

'Ah!' The monosyllable was a groan. 'Let's talk of something else.'

'Ogre!' cried Jessie to Una, resenting Larry's manner, as they stood apart.

'Eccentric, dear,' corrected Una. 'Uncle tells me that Mr. Goldwin's death nearly drove him man They were so dear to each other. A man capable of such love, Mid, cannot be an ogre.'

'I'm on for the smoking carriage, youngster,' said Larry, with a hand affectionately pressing Roland's arm, 'but we'll meet again. I'm put up at the Virginia Arms; come and see me.'

'I'll come to-night,' responded Roland impulsively. 'I want you to tell me all about my father.'

'You're a brick!' exclaimed Larry with earnestness, as he hurried away to his desired smoke, without any further recognition of the young ladies or saying good-bye.

'He is not a model of politeness, your friend,' remarked Una

Pennacove, when she, with Roland and Jessie opposite, was seated in the cariage and was steaming back to Phillipia.

'An ogre,' reasserted Jessie, disinclined to give up the word. 'He glared at me as if he would send fire out of his eyes to burn me upon the spot, and I had actually been pitying him.'

Roland looked vexed, and declared aggressiveness.

'You are speaking of the man who saved my father's life, who was his bosom friend,' he said, turning to Jessie.

Jessie made no reply; she coloured, and her throat swelled with the pain of restrained tears. She could not bear Roland's displeasure, and in consciousness of having offended him she could not speak, while he thought she was sulky; but he did not understand her. And next Una spoke.

'Mid does not mean what she says. We saw tears in his eyes when he parted with you, or rather we saw him wipe them away with his hand, and she is still sorry for him, thinking he has some trouble.'

'You are right, Una. The poor old fellow was too much moved to remember conventionality. He is still mourning my father's death, and if he is rough and unpolished and uncultured, what matter? He is honest and faithful now, as he was when he stood by his friend and got a broken arm for his sake. Phillipia was hateful to him after that friend's death, and so he rushed from it to take your uncle's place on the station, and now after twenty years he has returned to visit the grave on the anniversary of my dear father's death, as we have done to-day, and to remain in Phillipia till I come of age. I think we ought to make him a guest of Goolgun.'

'And if not of Goolgun he shall come to Unaville,' said Una, who had her doubts as to the welcome such a man as Mr. Larry would receive from Mrs. Goldwin. 'You know our house, which is called Unaville in my honour, was once 'Bachelor's Nest,' and his home and your father's a long time ago, before we were born.'

Roland understood the gist of her promise; he knew why she had said, 'If not of Goolgun he shall come to Unaville,' and he thanked her; while Jessie, clasping her little gloved hands in her lap, had turned her face to the window and still maintained silence: she also knew why Una had so spoken. A proposition to give bed and board to Jeremiah Goldwin's

friend beneath his widow's roof was not one likely to find favour with that widow for many reasons unknown to her son. He was thoroughly ignorant of all that had gone before, but not of her disposition to domineer and control.

He was not so careless of her rule as might be expected from an only child, who is sometimes converted into an insufferable nuisance through over-indulgence and the weak government of misguided love.

Roland Goldwin had never been spoiled by silly clemency or superabundance of affection or adulation. His natural sweetness of disposition and loving characteristics had craved for a reciprocal rush of tenderness from the beautiful woman he called 'mother.'

Mrs. Dripper—who was a fixture at Goolgun still, and had been from the time she began to administer to his wants—was softer, kinder, more gentle in every way towards him.

She had taught him his alphabet and nursery rhymes, and told him blood-curdling tales of ghost or goblin, and milder ones of fairy, mermaid, and giant; while his mother, indifferent to the pleasure of unfolding the infantile mind, had strict regard for his healthy physical development. She commenced to superintend his diet as soon as he could suck a crust or enjoy broth. She never allowed him out of her sight, in dread of those comestibles so dear to the juvenile palate being offered to him. She studied medical books on infancy and childhood, and adopted all their rules. If an epidemic broke out in suburb or city, she was off to some distant colony with him and Mrs. Dripper.

Of course a few who knew her well smiled meaningly, and said it was only natural after all, considering how much depended upon his life; for the peculiarities of her husband's will were not unknown to them.

This close, anxious watching continued from his infancy to boyhood and up to the present time, and made the victim wish his mother less solicitous about his health and more for his general happiness; for he did not know until recent years what possibilities she feared, and why, while she encouraged him in athletic sports and gymnastic exercises, she forbade him so indulging in summer months to insure against wet flannels and consequent chills, which he would have braved with the incautiousness of robust youth which knows not what it is to suffer, and laughs at risks.

Neither could he know why she was cold and austere. She was a puzzle to him, and with her oppressive rigid rule it occurred to him that he was worse off than the Czar, with his mother's ever-watchful eyes as zealous as the body-guard on the alert to detect lurking bullet, blade, or dynamite.

He had never entered a school for fear of 'pestilence stalking in darkness' within its walls. His education had been conducted by tutors, and for companionship he had to thank the children of Theodore Lockstud, at whose house Mrs. Goldwin's wishes in regard to his food were respected. He grew and thrived amidst Priscilla's boys and girls as one of her own, and he was fond of all in the house excepting its master, of whom he, like his little companions, was somewhat afraid. They never laughed aloud, or played, or shouted, when he was by.

There are certain people the influence of whose nature acts like an unwholesome cell, where God's free air cannot enter, and where, as dictated by natural laws, a light must expire. The light died out of the children when the father's presence clouded the atmosphere they breathed. Roland felt something of the heavy air too, but loved to be of his household, nevertheless. Fortunately for him he could revel in a sunshine, more often than not, which was denied to him at Goolgun. When Una Pennacove, a tall angular girl of eleven years, became an orphan and shared her uncle's home as his adopted daughter, he found in her an affinity of soul still more precious to brighten his boyhood.

Priscilla Lockstud loved him from his baby-toddling days. Was he not the foster-brother of her first-born? She laughed at his jokes, and cried over his disappointments, and eulogized each kindly sentiment and chivalrous action emanating from him. To her and the Pennacoves he perhaps owed at the present day much that was excellent in his character.

He was now a student of the Phillipia University, and aspiring to his degree of B.A. So was his friend Una, and very often they conned from the one book; but he was addicted to over-application in his anxiety for success, and in this matter again the maternal guardianship sometimes arose to irritate him.

If in the afternoon he worked too long, he was told to close his book and go for a walk. If in the night absorbed in some particular study beneath the midnight gas, to his discomfiture his mother's voice came through the keyhole of the door like a curfew-bell, 'Turn off the gas,' and darkness would fall upon him.

In one way she never interfered, and therein lay a very happy side to his existence. He had a handsome allowance to do with as he pleased, without stint, comment, or question; for was there not a glorious milch cow, as it seemed, at John Tackerline's office, from which he could draw a copious draught now and again, destined to quench the desires of others as well as his own?

It was an advantage of which he was duly conscious, and for which he was sincerely grateful, because a flow of generosity always his never knew a check to its practical exercise.

Perhaps there is more to be said of the text, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' than has been written. It is mostly accepted in a celestial sense; the action of giving is to be set down to our credit in the great Book, and create expectancy only of future reward in the dim hereafter. Is there not an immediate compensation? Active benevolence keeps itself warm, every gift kindles a glow at its heart. It pours forth from its horn of plenty, and exults and trembles with a sweet self-gratulation. It is a higher law of selfishness perhaps—a fruit-laden tree on earth, yet of seed divine, and with fragrance reaching heaven:

> 'Grasp the whole world of reason, Life and Sense,
> In one close system of Benevolence:
> Happier as kinder, in whate'er degree,
> And height of Bliss, but height of Charity.'

Roland, who knew he was heir to immense wealth, and was already planning what he should do with it to make some portion of the world happier when he should be its custodian, felt himself approaching the 'height of Bliss.' He looked forward eagerly to being his own master, to escaping for a time from Goolgun and the restrictions enforced by one to whom obedience was due. He wished to give her affection, but was repulsed. They never seemed to understand each other.

Mrs. Goldwin had asserted in her early widowhood her determination to dedicate her future to her son. She did not swerve from her intention, apparently, for she continued to live a retired, quiet life, almost equal to that of Mrs. Calliport—never entertaining on the previous elaborate scale. 'When her son came of age,' she said aloud, as if to defend this line of action, 'it would be another thing, of course; she would have done her duty, and he could keep a Liberty Hall, and be as hospitable as he chose.' With her it was very different, she told herself. Certain investments could not have been made out of clippings from her annuity had she been improvident. As it was, those investments had been conducted by the manager of the Civic Bank, Mr. Theodore Lockstud.

That gentleman was now propriety personified. His wife, since Jeremiah Goldwin's death, had found no reason to complain of his over-due attention to Mrs. Goldwin. He suddenly became conscious of moral obligations, and paid no allegiance to anybody but his aunt, Mrs. Calliport, still living, but of ripe age enough to give him confident expectation of soon obtaining that substantial acknowledgment which his unimpeachable conduct certainly merited from her. He had gone back to the bank (out of which Mrs. Goldwin had once lifted him), at his aunt's wish, and had gradually risen to his present position. He knew now that she had a heavy fixed deposit at the Civic, that she had various properties besides in England, with accumulated rents well invested there.

All this promised to be a salve for his sorrow at her death-bed, when it should come, and so with her golden bit in his jaws, and silver reins about his neck, he was driven in a straight course, and if the bit hurt his mouth he bore it unflinchingly.

It was scarcely likely that under these altered habits the old whisperings of busy scandal would be remembered, excepting by those who could not forget. Exemplary behaviour on both sides had effaced the stain.

Theodore Lockstud did not want for friends; he had a fine house at the present time, with wide-open doors for hospitable purposes. Morose and stern as a rule in the bosom of his family, but cordial and free-handed with strangers or intimates

with whom it suited him to appear at his best, he was just as sociable as Mrs. Goldwin was the reverse.

Roland objected to her seclusion and exclusion, but had no authoritative voice in the matter, and if he now contemplated asking her to make Washington Larry her guest, he believed the fact of his friendship for her husband would compel her to make an exception in his case, and that she would not only accede to the request as a duty, but as a pleasure.

But when he thanked Una for saying his father's friend should be welcomed to Unaville if not to Goolgun, he knew she was prepared for his mother's opposition, yet he was not.

'How,' he argued mentally, 'could she be otherwise than gracious to one whom he considered they both should honour?'

He led the way to the subject that same night over the dinner-table.

CHAPTER II.

ROLAND BREAKS HIS PROMISE.

Mrs. Goldwin and her son sat down to partake of their dinner, which was as strictly ceremonious and gloomy as that particular meal generally was at Goolgun. The large dining-room with its heavy oak furniture and sombre-curtained windows; the long dining-table with its service set for two only, requiring but one-fourth of its length; and the lad in buttons flitting about it and passing them dishes within easy reach of their own hands, made dining cumbersome for Roland always, but this night more so than ever, as he waited impatiently for dessert, knowing that attendance would be no longer necessary for that course, and he would be able to speak without reserve of Washington Larry, in the confident hope that his mother would surely coincide with his views on this subject if not on any other, and consent to receive Larry as a guest.

Mrs. Goldwin's additional years had not passed over her head without a rough sweep at her beauty. Hair and complexion retained their loveliness; form and gait were still graceful and girlish, as her son had affirmed to Larry; but there were curious little lines which were incipient wrinkles under the eyes, and deep indents from nostril to lip-corners, and about the contour of the chin, which had not been so decidedly asserted until latter years; and the lips were paler and drawn, while the eyes, less lustrous, wore an everlasting expression of anxiety. In truth, it was a sour, unhappy countenance, and the beautiful Isabella Goldwin was spoken of as something that had been, but was not. Quite unwittingly she led the way, as soon as they were alone, to the proposition which was tingling on Roland's tongue.

'You went out early this afternoon,' she began, while in the act of paring a peach.

'Yes—to Gobong,' he replied. 'If you call to mind the date, you will know why.'

She did call to mind the date, but only in that moment. Not wishing to confess as much, she said:

'I am aware of the date, even if I do not choose to commemorate it in the way you do, and take a pleasant railway drive to a suburb with two chattering girls; for, of course, you went in the train as usual with Una and Jessie, and enjoyed the little trip, I dare say.'

'You would not have accompanied me if I had asked you, for you always have refused, though you should be my companion there. I thought it useless to ask you to day,' Roland answered, not pleased with her reference to the 'chattering girls.'

'You are quite right, so it would have been. You and I look at these matters under different lights; but you are allowed to please yourself, and that should content you. For my part, I can't understand what good such visits can do to the dead or to the living. The dead are dead. What do they know of the people who stare at or cry over their tombstones, do you think? But the living are alive to the horrors the sight of such a crowd of stones must inflict. You may like it if only to pose for sympathy, and upon my word'—here one of her thin derisive laughs irritated Roland's ears—'you are a pretty subject for pity when one comes to reflect—you, the heir of a millionaire, and so painfully overburdened with expectations!'

Roland toyed with some loose grapes on his plate, and evinced no desire to laugh with her.

'You misunderstand: the heir does not call for pity, the fatherless lad does. I crave to know the father of whom all who knew him speak so highly to this day. Surely he must have deserved the praise and esteem he won. You can't understand how sweet a pleasure it would be for me to have him with us, that I might make his honourable age as perfectly happy as is possible in this world. Money can't buy him back to life. Money can't reconstruct a nature, else I would forfeit much of my coming wealth to alter yours and attune it to mine. I pray daily, as I pray yearly at his grave, that I may be able to emulate his virtues; and I appeal for guidance in my future stewardship of that wealth which his ability and hard industry have gathered, which will be a burden without that aid. I want to do as he did—make people happy.' Mrs. Goldwin bit at her peach, and said nothing. Her eyes glittered according to their wont when some suppressed emotion made her heart beat a little faster; but she did not soften to this only child, who cried out with such filial passion for the father he had never known. She looked at him covertly as he, with fingers nervously rolling his grapes to and fro, continued: 'I want to make people happier and to know how best to do it. Only to-day I met one who knew father well, and said he was always trying to make him happy. Perhaps you know him, for he did father a service never to be forgotten.'

'Indeed!' she said. 'I really can't say. My husband had numerous friends — of a kind — scattered about the colonies whose names I have no particular wish to remember.'

'But this one, mother, saved his life.'

Mrs. Goldwin dropped her pearl-handled knife and fork with a clatter on the plate. Roland thought it an accident, especially as she spoke quite coolly:

'Yes? Did he tell you his name?'

'I asked it when I found he was such an old friend of my dear father. Washington Larry he proved to be.'

Mrs. Goldwin evinced no surprise at the name she had expected to hear, but she said, with a harsh tremble beyond her restraint:

'I thought he was dead and done with.'

Roland looked up from his plate and at her. There was such vindictive hate concentrated in her face and her eyes that it boded ill for the request he was working up to.

'You know him, then?' he said.

'I loathe him!' she cried, now glaring at her son. 'And I forbid you to speak of him.'

If she had thrown her half-consumed peach at his head Roland could not have been more surprised or more repelled than he was. He rose excitedly from his chair.

'Why? I have promised to meet him this night, and I thought, being who he is and what he was to my father, we owed him much—hospitality, kindness, consideration, leniency. I thought that perhaps—I thought of—that is——' He floundered painfully, and she put an end at once to his appeal on Larry's behalf.

She also stood up, and her words rang shrilly as she leaned forward with both hands pressed on the table.

'If you dare to ask him near these doors,' she all but screamed, 'you are a hypocrite with your prating about the dead coming to life that you might do honour! What shall be said of the living to whom you owe more than duty—more than gratitude—more than you will ever know? That man—gorilla, not man—is indebted to me for nothing but hate! He insulted me; he would have ruined me. If you don't know where your duty lies after hearing this much, then I say you are a hypocrite!'

'Insulted you—would have ruined you!' Roland repeated, flushed and confused, not knowing how to construe her words.

'Yes! Shall I say it again?' she asked scornfully. 'Never mind the why and wherefore; some day, when you know more of the world, I may tell you, but not now. Only heed what I tell you this day. Yes, it is true he saved Jeremiah Goldwin's life—by a fluke, no doubt—and made capital out of it. It assured him the position of an independent man for his life; *that* debt has been wiped off long ago. He had reason to love one who treated him so much better than he deserved, but he hated that one's wife; he was jealous because I took his mate from him. He was a sneaking, crawling, prying idiot, and his insult has never been repaid. Now perhaps you will tell me

where lies your duty—to the dead man or to the living woman who has done so much for you?'

She gave out all this with a wild vehemence which he had never witnessed in her before.

'Sit down and calm yourself,' he entreated, with firm but low accents, unexcited to loudness. 'There is really no occasion for this undue rage. I hope I shall always know my duty to you without compulsion from you.'

His gentleness presented such a contrast to her violence that it stirred a sense of shame within her for her exhibition of passion, and made her obey him with a strange docility when she said by way of explanation, 'His very name maddens me,' and next caught at her handkerchief convulsively, to bury her face in it and actually sob aloud.

The whole scene was painfully novel to Roland. That his mother was hot-tempered, and could say cruel, biting things when her temper was raised, he knew; but that she could be capable of such a volcanic eruption of wrath as just displayed, and which in its way fell like lava on his head, was quite a new phase of her disposition.

She was not a woman addicted to weeping over trivial matters, and, moreover, a woman's tears will upset the equanimity of any man who can boast an ounce of chivalry in his composition. Roland was rather liberally endowed with this quality, and, considering the circumstances, he had reason to be thoroughly distressed.

It was not likely that he could listen to her and remain unmoved, or feel now so strongly prejudiced in Washington's favour. It was not likely that he could give him his hand in pure friendship. His heart had gone out to the old man, white-haired and bent, whose hand had gripped his almost to pain, whose whole attitude towards him was a benediction; and there followed a revulsion of feeling. It was as if he had drunk unwittingly from a poisoned brook with waters sweet and refreshing to his palate, but now infecting his blood and making him writhe in torture. What was he to do?

It was not the age for him to rush to the offender and throw down the gauntlet at his feet, to be followed by the clashing of swords, even if Larry's hoary head did not protect him. But it was his sacred duty to champion any insulted woman, and

this woman was his mother, to whom he was not passionately attached, but who held a powerful claim on his obedience, nevertheless, because his filial instincts were strong.

'Certainly,' he said to himself; 'the greater absorbs the lesser duty. I must defend her by breaking my promise to Mr. Larry, and by avoiding the intimacy we mutually desired.'

He, still standing, moved nearer to her, and placed his hand gently on the coil of golden hair as she hid her face in her handkerchief, and said:

'Mother, enough of this; dry your eyes. I shall treat Mr. Larry as his past conduct to you deserves.'

And then he walked out of the room to his study, and wrote a note, which was soon despatched to the Virginia Arms, and over which Larry still pondered, when the writer, having regained composure, had settled to his studies.

Leaving Roland to his books, we must turn to Unaville, once Bachelor's Nest, and now tenanted by Captain Pennacove, who had changed its name on the adoption of his niece.

It was a warm night, and the windows of its drawing-room were open. They overlooked the front veranda, which receded some distance from the street, behind a neatly-kept flower-garden, diamond-bedded, and with gravelled paths. The drawing-room was the same apartment as that in which Larry had made his unhappy communication to Jeremiah Goldwin. The same, yet not the same, for its old individuality had departed. Now it was rich and soft with admirably blended colour. It was adorned with pictures, sculpture, costly ornaments and knick-knacks, valuable and quaint odds and ends of grotesque art. It was draped with curtains and garnished with flowers, and completed with a grand piano. The *tout ensemble* declared the presiding genius of a refined and cultured woman.

It was occupied by two men, who were sitting opposite to each other at a chess-table, playing chess. One was Captain Pennacove; the other was a young man of about twenty-five years, who was fond of visiting Unaville, ostensibly for a game of chess with the Captain, or to sing his songs to Miss Pennacove's accompaniments, and receive her instructions thereon, but in reality for far more cogent reasons, which shall be gathered later on.

He was at present a mere clerk in a large shipping firm, but expecting a rise in the near future. He was slim and of the average height, not brilliant in intellect, but shrewd, pleasant in converse, gentle in manner, sanguine in spirit, and not rich in good looks, but with *nez retroussé* and bright gray eyes, inclined to that expression which is so often classed as 'wicked'—wickedness accepted as palatable—giving a piquancy to what would have been otherwise a decidedly plain face. He could sing a good song, and, as Miss Pennacove was a thorough musician, and a charming singer, too, she enjoyed his visits, and founded a pleasant intimacy.

He had come this night for music, but, finding Miss Pennacove to be absent, he allowed himself to be grabbed by the Captain for a game at which the latter was an adept, and mostly won. The Captain took a delight in letting his opponent think he was well on for victory, and then pouncing on him at the last with a powerful unexpected battalion, crying, 'Checkmate!'

He was inwardly gloating now because his young would-be adversary had just made a move to his own destruction, but, confident of success, was yet awaiting the next step in the campaign by the wily general of the mimic battle with breathless impatience.

And as the Captain's right hand hovered over the board, and his white brows almost bristled with effort of thought, a man, who looked very much older than he was, opened the wicket leading to the front-garden, trod the path to the veranda-steps, mounted them, and walked to one of the open windows, there to stand and watch alternately the players, and next to inspect the room with an air of disappointment.

'Thunder!' he exclaimed, 'it ain't the same, or I am dreaming!'

'Check!' cried the Captain.

'Ah!' from the man without, 'he ain't changed — looks younger with his seventy-five years, and not a day less. Not twenty years older.'

Now, the young player, whose name was Charles Mountfu, looked annoyed, and made a vain attempt to parry the Captain's attack, which was quickly followed by a jubilant cry from the latter of 'Checkmate!'

'Beaten again, by Jove!' cried the vanquished one good-naturedly. 'Captain, you're merciless.'

'Come, I'll give you another trial,' offered the winner exultantly.

'No, thank you, I'm not on. One beating a night is enough, If you don't mind, I'll strum.'

'Strum away, then; Una can't be long now; she said she would be home early.'

Mountfu rose, and went towards the piano: but in rising he spied the man at the window, and turned to the Captain with a low-toned remark:

'I say, there's a tramp on the veranda, Captain.'

'A tramp, is it?' said the Captain, as he swept the chessmen into the drawer of the table. 'I'll have a few words with him, then.'

With the intention of making inquiry into the fellow's wants, and dismissing him from the premises, he strode hurriedly to the door between hall and veranda, just in time to admit the supposed tramp, who had his hand on the knocker ready for a rap, but dropped it quickly to his side with the sudden meeting of the unexpected door-attendant.

The hall-lamp, burning high, threw its rays on the visitor, who was not recognised by the Captain, whose greeting was not unkind, but yet was not such as anticipated.

'Hollo, my man! you've made a mistake. Go round to the back if you want a meal, and then clear out.'

He did not know the snowy-bearded man who, with bent back, rested a hand on his stick, wore loose, badly-fitting clothes, a slouched felt hat low on his forehead, and who looked as if he wanted a meal, though he had not long dined.

'Have I growed so han'some that you don't know me?' he said, looking hard at the man who had taken him for a beggar, and feeling a trifle hurt. 'I'd have spotted *you* in a crowd—for, as sure as your name is Timothy Pennacove, mine is Washington Larry.'

'Lord bless my girl!' ejaculated the Captain with a start, and then a closer inspection; 'so it is. I know your voice, but, hang me! I'd have passed you in the street.'

Their hands met in a fierce clasp, and the now beaming host drew his guest into the drawing-room, where Mountfu at the

piano was playing a dreamy waltz very pianissimo, and unconsciously gave an entrance to the two old men with slow music.

Larry, having passed the threshold, stood within the room, leaning on his stick, and cast disparaging glances about him.

'It ain't the same,' he said; 'it ain't got the old hang somehow.'

Where was the mantelpiece adorned with pipes, pouches, and cigar-ends? Where were Jerry and Cicero? The whisky-decanter, the steaming jug, the glasses, spoons, and sugar-bowl, the tobacco fumes, oh, where were they? But for the unchanged Captain he would have been as dazed as Rip van Winkle after his long sleep. The harmony of the waltz filled his ears, but not his senses; it might have been a cricket chirping on the hearth for all he heeded it.

He shook his head sadly, and, as if in a trance, allowed the Captain to lead him to a chair and lift the hat from his head —a ceremony which he had quite ignored in his bewilderment.

'When did you come down?'

Here the Captain's hearty voice made Mountfu aware that he was no longer alone. He turned on the music-stool, and understood the supposed vagabond to be a guest. Shrugging his shoulders with some amusement at his mistake, he ceased playing, but began to overhaul a heap of music idly tossed on the piano, holding himself aloof that he might not intrude upon the Captain and the new arrival. Captain Pennacove, taking his seat close by Washington, put his question, 'When did you come down?'

'This morning,' answered Larry, waking up to his surroundings. 'I wanted to surprise you—and didn't I?'

'You did. I thought you would live and die in North Flindersland.'

'Knutsford,' curtly corrected Washington.

'I mean Knutsford, only one gets so used to the old names, you see. Goldwin and Company ought not to forget, though, since Knutsford is more prosperous than old North Flindersland tied on to the South. Have you come back for good—got tired of the station?'

'No, no. I felt a longing to see the old place, and other places and old faces; but, don't you fear, I'm not going to turn you out of this. I couldn't live here again by myself. I like

the rough life best up at Washington. But I'm going to have a spell for some months till I get tired of doin' nothing.'

'And I,' said Captain Pennacove—'I am bound now to live quite a different way to the old time. I'm civilized now. I stop in Phillipia—not against my will, mind, but because I like to for somebody else's sake—not alone on account of the business.'

'Not married?' exclaimed Larry, with something like a gasp.

'Married! Once a widower always a widower with me. No; but I'm fathered—bettered—whatever you like—with Ben's girl to look after me. I thought I was going to look after her, but she looks after me instead. You remember poor Ben —he was a barrister, you know.'

'Yes; where is he?'

'In a better place than this, I hope, where he died for want of briefs, poor chap! and left destitute his only child. I made her mine, and she's never done repaying me.'

'Ay, I've seen her,' said Larry, who, until the Captain had alluded to his niece, had forgotten the existence of the beautiful girl to whom Roland had introduced him only that afternoon.

'The devil you have! and where?' blurted out Captain Pennacove at this piece of information.

'At Gobong; I was there to see Jerry's grave.'

'And how did you know her?'

'Jerry's boy—I see Jerry's boy.'

Larry's eyes brightened as he said 'Jerry's boy' with an affectionate intonation, and he was unconscious of his vague reply, only thinking of him.

'You saw Jerry's boy—Roland!'

'Yes; God bless him! he's his father's own son.'

'How did you meet, then?' cried the Captain, impatient for lucidity.

'At Jerry's grave, of course; he was throwing flowers there on his stone, and I guessed it was him and spoke to him. He showed me her and the other one.'

'Well, you've seen the best girl in the world. I've been talking to you for ten minutes and more, and have never used an oath; that's through her. I'm not half such a rollicking

chap as I was. I used to swear like a trooper, but not since she came; it wouldn't do, you know. When I feel a string of oaths coming up I ram them back again, and just let off easily a mild "Lord bless my girl!" That never frightens her, and it comes quite natural now. And she is as clever as she is good. Why, man, she's in her second year at the University, and she's going to be a bachelor of arts. What do you think of that? Think what our mothers would say if they could rise and see our girls aspiring to be bachelors, and wearing a University cap and gown!'

Larry looked just as much surprised as any long departed grandmother might could she return to the world this day to find an advance which to her would be but a deplorable retrogression of maidenly modesty.

'A what?' he cried with some emphasis, not being fully acquainted with the gradual and worthy ascent of the female mind into the realms of learning and letters.

'A bachelor of arts!' Captain Pennacove made a proud stress on the title. 'It is the aim now of a good few of our girls, and they make quite as fair shots as the lads. Roland goes up for his degree soon.'

'It's a queer thing,' remarked Larry, not taking kindly to the bold feminine march of intellect. 'Do you think it's a safe thing to let 'em get ahead of the boys? Give her a chance, and there's no knowing what a woman will do. She does a power of mischief without the learning. What do girls want with universities? There'll be no holding of 'em down at all.'

'Well'—here Captain Pennacove had to throw back his head and laugh sturdily at the other's dismal acceptance of a fact and his evil prognostication thereon—'I don't know much about other girls. I do know that my Una will never be less sweet than she is because she is clever. She'll come in after Roland, that's certain, and he is working hard.'

'Per'aps,' said Larry, with an idea brightening his sallow face, 'that's why he couldn't come to-night.'

'Come where?'

'To the Virginia Arms. He said he'd come right enough, but I got this instead.' He drew a note from his breast pocket. 'Read it.'

The Captain read the following curt lines:

'Roland Goldwin regrets not being able to keep his appointment with Mr. Washington Larry.'

'Short, not sweet, ain't it?' commented its recipient. 'And it ain't like him. Do you think, now, it's them books of his keeping him away after he promised to come?'

'Very likely, or some friend may have dropped in. He's too honest a fellow to wilfully break his word.'

'He looks it, anyhow, and I'm longing for him. He's Jerry's own boy.' Larry turned his eyes towards the piano, and, remembering what Roland had said in reference to Miss Jessie Lockstud's number of relatives, he glared at Mountfu as he had at Jessie, and added, 'Is that a Lockstud?'

'No; that's Charlie Mountfu, a friend of ours. I'll call him over.—Here, Mountfu!' he called across the room; 'this is a friend of mine; haven't seen him over twenty years, and he's bleached out of recognition.'

Mountfu at this invitation to join the Captain went over to him, and shook hands cordially with Larry.

'Happy to make the acquaintance of any friend of Captain Pennacove's,' he said, and the words had scarcely left his lips when a door opened from the room which had once been occupied by Larry, and admitted a young lady.

Larry immediately displayed a snail-like tendency, but as he could not creep bodily into a shell, he drew in his tongue and forebore responding to Mountfu's heartiness as he had been ready to do a second previous, and drew himself together as if with sudden cold, and bent forward with both hands on his stick, standing upright between his knees.

It was only Una Pennacove, whose power of shedding brightness had not yet touched him, whose womanly sweetness was yet to draw incense from a woman-hater. Science tells us that the shadow thrown upon the wall leaves its permanent trace there, to be made visible only under the requisite chemical process. An outline of our movements may be thus negatived on the very walls of our dwelling-houses, awaiting the action of the necessary agent to render it positive. But daily life holds up to us a similar lesson in simpler form. Love and duty in the home—be it palace or hut—record their story. Every deed, every word, every thought, sweetens the air, and needs

no aid from the laboratory for the revelation of distinct impressions, a centrifugal force of an inward light shooting rays on all sides. Una Pennacove always made her presence felt for good. She had been dining this night with her friend Jessie Lockstud, but had hurried home to fulfil her promise to Mountfu for a singing lesson.

She entered with her hat still on, and not so flushed or happy as usual, just to tell her uncle she had returned, and to greet Mountfu; but, seeing Roland's friend, she forgot to do both, and walked up to him at once to say, 'I did not know we were so soon to have the pleasure of welcoming you to your own house, Mr. Larry.'

Mr. Larry put his hand out to touch hers—gloved, warm, and ardent in its pressure—and looked at the carpet as he replied:

'Thank you, miss.'

'And where did you leave Roland?' she asked, determined to put him at his ease, and believing the appointment to be kept.

'On the Gobong platform.'

Larry's hands shook on his stick as he stared at it.

'Oh, I mean to-night; he was to meet you, I remember.'

'Couldn't come; sent me word.'

'Then something important must have prevented him, for his heart was set on having a long talk with you, I know.'

Larry turned to the Captain after a covert glance at his niece, and said:

'Then two of us are disappointed.'

But he looked relieved that this girl could endorse her uncle's opinion on the subject, and in the glance there dawned something akin to respect, and a sluggish admiration for one who had helped to soothe his disappointment, that one actually being a woman.'

Una looked thoughtful, and then, as if anxious to banish something unpleasant from her mind and his, persisted in standing there before him, pulling off her gloves and putting questions about the new colony of Knutsford, while he, being compelled to answer, was made to talk till use made his tongue run freer and her less formidable.

Captain Pennacove said never a word, but was gloating over her pretty talk and sweet wiles. Mountfu, on the contrary, was

fuming with impatience. Half an hour after, when she had disposed of her hat and gloves, and was about to commence the lesson, her uncle and Washington Larry being on the veranda smoking, he said to her reproachfully:

'I thought Sindbad would monopolize you all night.'

'Why Sindbad?' she asked, with her hands on the keys.

'Well, doesn't he look as if he had an old man of the sea clinging to his neck?'

'He is old and lonely, and may have troubles not to be shaken off. I wish I could relieve him.'

'Is everybody so fortunate in your wishes, I wonder?' he said, as he set a song before her, and noted that she was less lively—was even apathetic—as she allowed her hands to lie idly on the ivory notes and sighed, not wondering why Roland had broken his promise, but partly guessing. 'Have I offended you?' he was compelled to ask presently, when she made no attempt to begin his accompaniment. 'Have I vexed you?'

'No,' she replied, aroused. 'Why, do I look offended or vexed?'

'You can never look anything but what you are.'

Una turned her head impatiently after an upward questioning glance at his face.

'You vex me when you talk nonsense,' she said; 'now sing, if you please.'

So she struck the opening chords of the song.

'A pretty pair!' remarked Larry thoughtfully, as he looked towards the piano through the window from the outside.

'A pretty pair,' echoed the Captain—'where? Una and Mountfu?'

'No,' from Larry emphatically—'Roland and her.'

'Oh! is that your game?' cried Captain Pennacove, who wished for nothing better than to see his darling Roland's bride a very few years hence. 'Well, to that I say Amen!'

By which it may be perceived that the faculty of match-making and pairing may be found in gray-headed old men, and is not confined to officious matrons and anxious mothers.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. CALLIPORT IS CRUEL TO BE KIND.

'JESSIE.'

'Yes, auntie.'

'Fetch me my shawl as you come back.'

Jessie Lockstud, who was ungloving and unbonneting in a room adjoining Mrs. Calliport's bedroom, hurried from it, carrying the desired shawl to her aunt.

Mrs. Calliport, unlike Captain Pennacove, declared her years. Her pink and-white skin had lost its freshness—was faded and discoloured; her eyes, though retaining their keenness and tender depths, were sunken.

Asthma clung to her to make her breath painfully short in her old age, and whims and fancies of over twenty years ago were still in force. She had her dogs and her birds and her pensioners, and in the latter decade of her life had developed a strong faith in homœopathy versus allopathy, believing it the more efficacious in her own case, and ever ready to try its effect, or force it upon others as the one thing needful to meet and control their ailments. Her benevolent instincts made her thoughtful for everybody within her own little domain. And though she could be irritable at times, and liked to have her own way with the people about her, it did no more harm than a mild fog through which the sun pierces, for the predominant features of her character—firmness, generosity, and goodwill—ever recognised, rendered her beloved, and shed warmth. Her nephew's children loved her. Roland Goldwin and Una Pennacove loved her, and to them, as to her nephews and nieces, she was 'Aunt Jessie.'

She, in her turn was deeply attached to these young people, and was more satisfied than formerly with Lockstud, upon whom she looked as a reformed man, though certain reports of lavish hospitality and liberal expenditure in out-door pleasures reached her ears unpleasantly.

She refrained from sermonizing him now on profligacy, for more reasons than one. Having attained his present position through his own merits, he had a right to dispose of his means

as he pleased, while anything like a protest from her would have been a mere beating of her hands in the air. Nevertheless, doubts of his prudence, and a fear that he was taking paces beyond his financial strength, would arise. He was located once again in the handsome home of Virginia Bay, from which circumstances had ousted him so long ago. But now it was his own, and in deference to his wife's wishes—a concession for which she could never be sufficiently grateful—he had called it Cecillambda, that she might thus enshrine the memory of their first-born. Strange it was to her to get her will with such ease, and stranger still when he escaped from her kiss and her thanks to hide an emotion never betrayed before.

'He has changed,' said Priscilla with a sigh that was thanksgiving.

'He has changed,' said Aunt Jessie likewise, for, much to her surprise, he had exhibited one afternoon traces of a quality with which she had never credited him, and that was a disinterested friendship.

He had come to ask her help in a small thing, he said.

'May I look to you,' he began, 'to use your influence with Jessie? Will you nip something in the bud? You can. She will listen to you and abide by you for love. If I speak she may be ruled out of fear, and feel oppressed by my authority. I don't want to oppress her, and I don't want her mother to have a say in it at all, for she will do more harm than good; you know she is not always capable of guiding aright, and is as simple as Jessie herself. You can do it best. I will put it in a nutshell. Roland Goldwin has been taught to make our home his, and is fond of all our children alike; but the silly girl does not think so. She believes he loves her—not as a sister—and she is all wrong. She shows him a great deal too much attention—in fact, devotion—and I will not have it.' And here Lockstud turned so white, that Mrs. Calliport thought he must be ill, but he gave her no time to speak, as he went on, showing far more excitement than the subject seemed to warrant: 'I will not have it; it is a downright injustice to the lad, who is as soft as any girl, and easily led by the womenfolk. He is not like our Australian youth—has never mixed much with boys of his age, or with the world at all. He is not shrewd, not practical a bit; he is dreamy, romantic, pliable to a fault in some

things. He would promise to marry any woman out of sheer gratitude if he thought she loved him so that he was necessary to her happiness. If he promised Jessie now, he would keep to his word if it killed him, and I won't have him led to such a promise. He will go abroad when he comes of age, and learn life and get his judgment matured. For me to stand by now a passive witness to any such promise made by a boy in the innocence and integrity of his heart will be to court his contempt when he becomes a man and knows how his youth has been imposed upon. We will all be put down as anglers for the millionaire, as harpies binding him to a troth which had been forced upon him. If he were not what he is'—Lockstud here opened and shut his mouth in silence, as if it were dry and parched, before he finished his sentence—'I should not be so eager to protect him. He is a noble fellow, who thinks no more of Jessie than as a dear sister. I say this with certainty, and I ask if you think it is just?' His lips trembled with the earnestness of his words, and he looked at his aunt as though a full jury were concentrated in her, and a verdict affecting someone he loved was about to be spoken.

Mrs. Calliport was as much surprised at this spirited, unselfish view of Roland's future as Roland had been at his mother's extravagant hate and passion spent over the name of Washington Larry. She was inclined to be more pleased with his sense of justice and this unexpected display of loftiness in a disposition which she had patiently accepted as one of entire greed, than she was with his appeal to her for assistance.

'I think you are right,' she said, 'not to stand in the way of his future interests. Let him go abroad a free man, at all events, and if Jessie should be his own choice he will return to her of his own accord, and your conscience will be free. He can never accuse you of bait-throwing.'

'Pshaw!' cried Jessie's father, gnawing hard at his moustache. 'She will never be a fit mate for him, and you ought to hint as much to her. Roland wants the Lady Godiva kind—a woman to be a real helpmate and intelligent companion, with ideas above the ordinary woman, which Jessie has not. She will make an excellent wife, I dare say, some day, after her

mother's style, for superintending pies and puddings, washing babies and making pretty frocks. A woman of spirit, energy, and power she will never be, capable of maintaining the position and onerous duties which will fall on the millionaire's wife. He ought not to be trammelled in his affections, as he certainly will be if he once thinks Jessie cares for him more than I wish her to for her own sake. I know what is best for her future happiness, and I also know what he is capable of doing—sacrificing himself now for the pleasure of another, and to rail against himself by-and-bye, perhaps for a fool, and at us for rogues, when his views of the world shall become broader with experience. He need not look so far away, either, for such a wife as I have named. There's Una Pennacove, as grand a girl as there is going, with or without money. Any way, aunt, I shall be much obliged to you, more obliged than I can say, if you will speak to her, and knock this romantic nonsense out of her silly little head.'

'I will do as much as I can,' she promised, while she inwardly determined not to pain the girl more than she could help under the process of nipping in the bud a love which it was as natural for her to conceive for one like Roland Goldwin as it is for a flower to bloom in sunshine.

Besides, Mrs. Calliport and Mrs. Lockstud had often talked quietly together over a possible union between the two, and desired it heartily, while Jessie, who had almost grown side by side with him, believed they would go through life so, and were necessary to each other, and made no disguise of her real feeling for him before her relatives.

So Jessie walked nimbly towards Mrs. Calliport with the shawl one morning, about a week or so later on, she having been just deposited at her aunt's residence—the same as of yore—by the Lockstud brougham, which had carried off her younger sister Louisa from a short term of service or companionship to the beloved aunt, the aunt to whom Lockstud commanded every attention should be paid, because, as he impressed upon his children, her hoary head should be honoured, if even she were not dear to them by ties of blood. A sentiment praiseworthy indeed!

'Here it is, auntie,' said Jessie, winding the folds of a cream-white china crape shawl about the old lady, and beginning

to refix the pillow at her back, and make her otherwise comfortable.

'I am so glad it is my turn to come to you; I have such a lot to tell you.'

'Have you, dear? Well, sit down. You have brought your work with you, I see,' Mrs. Calliport replied, with an eye on a dainty handbag hanging over Jessie's arm.

'Yes, auntie, of course,' said the girl, as she proceeded to draw from the bag a little heap of fancy work, and next sat down on a stool almost at the hem of her aunt's dress. 'You set me the example of having busy fingers always, don't you?'

'What is it now?'

'A pair of slippers.'

'For father?'

'No; for Rol.'

Mrs. Calliport searched the pretty brown oval face, so artless and happy, bent over the canvas which was destined to become a slipper for Roland, and made no answer, because her heart failed her. This girl was her namesake, and secretly the favourite of her nephew's children, more like grandchild than great-niece, so near and dear was she with her unsophisticated, unselfish, affectionate nature. She was so chatty that she overflowed with harmless gossip, sometimes incoherent, but always pleasant, and as reliable as any gazette as she told of the guests coming to her mother's house, their ways and their looks and peculiarities.

This chatter relieved the old lady, who seldom went out now; and it made her love to have Jessie administering to her wants, always smiling and light-hearted and gentle.

It made her nervous to think she must keep her promise to her nephew, and perhaps chase the brightness from his daughter's sweet face. A ball of white Shetland wool was lying for a second unheeded in her lap, with gleaming knitting-needles like a double axis running through it. This she took up presently when she removed her eyes from Jessie's face, and her fingers—always busy, as Jessie had affirmed—fastened on the needles, and sent them flashing on their mission, dropping and picking up stitches, and dexterously laying the foundation of a warm winter petticoat for one of her infant pensioners.

She made no reference to the slippers, but said:

'So you have a lot to tell me, Jessie. Well, I'm listening; begin at the beginning.'

'It is not all pleasant, auntie.'

'No? Anything wrong at home, dear?'

'Well, not exactly; but the trouble does touch one of us.'

'Meaning Miss Jessie Lockstud?' asked Aunt Jessie, with a smile at her random guess, and not over concerned about the trouble, since Jessie was evidently not too much affected by it.

'Well, yes; meaning that very unimportant and insignificant little personage,' replied Jessie, inclined to be serio-comic.

'Well?'

'Do you know a man of the name of Larry, aunt—Washington Larry?'

'I believe I have seen or heard the name somewhere. It sounds familiar. What has he got to do with it?'

'Everything. He was a great friend—a very great friend of Roland's father, and saved his life—oh, years and years ago.'

'Ah! now you give me a landmark, my dear. I don't know him personally, but remember hearing of him, and not too favourably, through Mrs. Goldwin. He had a decided interest in her husband's estate, I know, if anything had happened to the heir; but that is pretty certain, I think to cease. I thought he was dead.'

'He is not dead. He ran off to Flindersland, Una says, when old Mr. Goldwin died, because he couldn't bear Phillipia without him; but now he has returned after more than twenty years.'

'And how does he fit in with the trouble?'

'This way, auntie. You know Una and I went with Roland as usual to Gobong the other day. Well, this Mr. Larry was at Mr. Goldwin's grave, too. Una and I thought he was going to kiss Rol when they met, he put his face so close to his; but he did not, and after that Rol introduced him to us. But he never said a word, and frowned at me horribly; and I resented it, but was sorry afterwards. I called him "an ogre," and Rol was vexed with me. He looked so hurt, auntie; and I never vexed him before, that I can remember. It was when we were coming home, and Rol was enthusiastic over the old man, and I could not be. That was the beginning of the trouble. Rol

made an appointment to meet his father's friend that night, and never kept it; that also meant trouble—for Rol this time—because his mother told him Mr. Larry had behaved badly to her a long time ago, and Rol thinks it right to take up his mother's cudgels. He never told us what she said, only that he had determined to avoid Mr. Larry, for fear he might say something he would be sorry for; and papa thinks he is quite right, and the Captain and Una think he is quite wrong, and here is the mischief of it all. Mr. Larry has been asked to stay at Unaville, and is now a guest there. So Rol won't go there, and I can't go there; and we are both shut out through that old man, who is, after all, just what I called him.'

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mrs. Calliport, 'how very uncomfortable! It would have been better if he had remained at North Flindersland with the blacks and the alligators.'

Mrs. Calliport, partly through misrepresentation, had some distorted notion that old North Flindersland was a vast forsaken country, where alligators and blacks were not probably the worst features to meet the exploit-loving salamander creatures who dared to reside there.

'I wish he had then, auntie. You see, papa sides with Rol; and not only that, forbids *us* from visiting Unaville as well. Una came home to dinner with me when we returned from Gobong, and of course we spoke of Mr. Larry over the table. Well, you know, auntie, papa is never loud in his passion; but I think he forgot himself that night, and before Una, too. He had that frown which terrifies us so when we mentioned the name of Larry—Washington Larry. He banged his fist on the table, and said to me, "He is a contemptible boor. How dare you speak to a fellow like that! If you do it again, or any of you, you shall rue it. Miss Pennacove, of course, may or may not, as she pleases." And then he remained sulky through the meal, and we were all afraid to raise our voices above a whisper. I am sure I don't want Mr. Larry; he is a horrid old man, and I dare say he did something dreadful, or else why should Roland be against him, too?'

'I don't know, dear. Mrs. Goldwin is bitter against him for some reason, and perhaps your father knows why. Roland, of course, knows a son's duty.'

Mrs. Calliport shook her head gravely over her knitting.

Her nephew had been reticent about many things, and this was evidently one of them.

'But, auntie, Roland is unhappy, though he knows his duty and does it. The Pennacoves think he is straining it, and that Mr. Larry ought not to be condemned entirely on his mother's word; but, of course, they can't tell him that. And he is miserable because he can't go to Unaville in the old free way. He told me so yesterday, and says his mind is so unsettled that he can't study; and I tried to say something wise and comforting and couldn't. Una would have known exactly what to say. He came to me miserable and went away miserable, and, of course, I was miserable, too.

Here was Aunt Jessie's opportunity to keep her promise. She caught at it desperately, and said as firmly as possible, with a hand on Jessie's head for a moment:

'You must not be too fond of him, dear.'

'Why?' Jessie flushed to the roots of her hair. 'Is it wrong to be fond of him—of Roland Goldwin?'

'That depends entirely upon circumstances.'

'Please tell me exactly what you mean.'

Jessie allowed her work to remain idly in her lap, and lifted up a questioning face to her aunt.

'Do you know that he will soon be a millionaire?'

Mrs. Calliport also neglected her work, and only looked kindly upon the upturned face.

'Yes; and hasn't he told us what he hopes to do?'

'"Us!" "told us!" He tells you all alike, then?'

'No, not all; sometimes mother, but mostly to Una and me, if it is anything he doesn't want all to know.'

'But, child, has he ever told you anything which not even Una has been told?'

'I don't think so. Jack calls Una and me the "Siamese sisters," because we are so much together and tell each other everything. I don't think Una is in ignorance of anything that he has told me.'

Aunt Jessie now caught her niece's chin between her thumb and forefinger gently to lift her face up still higher, and said:

'That is not exactly what I mean. I had better put the question straightforward to you. Has he ever asked you to be his wife?'

'That would be much the same as for me to ask you if you cared for me; and why should I ask such a useless question?' Jessie smiled; she could not understand the drift of the subject. 'I have been expecting to be his wife since I was twelve years old, and he knows it,' she added.

Her thorough trust in Roland's love was pathetic. She did not accept his warm affection as fraternal, or think his gifts and occasional caresses were bestowed upon her with the freedom and fondness of a brother—that he felt a life-long intimacy permitted a brother's privileges. But she did notice that his manner towards Una Pennacove was less pronounced in easy familiarity, though Una was a valued friend and a constant companion too. And she construed it according to her lights, but with an erring judgment.

'He knows it!' echoed Mrs. Calliport, with surprise in her tones and her countenance alike. 'You don't mean to say that *you* have told *him* you mean to marry him?'

'Oh, auntie, what an absurd thing to think of me!' Jessie tossed her chin out of her aunt's fingers a little impatiently. 'I mean, when I say that, that he *must* know I care for him before all the world. If he were a poor man to-morrow it would be all the same.'

Mrs. Calliport repressed a sigh, and her old hand went again to fondle Jessie's head and play with the nut-brown tresses in silence for a moment.

'But, my darling,' she went on presently, with nervous articulation, 'it seems to me that he shows much the same attention to your friend Una as he does to you. You can't both marry him.' This with a forced smile. 'Don't think,' she added quickly, 'that I want to drive all hope from you, but only to advise you for the best. If Una were in your place now, I would say to her, too, "You must not be too fond of Roland; and, what is more, you ought not to let him see that you are; that is the most important."'

'Why?' asked Jessie again, this time looking down into her lap, and pulling and twisting at her silks.

She put the question very softly, very humbly, with a little fear making her heart sicken—a fear that she had behaved unmaidenly in her confidence in his reciprocal feeling. It had never occurred to her before that anything could ever happen

to separate their lives. They would go on like children together hand-in-hand, she had been thinking until now. His life was as part of hers, and with the thought of making a sudden effort to do the right and hold herself more aloof, and ceasing to show him that actual devotion which her father had been quick to detect, she turned pale as she asked 'Why?'

'Because it is the man's place to begin at devotion. If he loves he will tell his love in a thousand ways, but men mostly like to begin the wooing, and are not to be taught or influenced through the premature devotion freely offered by a woman. If Rol loved you, dear, as you think, he would have told you so; but he is little more than a boy, not knowing what it means to love, perhaps. He will go abroad when of age. Let him go a free man, unfettered with promises of marriage. Let him mix with men of the world, and other women besides those within his narrow circle of friends at present. He is too ingenuous, too upright, to break his troth once given—and remember he has not given you his word; but if he thought he was so dear to you, he would give it you to spare you pain, and perhaps out of a soft gratitude for the affection you openly declare. Do you understand me now, and why I speak to you so? I would not willingly pain you.'

Jessie twisted her skeins into hopeless knots, and bowed her head to give an affirmative. She could not speak, and Mrs. Calliport's fingers, busy at the curly fibrils of the girl's hair prettily astray, trembled like her voice as she went on:

'If he comes back to you and says, "Jessie, I have seen many women, but for me you excel them all," then, dear, you are safe. It will save you future tears to learn this lesson. Wait—you and he are so young—and you will then have a test of the feeling he entertains for you, whether it be that of a fond brother or passionate lover.'

Thus Mrs. Calliport fulfilled her promise to her nephew, and as tenderly as possible operated with a thin wedge of reason, inserting it like a lever into the heart of his daughter, to produce an outlet for the surplus love stored there for Roland Goldwin, aware that by the same rule she was creating an inlet for a rush of pain as strong as the passion.

The effect was a temporary suffocation, which made Jessie put her two little hands one over the other at her throat, as

though to press back that something there which seemed to be choking her. There was a knot at Mrs. Calliport's throat, too, as she bent over Jessie, and placed both her hands on her head as if to bless.

'My child,' she said, 'I have distressed you, but don't fret. It is the dearest wish of mine that you and no other should be his choice. He will come back, perhaps, loving you as you deserve to be loved, dear, and all will be well again. I only ask you not to let him see how dear he is to you.'

Jessie let her head fall on her aunt's lap, and she managed to say:

'I will not stand in his light.'

'I know you are a dear, good girl,' said Mrs. Calliport, quivering with sympathy, for she knew now that it was not to nip a girl's romantic attachment in the bud for which she had been working, but to crush the full-blown flower of a woman's strong and deep love. She had not crushed it, however, and knew it when Jessie lifted her face colourless and sad to hers, and said:

'Auntie, whether he cares for me or not, I shall always love him. I love him now with all my heart, and soul, and might. I love him so much that I could just go away and hide myself somewhere, and try to smile too, if my hiding away would relieve him or help to make him happier. You must have a reason for thinking he does not care for me as much as I care for him.' She rested her arms on Mrs. Calliport's knees, and searched her face. 'Tell me, auntie dear,' she pleaded simply. 'Is it Una he is fondest of? You must know, or you would not be so anxious to put me right.'

'Dear child, of that I know nothing,' cried Mrs. Calliport, catching at the girl's hands to hold them within her own. 'What I do know is that you, for your own peace of mind's sake, must try not to think of him as a lover, not to show your heart unless he asks you to do so, and *not* to give up hope entirely because of what I have said.'

'Perhaps I have been silly,' murmured Jessie. 'You shall see that I can be wise. I must not stand in his light, of course; but, then, I always thought I was the light itself, and have been all wrong.'

Theodore Lockstud would have been more than satisfied to

have known how successfully his aunt had acted as his co-adjutrix, and what resolutions were arising in his daughter's breast as a result of her counsel. He did quite right to enlist his aunt in his service, and ought to have left well alone; that he did not was but another strand for the rope he was weaving for his own entanglement.

Jessie meant to be brave. She had the spirit of self-sacrifice, but lacked the necessary stamina to support it boldly and make it a concrete heroism. Built upon a warm and generous impulse to do right, it yet threatened to relax or shrink with a contrary breath.

CHAPTER IV.

JESSIE CLUTCHES AT HEROISM.

THE afternoon of the day which had suddenly turned over a new and cloudy page for Jessie, when she was half longing, half dreading, to meet Roland, scarcely knowing how to sink self and try to be somebody else altogether in his presence, Mrs. Goldwin paid one of her ceremonial visits to Mrs. Calliport.

Since Mr. Goldwin's death her attentions in this quarter were simply polite, and never self-denying, as her infatuated husband had once believed them to be, but Mrs. Calliport never.

Jessie was in the room, but sat quietly enough at a window a few feet distant, and, as it happened, that very same window through which her mother had first beheld the woman who had since influenced her life for harm and sorrow.

She was working—not at the slipper, for it had been cast aside, like the joy which had once been hers, not buried quite, but prepared for burial—and her head was bent over some elaborate embroidery which seemed to occupy all her thought; for she gave no heed to the dialogue which was being carried on by her aunt and Mrs. Goldwin, the latter having interested the former with the recital of a wonderful cure under homœo-

pathic treatment, which excited an animated discussion, and hoisted Mrs. Calliport at once to her hobby.

The conversation was not enlivening or attractive to Jessie until the name that was uppermost in her mind continually reached her ears.

'I wish, then, you could give me something for Roland,' said Mrs. Goldwin, 'since his complaint is beyond me, and all the doctors, I am sure. He made me feel utterly wretched last night, and spoiled my night's rest. He goes about the house with a long face, and doesn't eat in the usual way, and all the satisfaction I get when asking what's the matter is, "Nothing, nothing," and a look which says as plainly as possible, "Mind your own business." After the way I have devoted my life to him, I must say he is a disappointment. He certainly is peculiar and reticent when he should not be, and I have serious intentions of making him give up study for a time, and postpone going up for his exam.'

'That would be a pity, for it may not be over-study that affects him,' answered Mrs. Calliport, with a swift glance thrown towards the girl, who was listening now intently, and not working at all.

'It will make him tell me what ails him, and show me what to do; I am not going to have him ill.'

Mrs. Calliport stooped to stroke a silky poodle coiled at her feet, and lifted it to her lap to fondle there, not caring to answer this as it deserved, knowing the anxiety evinced was for Roland's mother, and not Roland.

'He may be in debt,' continued Mrs. Goldwin—'for all I know, head over heels—for he does the most quixotic things possible with his money, and finds it gone not knowing how, and is afraid to tell me. That shows what it is to let a boy have the handling of too much money. But it is not with my will.'

'You wrong him,' suddenly cried Jessie, unable to bear this erring judgment without refuting it. 'He is not in debt. He is unhappy, and I know why.'

'Oh, you know why?' Mrs. Goldwin looked towards the slender childish figure, and laughed as if amused. 'Come, this is not so bad. So you are his father confessor, eh? Well, since you do know, pray enlighten me.'

Jessie coloured, and felt not unlike a poor little mouse in the claw of a cat for sport. What little mettle she had, however, urged her to assert herself with a dignity scarcely expected from one upon whom Mrs. Goldwin looked as a decidedly insignificant girl—'a chit,' as she affirmed.

But having said so much, Jessie was bound to support her statement with proof, and therefore replied:

'He is unhappy because he can't go to Unaville, and fears he may offend the Pennacoves.'

'Can't go to Unaville?' echoed Mrs. Goldwin, 'and what hinders him? Not I, though they are no particular friends of mine, and some mothers would under those conditions.'

'He won't go there because of their guest, Mr. Larry,' spoke up Jessie in Roland's defence, 'and because he is everything a son ought to be, and is not what you say.'

Mrs. Goldwin might have laughed again at this girl's championship but for hearing Washington Larry was the guest of the Pennacoves. The sneer in her words and on her lips fell a prey at once to a stronger expression which absorbed it completely, and presented itself on her features boldly as malicious hate not unmixed with fear.

'I think some people are mad,' she exclaimed. 'Who but lunatics would ask such a man to be their guest—a gorilla, a sneaking Paul Pry of a fellow; a low, ill-bred, illiterate brute?'

'He was your guest once and your husband's friend,' calmly reminded Mrs. Calliport, who did not quite favour the vindictive attitude against Mr. Larry, or words so coarsely chosen in ungovernable aversion.

'Yes, he was; that's true,' came a quick retort; 'because Mr. Goldwin believed he owed him so much. An aboriginal might have done him a service, and I believe he would have invited him to dinner. I am a bit tired of hearing of Mr. Larry. He always was a worry, and now, instead of being dead and buried, as he ought to be, he turns up again and makes trouble.' And then Mrs. Goldwin turned sharply on Jessie, whose face was averted and at the window: 'No doubt Roland has told you that he is a martyr to a woman's whim, that I have been exacting, and all the rest of it. It seems that he can gossip enough outside to anybody, and would never tell me that the man was stopping at Unaville.'

'You are quite mistaken,' said Jessie chokingly, as she turned her face full upon Roland's mother. 'He never made a single complaint against you. He only said that Mr. Larry had behaved badly to you a long time ago, and that while it was for your son to resent it, he still felt a lingering regard for the old man who was his father's friend, and so avoided going where he should have to meet him, and perhaps say words that he might be sorry for afterwards, and that he was between two fires.'

Mrs. Goldwin was too much engrossed with the subject as it touched herself to notice the ring of passionate earnestness in Jessie's vindication, which, like a counter-irritant, took the fire out of her veins and the demon out of her face, as she said, half apologetically for her display of rancour:

'Well, if you knew what a snake in the grass that man has been you would not wonder at me hating him as I do. I never told Roland he was not to speak to him, but that I would not have him at Goolgun.'

Literally this was true, though she had meant him so to construe her words. She was so far relieved by Jessie's explanation that she turned to her a second time, but with a milder bearing, which was unobserved, for the girl's head was lowered and her eyes cast down, while Aunt Jessie was feeding the poodle with biscuits, and thinking that Mrs. Goldwin was not unlike a hedgehog, bristled all over for self-defence, ready to prick her supposed adversaries if they touched her ever so lightly. Her next sentences, however, were not so appeasing to Jessie as Jessie's had been to her.

'It pleases me,' she went on now with an easy amiability, 'that Miss Una, if she chooses, can take a lesson from him in that filial duty which is but a tribute to my discipline. I am not so exacting, and he has misunderstood me. I value his happiness too highly to let it be balked through such a slight cause, and if he can't be happy away from Una he has my permission to go to her or meet her friend—a demented old man—and be as quixotic over him as he likes. Una is not to my taste, and why he worships her as he does I don't know, but I do not interfere with his likes and dislikes.' With this she rose to take her leave, and in saying good-bye to Jessie she added: 'You look as if you were stifled, child. You should be skipping or trundling a hoop instead of being cooped up in the house.'

Jessie, who certainly looked white to the lips, was unable to answer her with a little saucy retort, such as she might have given at any other time; but when Mrs. Goldwin was in her carriage and on her way to pay a visit elsewhere, she said piteously to Aunt Jessie:

'She always treats me and speaks to me as if I were a baby.' And then, with a quick movement to avert her face from Mrs. Calliport's tender gaze, her brown eyes swam with tears, and her heart felt like a stone in her breast.

Mrs. Calliport heard a distinct sob, and knew quite well that although Mrs. Goldwin was responsible for it, it was not because she had provokingly ignored Jessie's womanhood.

'My dear, I believe she is the most disagreeable of disagreeable women, and can say the most disagreeable things,' replied Aunt Jessie. 'Don't let her annoy you.'

There was an undercurrent of infinite compassion in this latter sentence which told Jessie she was understood, and made her tears rain faster.

Half dreading, and yet desperately longing to see Roland again, she was scarcely able to analyze the wild emotion which overcame her that night when he entered her aunt's drawing-room, and through not having seen her for a couple of days, perhaps put more earnestness than usual into his fraternal kiss. It has been previously stated why he laid claim to a brother's prerogative to tease or to kiss, to scold or caress, to love and to protect.

He found her lips icy cold and unresponsive, and seeing her with a book in hand from which she had been reading aloud to Mrs. Calliport, he attributed her pallor and chill to some sensational matter drawn from it; so with a gentle force he drew the book from her hold, and said:

'I can't allow this. What love and murder trash is here to make you look and feel like a ghost?'

'Love and murder!' echoed Jessie stupidly, as he held the book at arm's-length away from her.

'My dear boy,' explained Aunt Jessie, and not without a smile, for, unlike her niece, she was not too much overwrought to grasp the humour of the moment—'my dear boy, it is

only "Ruddock's Homœopathy." What are you talking about?'

Roland threw the book on to a table and laughed. He was not looking forlorn, as Jessie had seen him last; on the contrary, there was that brightness over him flashing from eyes and lips, which was as sunshine. His speech and his movements were mercurial. He laughed heartily as the book flew from his hand, and he said lightly:

'Then she's been reading up symptoms, Aunt Jessie, a dangerous practice for laymen, and she thinks she has experienced them, and has incipient typhus or small-pox.'

'She was just reading a paragraph about chills and their remedy, that's all,' laughed the old lady.

But poor Jessie, within her own cloud of misery, was invulnerable to anything like mirth, and could have exclaimed in Hood's words:

> 'I would that I were dead now,
> Or up in my bed now,
> To cover my head now,
> And have a good cry.'

'Then what is it, Mid?' he asked, relapsing into gravity, and looking at her with gentle sympathy. 'Are you not well?'

'I don't think she is quite herself,' said Aunt Jessie quickly. 'Go to the dining-room, dear, and take a glass of wine; it will warm you.'

Jessie recognised the ruse to give her privacy for a time, and with a grateful look at her aunt hurried from the room.

Roland became restless when quite ten minutes elapsed and she had not returned; his manner was preoccupied as he listened and talked to Mrs. Calliport, and he was impelled at last to rise from his chair and say:

'Would you mind me going to the dining-room for Mid and bringing her back? I have not long to stay, and I have something to tell her that will be pleasing.'

Mrs. Calliport, who could find no rational excuse for detaining him, assented at once.

'If he loves her more than as a brother,' she reflected when she was alone, 'why, it will all come right in the end. God grant it may!'

But then how could she know that he already had a day-dream of his own, in which was reared a palatial home of no likeness to Goolgun, by whose cheery hearth he had planted a second self, a helpful mate of face and form bearing no semblance to Jessie's, and toddling, lisping children with golden hair and limpid, dark-blue eyes with deep-fringed lids, totally unlike her, but counterparts of that one whose soul was reflected on his own—that one to whom it had gone forth, drawn by that wondrous affinity which alone means the quintessence of love?

Jessie was standing at a chiffonier, one hand on a decanter, the other on a wineglass, as if she were debating on the matter of drinking the wine or not, when Roland stole up behind her and laid his hand over her eyes.

'Oh, Rol, don't!' she cried, jerking her words, and pulling down his hand, the touch of which she knew so well.

She looked so alarmed that he put his arm round her waist and said, with some compunction:

'I did not mean to startle you, Mid—only to punish you for stopping away so long. I am in a bit of a hurry, and have come to tell you something. But just swallow some wine first, if you have not already done so. You have been here long enough to have drained the decanter.'

She poured out a thimbleful and drank it. It came quite naturally to her to obey him.

'Now do you feel better?'

'Yes,' she answered feebly, thinking she had never felt so ill in her life.

'Well, sit down and listen till I unfold my plain, unvarnished tale.'

She sat down and tried to smile, because she guessed his 'something to tell' was of a pleasant nature, judging from his merry mood. Her impulse was to put her hands upon his shoulders, but she only folded them in her lap, while her eyes looked anywhere but at him, as he stood over her and prefaced his communication rather abruptly:

'Mid, my mother is caprice personified.'

Mid nodded her head in affirmation.

'Do you know what a kindness you have done for me?' he asked, and Jessie looked up with questioning eyes for a second, but did not speak.

'I received something painfully like abuse this evening, because I had offended the Pennacoves. You told her that I had done so.'

'Yes, I did—because—because——' faltered the girl.

'Never mind, Mid,' Roland interrupted. 'There is no need to defend yourself. I know all about it, and thank you with all my heart.'

Jessie raised her eyes again, but now swimming in tears.

'Don't fret for me, my dear, for out of the evil hath come a good,' he said, noting her distress, but not aware of its source. 'She reproached me for giving a handle to them to find fault with her and think her an exacting, hard-natured woman. She said she never meant me to take up the matter with Mr. Larry quite so literally. What she did mean was that she would not speak to him or have him at Goolgun, and that I had treated her shamefully in not telling her that he was a guest of the Pennacoves, and for going about the place half alive because of a voluntary exile from Unaville, for which I would have her blamed and myself lauded as a pattern of filial martyrdom.'

'Oh!' half sobbed Jessie; 'how could she—how could she?'

'She did, and you know what I have been trying to do—trying to atone to her by the faithful fulfilment of stern duty for the absence of a son's natural affection, which her manner and habit have chilled. She told me this man had insulted her. Was it not for me to treat him with indifference and avoid intercourse as I have done? But it seems as if I have been too much of a slave to this rule of duty. I have been fighting with shadows because of a woman's extravagant hate and rage, which coloured his offence so highly in my sight. I don't believe now that he is to be condemned, and it is all your doing, Middie, thanks again; and I'm going when I leave here to see Una, and tell her what a fool I have been all this time.'

'I thought she would release you,' said Jessie quietly, with her fingers still at her lap, nervously interlacing. 'She said she valued your happiness too highly to let it be balked through Mr. Larry.'

A momentary frown, almost sardonic, disfigured Roland's boyish, frank face—a passing thundercloud before the clear sky—the heaven that smiled from his eyes. Jessie, noting it, forgot her prescribed *rôle* in that second, and, starting up, put forth her hand to set its palm over his brows with her wonted freedom, as she cried:

'Don't look so, Rol! Oh, don't!'

'Look how?' he asked, catching her cold little hand in one of his own and drawing her nearer to him. 'Must I not frown where frowns are provoked?'

Irresistibly she allowed his arm to wind around her as she replied:

'You have a right to frown, surely, but don't frown that way, Rol. You looked like papa when he says cruel things sometimes—cutting things—and it hurt me to see his angry look on your face, that's all.'

'Poor little Mid! I will try not to frown so again. Do you know, when my mother said she "valued my happiness too highly" she used the wrong word? For "happiness" read "health"; for, Mid, my life is precious to her until the remnant of that part of it which the law styles "infancy" shall have expired. In a little time I shall be twenty-one, and she will have piloted me safely through the years which have secured competence to her. My life is precious for her own sake, not mine. I have learned that only lately. My death within the term of legal infancy would be comparative poverty for her. My father willed it so. Why, I do not know; but there it is, Mid, in a nutshell. The sentence has been revoked for fear it might affect my system, or lead to suicide, perhaps. Who knows? And if it had not such a ring of tragedy in it for me, I should only see the comical side and laugh. As it is, I frown—frown at the fate which forces me to condemn my own mother, excites my contempt for her.'

It was only to Jessie or Una that Roland thus aired his one great trouble—his peculiar domestic conditions. They shared his sorrows and joys, and counteracted the gloom of home. Probably their sympathy and affection stood like trusty sentinels to bar the intrusion of splenetic humours, which otherwise might have wormed themselves into a sweet nature, to lodge there permanently and warp and twist it. Only Una and Jessie knew of this crumpled leaf in his bed of roses, and how much it affected him.

'Poor old Rol!' sighed Jessie, and then a tremor ran through her slight frame; and she suddenly released herself from his hold, changing to chilliness from extreme warmth. 'Come, let us go back to aunt,' she said.

'A kiss first, Mid, to take the bitterness out of my mouth.'

Roland bent forward to suit the action to the word; but she repelled him, and stood aloof with words and manner meant to be vivacious, but a sad failure.

'Don't be silly. Let us go to aunt.'

He looked at her wonderingly, and was a little offended.

'Can all women be capricious?' he thought. 'Does it come naturally to them as they near maturity?'

They returned to Mrs. Calliport; but Roland did not stay long, being eager to meet Una; and in bidding good-bye he made no attempt to touch Jessie's lips. He was vexed and constrained, and left her with a stiff hand-shake. All so different to what it had been before, reflected poor Jessie. The boy and girl nonsense was over for him. She was not 'all in all,' and with her it was 'Love me not at all or all in all.' Had not Mrs. Goldwin said he worshipped Una?

Mrs. Calliport took her in her embrace when Roland was gone, and whispered, 'Brave little girl!'

But I am afraid Jessie was not brave by any means, for she gave way at that password to her heart, and cried bitterly in Mrs. Calliport's arms.

CHAPTER V.

THE BREACH REPAIRED.

UNA was alone; the Captain and his guest, Mr. Larry, had gone to the theatre after a vain endeavour to make her accompany them. The servants were in their own quarters at the rear, and papers and books were strewed over Miss Pennacove's table in her own little study upstairs, awaiting her to finish that writing which she had pleaded as her excuse to stay at home, but which was neglected after all.

She remained in the drawing-room where her uncle had left her, and instead of going upstairs to work, she sat down at an open window to dream.

The gas was turned to a low jet, and she, half concealed in shadow, sat with her right elbow on the window-sill, her right hand supporting her chin, tilted heavenward, as she gazed at the myriads of twinkling opal-rayed stars, and tried to study a problem which had nothing in common with her University curriculum—the problem of life itself, with its intricate network, its maze of human emotions, aspirations, doubts, fears, from which there can be no outlet till the great scythe falls to cleave a pass to the unknown life beyond.

> 'And all her thoughts as fair within her eyes,
> As bottom agates seen to wave and float
> In crystal currents of clear morning seas.'

So writes the Laureate of one of his loveliest creatures cast from fiction's mould; so let Una's eyes be accepted by the reader, with their blue of Italian skies, their limpid depths, and soul-filled purity.

There were no tears in them, yet had they belonged to one of weaker will there might have been; for Una found no solution to the problem, and pensiveness ruled her features, and those wonderful eyes were fixed in thought and shadowed, until a figure outlined in the darkness, at the wicket in front of her, called them from heaven to earth. Something familiar in the figure riveted her gaze, as she saw it pass through the wicket and quickly advance up the gravel pathway to the house. Her sadness suddenly took flight—an imp dethroned—and joy reigned in its stead.

She shifted her position at the window; next hurried to turn up the gas, and waited to hear the door-bell peal its summons to the servant in attendance. Then footsteps hurrying across the hall; the door-bolt drawn; a man's voice, and the servant's reply: 'In the drawing-room, sir.'

Mechanically, as the drawing-room door opened, she stretched out both hands and met Roland on the threshold.

'You have come to us at last!' she cried. You will say "I forgive" to a poor old man whose only sin was fidelity to your father! Oh, Rol, Rol! I have learned so much from uncle

about that fidelity; don't ask me to speak of it to you—I must not; only think kindly of Mr. Larry, and all will be as it was.'

'And I, Una—shall I stand the same with you? I, a penitent, suing your pardon and leniency?'

He kept her hands locked in his as they stood under the bright gaslight.

'Oh, yes, yes; for uncle, for Mr. Larry and me. We know you are not to blame, Rol. We have been sorry for you in your determination to do what you believed to be right. You don't believe it now, else you would not be here. Of course, you were right in your endeavour to stand up for your mother; but you have come to see that you were wrong to act so unjustly towards Mr. Larry upon an evidence not thoroughly substantiated by others as witnesses.' This was equivalent to an assertion against his mother as a full and reliable authority. Roland understood it so, and merely bowed his head. 'Rol,' continued Una, 'why will people wrangle when peace must bring heaven so near earth?'

Roland smiled.

'Your hair will turn prematurely gray,' he said, 'if you worry your brains to find an answer.'

'Come and sit down, sir,' she replied, assuming anger. 'I am not satisfied with your answer, which is no answer to my question at all.' She drew her hands from his hold and walked to her favourite seat at the window. He followed her, and sat down by her side. 'Now say something sensible, please,' she began.

'What can I say, unless to offer a truism? Earth is far from heaven, and men are not saints; though here and there, happily, wingless angels tread the earth to shed glory on mankind and give a glimpse of heaven.' Roland looked into Una's eyes, and thought he beheld that glimpse shining there on him.

'I have been at discord with myself,' he added—'have been a fool, and that's the truth. You know I have been tied to what I considered a moral chain, tied there by my own hands—have fastened myself up for fear of breaking through a principle or duty; have chafed at the chain like a prisoner manacled, until she, who compelled me to use it, snapped it all in a second, and that through Mid—our simple, loving Mid.'

'Through Mid?' cried Una, in smiling surprise.

'Yes; fancy Mid, dear little mouse, gnawing at the net—not of the lion, but of a silly individual! She had audacity enough to defend me to-day when I was attacked. You know how fond my mother is of me, how she is scared if I complain of ache or pain.' Here the frown that had alarmed Jessie darkened his face for a second again as he went on with bitter irony: 'Evidently she detected the yellow flag flying over my head, feared sickness on board the *Roland Goldwin*, and Mid up and told her where the mischief lay; so she, like a devoted mother, trembled for my health and severed the chain which bound me to an unhealthy port, and let me go free on my own route again. She said a great deal that was unjust and unkind, but that is her playful manner. I was sorely provoked, but am not now; for you are the ship's doctor, Una, the ship which is to tow her into a comfortable haven, and has towed her all through, and which, when its mission shall be fulfilled, may sink or swim for all she cares.'

Una sighed in sympathy. She knew of the intricacies of Mr. Goldwin's will, but was not aware till this minute that Roland likewise knew. Never disposed to admire or feel friendly towards Mrs. Goldwin, she was still disinclined to inveigh against her, for she was Roland's mother, and it was for her to try and establish that peace between mother and son which she loved to see dwell amongst men.

Larry, stung with disappointment at not being able to continue a friendship with Jerry's boy, so well begun, attributed it to Mrs. Goldwin's influence, and, still more embittered against her, took care to refresh his host's memory in reference to many things concerning her past, which the swift passage of years had partly obliterated, and the Captain in his turn detailed incidents in a milder way, and not with Larry's peculiar embellishments, to his niece, who found it difficult to offer, as usual when people were censorious in her presence, the kind word that might serve to recommend the imperious Mrs. Goldwin to mercy or lenity. She struggled to find it for Roland.

'Your mother's life has possibly been soured in some way,' she said to him. 'She is a miserable, unhappy woman, with a mind or heart deformed for want of the proper early training, perhaps. Forgive her, Rol, and forget her injustice. Be content, since you have nothing to reproach yourself with.'

'I can do that if I know that Mr. Larry is not hurt with me.'

'Well, he is not hurt with *you*, but is bitter against your mother. He has said such things of you, sir, that the risk of making you vain bids me keep them to myself. But know this, for your peace of mind, if you were a highwayman he'd find excuses for you. His heart can't be steeled against Jerry's boy—he always calls you so—and it is a big generous heart that covers a multitude of trifling faults, the fruits of rough association, and is so full of gratitude that it colours all his words when he speaks of your father and your father's son—the gratitude that Aristotle says is the thing soonest effaced from the human heart. Its existence in him makes me forget his queer little ways and invests him with nobility.'

'You have a knack of ferreting out, or, rather, raising to the surface, the cream of natures, and keeping back the scum. If I do it too, you have taught me.'

'I do wish people would try to understand each other better,' she said; 'there would be fewer quarrels, fewer misfortunes, and happier homes.'

'We suffer for the capsizing of Pandora's box,' said Roland. 'Misfortunes are here, and always will be, whether she scattered them or not.'

'I wish they were a myth, like Pandora herself—a fable to tell, but not stern reality. Oh for the millennium or some sort of Utopia!'

'Not Utopia, Una. Not a see-saw existence like that, balanced on one pivot. Never to soar as high as the skies or penetrate to the depths of the earth, but always a monotonous swing according to a certain rule. Not a leather-clothed people with luxuries unknown and dull, unambitious lives, without aspirations and artistic tastes. Art would die in such an atmosphere, and competition be strangled. Where would be the glory of success?'

'And failure would be unknown, remember.'

'That in itself would be a misfortune, perhaps,' he argued. 'Failure begets success more often than not. It is not unlike a black draught, nauseous enough, but salutary in the end—a stern friend to rule us to higher and better things sometimes, where the creature ruled is really capable of higher and better things.'

'And if you should fail when you go up for your B.A. exam., will you not be disappointed?'

'Of course I shall, but it will determine me to work until I do succeed. I will compete over and over again. Competition is a splendid whip; it drives ambition, and ambition—a fiery steed—sets the world's wheels spinning. To ambition we owe study and research, to study and research the scientific wonders of the present day. It is a grand world, Una, and though we can never expect all men to think alike, any more than they can look alike, I feel sure we are almost on the eve of discovering some scheme of political economy which shall lift beggars from the streets, clothe the poor, feed the hungry, and make men realize that it is a grand world, and worship God the Giver as the one common Father of benefits.'

'And will there ever come a time when friends shall never exchange bitter, hard words, when brethren shall dwell together in unity?' asked Una again.

'"Ever" is a closed vista to us, who can't see beyond the hour, or minute even. Wars, civil commotions, antipathies, exist, and have existed, for a purpose. Such men as Napoleon and Alexander, bloodthirsty and cruelly ambitious as they were, have quickened intellect and strengthened morality. The Fire of London swept away the lingering germs of the fatal plague.'

'Then you think the whirligig of trouble throughout the world is previously planned for a future purification—a crucible God-constructed?'

'Yes; I can't help thinking so. You know what Pope says:

> '"All partial evil is universal good;
> Discord, harmony not understood."'

'And then, perhaps, it will be more like heaven—the heaven we dream about and cannot, must not, see with mortal eyes,' sighed Una, longing for sweet peace, and sending her eyes again up to the stars through the open window. For a minute she was silent, and then, turning to her companion, she said: 'Rol, I have a belief of my own about heaven. I wonder if you will think it absurd.'

'I never knew you to say or do a thing yet that I could think absurd. Trust me, Una, and say on.'

'Heaven is in the stars—the stars are heaven.'

He leaned his elbow on the sill and looked earnestly at her as she made this assertion.'

'Go on,' he said.

'I believe the stars to be a series of preparatory heavens, not one, but a multitude. We call them other worlds, but what can we know? There are stars whose light has but recently reached the earth, or has yet to come, which must destroy the theory of their creation for the benefit of this world; and as not a tree or stone or flower or bird or insect has been called into being without a purpose, which we may or may not understand, then why those wonderful invisible stars? They never give light to us. I have been wondering to-night at those that do, and somehow they have not been silent—they breathe to me of heaven, of homes of departed souls, and souls as yet unborn. Freed from the body, the spirit soars to a heaven, not *the* heaven, and in some ethereal existence lives a purer life, still impure enough to be far from the throne of God; but, capable of a holier expansion, it may rise from heaven to heaven, perfected to enter the actual Kingdom of the Creator and meet Him face to face.'

'A probationary establishment,' said Roland quietly.

'Now you are laughing at me, Rol.'

'Not at all, merciful prophetess. Why should I laugh? I know nothing, whereas some angel has touched your perception of the Great Unknown, perhaps, and your soul is permitted to see. If I could believe with you, that the mercy of attempted probation is conceded to the immortal part of us, I think I could be happier when sin worries my conscience.'

'But, Rol, think of the millions of souls carried away since the world began! Where are they, do you think—the good, the bad, and the medium; the men who have died on the gallows and by the axe for their crimes, or the noble creatures who have been tortured for their faith or their principles; or those who have perished in the sea, or simply died in their beds, having led lives neutral, inclined to neither great good nor great evil? Why, those purified by suffering went straight to the Kingdom; others have passed through each ethereal life, slowly but surely, and many—oh, so many!—must be still preparing to reach the highest haven, the heaven that knows

no pain. The people who sin here are not always responsible for their sin. If Napoleon and Alexander, with all their bloodshed and butchery, benefited this world, were they not instruments of a plan? Will a merciful God condemn them utterly? Or is it not more in unison with His love that the souls of His erring children should be led through years, nay, centuries, of purification, and ultimately ascend to His throne? While the world stands I believe strife will prevail, and ambition will ever demand its own tax from all men. Envy, greed, and all the ills of human nature, will continually float about us, even should poverty cease, and the stars look on calmly and wait for the misguided soul born to this planet, more human than Divine, yet to be born again away from the flesh, and enter a purer life in some purer sphere away from this palpitating world. Oh, Rol, I believe it.'

'You think it is belief, Una, because it harmonizes with your own inner yearning. It is an entrancing fancy, but who can say you are wrong or right? When we try to tip-toe and strain ourselves for a peep at the great Hereafter, we are as children crying for the moon. It is for us to do our best here, to be content with the little we do understand, to remain as pure as we can by resisting temptations.'

'Ah, Rol, it is so easy for such as you and I to talk about resisting temptations. What temptations have we? For us to want is to have.'

'Is it, sweet girl philosopher? No, you are wrong there; every phase of life has or brings its own temptations. Like love, they rule "court, camp, and grove"—are not bred alone by poverty. Have I not been tempted to-day to sneer and revile? Your sympathy is soothing, and I give way to it, and speak of things which, but for the temptation to pour out my wrongs and unlock my lips, should be hidden away. And even with Mid I have been wrong.'

'With Mid—how?'

'I thought her distant and capricious to-night, something totally unlike her usual self; and now I begin to think the poor little girl was not feeling well, and the regret will arise that I was tempted to show my displeasure by studied coolness towards her—and after all she has done for me to-day!'

'She is so fond of you, Rol,' said Una gently. 'It was wrong to be nettled with her.'

'It was wrong—I confess it;' and Rol, reading a certain pain in Una's face, magnified his offence to Jessie with Una's reproach searing his conscience, which was peculiarly sensitive.

Under the force of any emotion, he was always impelled to be on the move; and so, true to this idiosyncrasy, he rose and began to pace the room, with his eyes on the floor.

Una was deeply attached to her girl-friend, Jessie Lockstud, whose affection was so precious, who trusted her so implicitly; who had told her over and over again of the way she would keep house when she and Roland were married, and how happy they were going to be in trying to make others happy, and how many servants she intended keeping, and ever so much more to the same effect, which made Una ask quietly if Roland had ever declared his love for her or proposed marriage.

To which Jessie had replied naïvely, 'No, but he will; actions speak for themselves. When he is his own master he will. At present he submits to his mother's ruling, and is afraid of her displeasure. He will speak when he is of age.'

'And suppose, Mid, he never should,' questioned Una for reasons of her own, and with a serious face.

'I can't suppose anything of the sort,' said Jessie, with a little toss of her head, 'when we are so fond of each other, and he is the only one in the whole world who can be dear to me in that way! And I can't tell what makes you speak as if it were not a decided thing, or as good as decided between him and me, and mamma, too. She quite expects him to be her son-in-law.'

Una had said no more, but continued to listen to her outbursts of confidence, without making any unpleasant insinuations, or giving any insight whatever to her own thoughts. She was thinking now of Jessie's appropriation of Roland—of her wild woman's love for him, and was so quiet and thoughtful, that Roland stopped his marching and stood before her.

'You are thinking me unkind,' he said, 'and are vexed with me.'

'No, no, Rol; not vexed with you, only sorry for poor little Mid. I fear she must be ailing, and I will go and see her to-morrow, as soon as ever I can.'

Accordingly, Una went the next afternoon to Mrs. Calliport's, and found Jessie curled up and reading on a couch in the dining-room.

She did not bound from the couch as Una expected, or rush at her with a spontaneous flow of nonsense. She merely looked up from her book, and displayed a pale face and eyes suspiciously red about the lids.

'Oh, Una! is that you? I'm so glad to see you.'

'You lazy girl! you can't even get out of your luxurious position for a minute when you are glad to see me. I don't believe you can be glad.'

Una resorted to badinage; but her clear eyes rested on her friend's countenance searchingly and tenderly, even with gravity. A faint flush transiently cloaked the pale face, and Jessie put our her hand affectionately.

'I am glad,' she affirmed, 'glad and sorry, too; for I don't feel quite well, that's the truth, Una. I'm in a state of limpness, and am sorry that you should find me so.'

Una sat down on the sofa quite near, and laid a hand gently on Jessie's.

'What is it? It is not usual for you to be ill, dear. Perhaps you are too cooped up here; a walk could be easily taken when your aunt does not require you. Where is she?'

'She is asleep upstairs. She told me to take a walk—to go to mamma or you; but I did not feel inclined. Perhaps I felt lazy, as you found me.'

'Drive the laziness off, Mid. Put on your hat, and we will take a walk together.'

'No; I'd rather not.'

Jessie nestled closer to her cushion.

'Why not? You are not too ill to walk, and it would do you good.'

'Please talk about something else, Una, and leave insignificant me alone,' requested Jessie.

'Of whom shall I talk, then?' began Una, ready to humour, and thinking her friend was really ill. 'Rol?'

'Yes, if you like. Did you see him last night?'

Jessie slightly averted her head, and commenced to trifle with the leaves of her book, slowly and meaninglessly.

'Yes, I did see him; and we had one of our beautiful long

talks, Mid, and peace is proclaimed. I know all about it, and how you took his part. You are a little Trojan in spirit; and he is so thankful to you, and]'—here Una quite forgot Jessie's prohibition of the subject of herself—'he is distressed about you—thinks you must have been ill, and said you were not our own bright Mid at all. Now I see he was right. He said I was his doctor. May I not be yours? Come, Mid, what is it? I fear you are hiding some pain of body or mind?'

'There is nothing the matter.'

Jessie lowered her head; and leaf after leaf rustled with monotonous regularity, the book sprawling on her lap.

Una took her hand from Jessie's, and, pained with her unusual reticence, said:

'I'm sorry to have to say it, Mid, but upon my word I don't believe you. Has Rol offended you? Have I, unwittingly?'

'No, no. I asked you to talk of something else, and not me.' Jessie's character was too shallow, and Una's penetration too sure, for this sort of fencing to last long; and Jessie, who was getting frightened at Una's queries, not knowing where they might land her, thought to hide herself behind an ill-setting disguise of peevishness, and cried out petulantly: 'I am sick and tired of myself, and if you don't talk of other things or other people I'll just run away and leave you, so there!' Here a page was sharply turned.

This threat did not deter Una from her purpose.

'Mid,' she said, as she put an arm round Jessie's waist, in all tenderness and sympathy, 'something is out of gear with you. You are in trouble and won't tell me, the friend you have always trusted. May I not help you? must I not know?' Something fell and glistened on one of the pages. 'Mid!' cried Una solemnly, 'you are positively crying. Oh, trust me, my dear. Let me help you if I can.'

'You can!'

Jessie, fairly overcome, breathed those words in a decided sob.

'How?—how? Tell me like a good girl,' said Una, somewhat alarmed at these strange symptoms of some trouble touching her warm little friend.

'By not—not noticing me,' faltered poor Jessie. 'It will wear away. I can't even tell you, Una, what it is, and that

makes it harder to bear. You will understand some day. I am not ill. Don't mind me.'

'And you are not angry with me or Rol, then?'

'Why should I be? How could I be?'

'Well, Mid, let us talk of him, since Miss Jessie Lockstud must, by her own order, be set aside.' Una smiled sadly, and, woman-like, was excited to some curiosity, which lingered in her eyes as they rested on Jessie, but which was banished from her tongue. 'You know in about three months' time he will go up for his B.A. degree, and some few months after that he will enter his majority. He will not have any bonfires or bunting, or ball or champagne demonstration, or anything of that sort.'

'Yes, I know,' murmured Jessie. Had he not told her so over and over again? 'He doesn't believe in spending so much money for such a purpose; he calls it profligacy.'

'Yes; he has quite novel ideas in his head for the outlay of his wealth, and is not going to begin by squandering it on himself, or to feed a crowd of friends who do not want feeding from him, while there are hundreds who do. He is a noble fellow, Mid, and philanthropy overflows in him.'

'He is everything that is good,' acquiesced Jessie, very softly indeed, and again rustling her leaves.

'He has some great scheme for using up several large tracts of purchased land of his father's in Knutsford by settling villages there, if I can understand rightly, and giving employment to hundreds and thousands of people.'

Una's eyes now flashed with pride.

'He did not tell me that,' murmured Jessie.

Here was something, then, that he had confided to Una and not to her. At every step she was beginning to find out how right her aunt had been in opening her eyes.

'Did he not? I think he meant to, Mid.'

This was said consolingly, for Una judged Jessie to be hurt at his seeming want of trust, when he had simply forgotten or deferred to tell her. She could not gauge the depth of her pain, and would not continue, as she had intended, to descant upon Roland's wild hopes, and the plans and schemes which should exalt his father's memory and bring needed relief to the deserving poor, for fear that Jessie, being unenlightened through him on the matter nearest to his heart, would be further pained.

She would not tell her of his intention to travel when he came of age, to visit all his possessions in Knutsford, or that Mr. Larry had determined to wait in Phillipia, see him enter his majority, and accompany him to Knutsford.

She glided into other topics, and did her best to cheer her and rouse her to the familiar piquancy, but did not succeed.

'Good-bye, Mid,' she said at parting; 'I shall come again to see you to-morrow, and hope to find you better. Give my love to Mrs. Calliport; and, Mid, don't tell Rol that I mentioned that little matter of the establishment of villages in Knutsford. He might be vexed with me for forestalling him. And don't tell your aunt, for the same reason. Let him tell you and her himself.'

Una was sorry that she had alluded to it; but having done so in her belief that Jessie knew as much as she did, she was anxious to extract the sting which she guessed had been unwittingly planted in Jessie's sensitive heart, and was annoyed that she had touched upon the subject at all, and so perhaps betrayed a trust. She sighed for Jessie—poor little Jessie, whose nature, so transparent for Una, sent her thoughts like so many corks to swim all exposed, and to be lightly caught with a quick, loving glance. But Una to-day could only note the troubled stream, and not that which troubled it; could not see the particular cork of the hour, clogged with complications, acting as a bullet attached, and weighing so painfully.

Jessie could not tell her that Rol might seek a wife out of Phillipia, that she had given up her girlhood's sweet dream, had been aroused from it; for she firmly believed now that it was really Una he cared for, after all, and that she herself had been a silly blind girl not to have seen it before, and decidedly too confidential in laying bare what should have been concealed from one who had never reciprocated with a like confidence. But the present attempt at concealment was a positive pain in its novelty; and as she looked at Una she wondered whether she knew or not if she were so very dear to Roland. She was so calm, so reserved, and had never hinted at any passion disturbing that serenity. She would not tell her what she thought, and as for Rol, why, he would get used to her changed manner and find consolation. Only to keep the secret was so hard for her, and so the loaded cork lay on her breast and sickened her.

CHAPTER VI.

LOCKSTUD PLAYS A LOSING CARD.

Priscilla Lockstud, more matronly, more set in figure, of rounder proportions, with silver threads amidst the brown of her hair, with delicate wrinkles, too, across her brow, was otherwise very little different to the Priscilla Lockstud of our opening chapters. She was the same simple-minded, golden-hearted little woman.

Every wrinkle might have told its own tale, especially to those who knew of her home-life and its insufficiency of sympathy and affection.

Maternal joys were as 'balm in Gilead,' but could not compensate entirely for the one thing missing in her wifehood, the tenderness and devotion which every loving wife expects as her due, and craves for when withheld.

Want, in a financial sense, she knew not. Surrounded by luxury and children, she could boast a home ring of pearls, but a ring from which the centre stone had slipped, and therefore incomplete. She was more satiated with luxuries than otherwise; she would have preferred the 'dinner of herbs' to the 'stalled ox,' and the social life led was simply a sacrifice to her lord's pleasure. Submissive still to his will, she was likewise yielding and indulgent to her children, of whom Jessie was the best beloved.

Probably this ultra-affection for Jessie was owing to her being a counterpart of herself, with a little additional beauty of feature inherited from the paternal stock. In this child she saw herself repeated, not only in form, but in disposition, and watched her budding maturity with some anxiety lest she might prove a repetition, too, in loving to her own misery. But when she observed her growing attachment for Roland Goldwin she allowed no opportunity to pass without some endeavour to strengthen it.

Roland was a noble lad, whom she held up repeatedly to her eldest son Jack as an example. His intimacy at the house gave her ample scope for taking bearings of his character, which gradually unfolded itself to her in all its chivalrous strength and

honest purpose. There was a strong element of romance in her disposition, too, which made her delight in watching the children playing at love within the first decade of their lives, when they knew not its meaning, and Rol—like Enoch Arden, she thought—spoke truth in jest when he called Jessie one day, in her hearing, 'his little wife,' with never a rival Philip Ray.

When they were no longer a mere boy or girl her watch never slackened, and every kiss, every smile, every gift, bestowed upon Jessie by him, she construed according to the desire of her own heart, counting all as so many links in the golden chain which should ultimately unite them.

Theo had been angry with her, very angry, when upon one occasion she drew his attention to Roland's apparent fondness for Jessie, a fondness beyond friendship; but, then, he mostly treated any suggestion of hers with contempt, so she thought no more about it, but felt sure that he would be delighted with such an alliance, if only from a monetary point of view; and, besides, he was really fond of Roland himself, for he had not alone spoken highly of him, but she had often caught his eyes fixed on him, when he thought he was unobserved, and in them she had read actual tenderness—a pathetic gaze, which had never rested upon any of his children.

This certainty of Roland's intentions towards her eldest daughter served to strengthen the girl's conviction that she was very dear, very necessary to him, which she was to a certain extent; and as there always will be people ready to pry into other people's cupboards or behind doors, and whisper amongst themselves over what they find there, or think they see, it did get bruited abroad that these young people were engaged; that the Lockstuds knew very well what they were about, and kept their arms wound about the millionaire prospective.

Sometimes they were congratulated, and while Lockstud frowned and looked ferocious enough to prevent anybody repeating the congratulation in his presence, his wife did not resent the joy-giving, but mildly, said:

'Well, they are fond of each other, but are little more than boy or girl, so that nothing is settled yet one way or another,' which certainly implied that busy rumour was not entirely to be despised.

With Jessie it was different again; she would blush to the roots of her hair if one bolder than another ventured to tease her with insinuations relative to a future marriage with Roland, and try to shift the subject without denying the allegation; but Roland, who likewise had to stand some occasional reference to it in a little pleasant raillery, only threw back his head and laughed as at a joke, conveying neither affirmation nor negation.

Matters stood thus when Jessie took her turn at her aunt's. But when she came home again Mrs. Lockstud was less exalted, for Jessie went about the house looking wan and white, and with no elastic step as usual to her. Moreover, when she met Roland her manner towards him was constrained, or she avoided him if possible.

Her father casting furtive glances at her across the table during breakfast, evidently noted her changed appearance, for he set to gnawing his moustache ends, and Mrs. Lockstud knew that this with him was a sign of some inward emotion, arising from various causes; she thought it pointed to discomfiture at the sight of their daughter's suffering, and that he was not so callous as he forced his children to think. Mrs. Lockstud generally understood her husband's humours, and, pleased with his notice of Jessie, she ventured to say, when the meal was over, and for a moment they were alone:

'Theo, do you think Jessie looks ill? She is ill, I'm sure, though she never complains.'

'She has been shut up too long with Aunt Jessie,' he said shortly, as he studied his tie in a mirror set in its handsome frame against a wall of the dining-room, and stood with his back turned to his wife. But she caught sight of his face in the glass, and could see it was not a pleasant one. She ventured further still:

'She has been shut up there before, and never looked so.'

'You had better tell her at once that she looks very bad,' he said, turning round sharply, 'and make her think she is ill. Croak over her, and she will. Leave her alone, and she will get better. I say she has been too long shut up,' with which sweeping assertion Lockstud hurried from the room.

Priscilla said no more; she knew it would be useless. Over dinner, however, the same day, he surprised his family by

addressing Jessie and proposing a little pleasure for her. It was quite an unknown thing for him to interest himself in his children's diversion.

'How would you like a dance,' he asked, 'after your dull time with Aunt Jessie? I thought it would do you good, so I accepted an invitation for you this afternoon. The Lannagers are going to have a dance; you'll get a note in the morning, so get your gewgaws ready.'

Jessie did not look over-pleased. The Lannagers were a well-to-do family, occasionally visitors to Cecillambda, but not close friends of hers.

Lannager senior was a prosperous solicitor, a shrewd, intelligent, far-seeing man, with an eldest son, who so far promised to be a chip of the block that he had recently passed through a successful examination, and likewise entered the field of law, and was now a partner of his father. As well-to-do men Lockstud entertained a profound respect for Lannager and his son.

'The girls expect you to-morrow afternoon, I think,' he added, seeing that the invitation fell rather as a disappointment than a delight.

'To-morrow afternoon,' echoed Mrs. Lockstud; and then to Jessie: 'Isn't it arranged that Rol and Una are to come here to take you for a walk to-morrow?' She feared Jessie for some reason would not care to remember the appointment, and so reminded her.

'What has Roland to do with it, or Una either? They can come any afternoon,' said Theo with peppery accents and one of his ugly frowns.

'Will there be many there?' now asked Jessie, speaking for the first time, but evincing no pleasure in the prospect of a dance, as she might have done but a little while ago.

'I don't know,' he answered, 'and I don't know what that has to do with it. It is a long way, rather, so you had better go in the afternoon. I wish you to go, and I will call there for you myself. I shall be detained in the city to-morrow night, so you can depend upon my escort home, and the brougham need not be sent out.'

The fact of Lockstud's determination to wait upon Jessie himself caused her to change uneasy glances with her mother, for they both knew now that his wish had a concealed purpose,

and looked at him curiously, for he was never known to put himself out for anybody dwelling under his own roof.

The Lannagers lived at Lahraloo, a very pretty suburb, some distance from Virginia Bay. Nevertheless, Lockstud, who was detained the following night, as he had stated he would be, took a hansom and went home, *viâ* Lahraloo, submitting amiably to the detour in order to keep his promise to Jessie, and for other reasons as well.

It was quite eleven o'clock when he entered the Lannager dwelling, and with Mr. Lannager stepped over the velvet-pile carpet of the drawing-room and on to a broad, lengthy, covered-in veranda, where several young couples were whirling in dance, while Jessie sat at a grand piano in the drawing-room, her little hands gliding over the keys to awaken a dreamy waltz. Frank Lannager, the newly-fledged lawyer, was standing by her with an elbow resting on the upper framework of the instrument, with its flap gaping like a gigantic mouth, to pour forth a richer volume of sound. He was looking at her earnestly, and talking in an undertone, as he half reclined, half bent towards her.

Lockstud took in details with a swift survey which was appreciative, as he passed through to the ball-room *pro tem.* and met the lady of the house. Mrs. Lannager was a tall, angular lady with hair rather a dull drab than gray, brushed smoothly back under a stylish little cap, from a brow not over broad or high. She had a peculiar face with a mouth always spread as if to smile, but which seeming smile was a fixture under any and all emotion, having nothing to do with mirth or happiness, while her brows were so extravagantly arched that they perpetually declared surprise where none existed, though her eyes expressed nothing in particular but ugliness, being of a faded watery gray, and as opaque as the white of an egg. Probably nature was anxious to atone for their deficiency, and so compelled her to manifest an exaggerated exuberance of feeling towards most people coming within her notice, in a lively attention and a rush of emphatic words meant to fascinate—vocables like bubbles, perseveringly blown to burst and leave no trace behind.

Strangers, as a rule, when first introduced to this lady, were discomfited with the idea that they presented to her sight some-

thing peculiar in person or manner to occasion on her part a slight ill-bred display of amusement, as portrayed by her brows or lips, but were quick to discover their mistake, since her features never underwent change of any sort, but remained in their fixed declaration of smiling wonder, while her sentiments and actions were so devoted and assiduous that it did occur to many to believe she was overflowing with an excess of amiability and love for her fellow-creatures, and to a few that she was trying to gull them. Invariably she prefaced her remarks with a couple of stereotyped words that affected those addressed unpleasantly, since they meant so little and had lost gloss from constant use.

'Oh, *how* delightful!' she began, with Lockstud's hand within her own, undergoing a fervent pressure. 'Now this is good of you, Mr. Lockstud, to come upon us in this way—so *like* you! See what it is to be young.' She waved her left hand towards the dancers. 'Though I have no right to draw comparisons with *you*. You are positively youthful yet. I might easily introduce you to any of the young ladies, not knowing you by repute, as an eligible bachelor.'

'Not with Miss Lockstud in the room, mother,' said Lannager senior, who always addressed his wife as his children did. 'We might palm him off for one if we call him Smith, now'—this facetiously.

'There isn't much time for introduction to-night,' laughed Theo pleasantly enough, and accepting Mrs. Lannager's flatteries as a shower of withered leaves dropping harmlessly from him to the ground, and lying there to be trampled on as he moved away. 'I have come on duty bent, to carry off my daughter, and I have a cab waiting; but don't disturb the dance. Let Jessie finish at the piano; the cab can wait.'

'Well, you *are* really *delightful!*' Then, turning to her husband, Mrs. Lannager shook a much-beringed but lean finger at him, and said, 'Now, Frank, confess; would *you* do as much for one of our girls? Indeed, very few fathers would, so don't look crestfallen; but, then, we know Mr. Lockstud is an exception—such a pleasant, *charming* exception.'

Jessie heard her father's name pronounced thus loudly and vehemently, and knew he had kept his word in appointing himself her escort.

Again, she wondered what could be his reason, and her face, still pale, wore a puzzled look, which puckered her otherwise smooth brow into little wrinkles of thought, and gave her an uneasy expression, for she did not relish the anticipation of a drive home with him, for it may be remembered it has been said that his children were wont to droop in his presence, and avoid a society that was mostly irksome, burdened as it was with his chilliness or marked authority.

She was playing from memory, and practice enabled her to be so far mistress of this piece of music that the dulcet notes seemingly dripped from her finger-tips without any effort of her own.

Frank Lannager was watching her hands and face alternately, and whispering in her ear. He was a slight, well-built young man, well meaning, and favouring the paternal features, but a long, thin edition of his father, with pale-brown hair and fluffy whiskers, an elongated throat presenting a painfully apparent Adam's apple, like a hen's egg, ever ready to burst through the confining skin.

Jessie scarcely heeded the sense of his words, which were bordering on soft nothings. As her attention was not concentrated on any music set before her, and she yet gave random replies to his murmuring, he was troubled with her *distrait* humour, and tried to ferret out a reason for it. As a rule, the young ladies to whom he paid courtesy encouraged him; here he met with something like repulse, and suffered accordingly.

Naturally, the memory of certain rumours arose to account for her want of interest in his especial companionship, a laxity which was more than unpalatable to him because he was so anxious to interest her, because he thought she was the sweetest, the prettiest, the daintiest girl in the whole world for him.

'Do you know,' he asked, 'we invited your friends to-night—Una Pennacove and Roland Goldwin?'

'No, I did not.' She heard that aright.

'Her ears are open now,' he thought; then spoke again: 'Yes; but neither accepted. Miss Pennacove sent an apology; I forget now what. And Goldwin told me himself he was too hard at work at present to spare time for recreation to any extent. You were not aware of it?'

'Aware of what?'

'That he was not coming?'

'How should I be? I have not seen him since yesterday.'

'I thought, perhaps, you had.' He paused, and, with a jealous passion stirring, he continued: 'He is certain to pass: some people have no end of luck.'

'If a will to work and win means luck, he will be lucky.'

Her eyes were cast down upon the keys; the very mention of Roland's name made her quiver, and her fingers trembled.

'Yes, there's something in that,' he replied. 'I have worked and won.' He was not conscious here of vaunting his own achievements, in his eagerness to court her approbation. 'But,' he went on, 'I doubt if the luck will abide with me. You see, Goldwin will be a millionaire, and a millionaire has more than a strong will at his command. Wealth is might; it can wield a magic wand sometimes. For instance, when he wants to marry, as some day he will, of course'—here Jessie blundered over a bar—'he need only to hold out his hand, like a magnet before the needle, and the girl he desires will fly to his arms.'

'You think the millionaire the attraction, and not the man? You don't know him if you say so, and must have a poor opinion of girls in general.'

Jessie lost her apathy, and fired up at the slur on Roland and her own sex. She blundered again over the keys.

'Quicker, please, Miss Lockstud!' called out one of the dancers, who with her partner ceased to whirl with the erratic time, and looked impatiently towards the piano.

'I think you are imposing on good nature,' said Frank, turning from the piano, vexed with himself, thoroughly dissatisfied with his progress in winning Jessie's esteem, almost afraid he had offended her. 'Miss Lockstud must be tired.'

'Tired!' cried Mrs. Lannager, overhearing her son's assertion, and immediately marching up to Jessie; 'now, that is *too* bad.' She took forcible possession of Jessie's small person, and almost lifted her bodily from the piano-stool, so concluding the waltz. 'My dear girl, you *would* play, and you are *so* unselfish. Of course you must be tired. Your charming father is here—so *good* of him to come!—and you must come and have some refreshment before you leave.'

'I have had some supper, thank you,' pleaded Jessie, 'and I would like to get my wraps, and not keep my father waiting.'

'He does not mind waiting; he is goodness itself, and you are your father's daughter. Besides, he will have something too.—Come on, Mr. Lockstud, we are going to have a little supper,' she added, as that gentleman advanced to meet his daughter, and tell her to get ready to start for home.

But not being averse to refresh himself at the desire of his hostess, he bowed politely to her invitation.

Here Mr. Lannager joined them, so the quartette marched to the refreshment-table.

They did not group there, for Mr. Lannager appropriated the bank manager at one corner, and Mrs. Lannager sat down with Jessie at another. The manager glided into political and commercial discussion with an affable confidence, warming over a glass of dry sherry and slice of rich plum-cake; and his daughter, wearied with Mrs. Lannager's importunities to eat, had accepted, and was tasting a quivering golden jelly, getting rid of it by small instalments.

'What do you think of our Frank's success?' asked Mrs. Lannager.

'It must be very pleasant to him, and to you and Mr. Lannager,' Jessie answered simply, but scarcely knowing what else to say. 'He must be clever.'

'Clever! I should think so. His father thinks there is not another like him; but, then, we all love him *so* much, because he is so *delightfully* kind and good.'

Mrs. Lannager's perpetual smile broadened, and Jessie thought to herself: 'I wonder how she looks when she gets in a passion? I'm sure she can get into one.' But she went on slowly depositing her jelly within her lips, and maintained silence. The mother's eulogy excited no response from her.

'He will make an excellent husband some day,' continued the lady of the house, 'and be able to give his wife a *charming* home, too. A good son makes a good husband, they say.'

'I am sure I hope he will find his equal in value,' said Jessie again, but in such a way that her hostess could not detect a grain of irony in it.

Mrs. Lannager talked 'Frank' for quite ten minutes, going into rhapsody, and detailing all family events in which he had

figured conspicuously well, until Jessie actually yawned, and felt as if she had swallowed something offensive with her jelly, and needed an emetic. At this juncture her father rose to go, and her release in one way was at hand.

'Well, mother, how did the pump work?' asked Mr. Lannager of his spouse later on, when the little party had broken up and they were retiring.

'Not satisfactorily at all,' was the reply, denoting that the question was thoroughly understood. 'She is either sly or stupid, and perhaps there is some truth in that report, though Goldwin's mother told me herself that his affections were engaged elsewhere, and she ought to know; but perhaps she doesn't.'

'Pshaw! why does Lockstud scowl if one even hints at a supposed engagement between the girl and Goldwin? He wouldn't take the trouble to tell me that he preferred our Frank even to him, as better suited for his daughter. He went into ecstasies over Frank; said he was a fine fellow, and I don't know what not that was good.'

'Perhaps he noticed, too, that Frank was smitten with his daughter,' Mrs. Lannager observed; 'for the girls did tell me what a fool he was about her when they spent an evening at Cecillambda a little time back.'

'Well, of course; wasn't that the reason we invited her to-night, and Goldwin, too, just to watch them together?'

'Goldwin balked that move, but, any way, I tried it on the best way I could to-night, and I'm not satisfied.'

'You're in a hurry, mother.'

'I'm not blind; she doesn't care for Frank a bit.'

'She can be made to care for him.'

'She might if Goldwin were not in the way.'

'Make yourself easy: Lockstud for some reason or another is averse to Goldwin; and, besides, when one man throws out hints to another, as he did to me about his girls never being allowed to depend solely upon their future husbands, about giving them handsome dowries, why, there is something at bottom.'

'And yet I have heard him myself speak glowingly of him, and Mrs. Lockstud scarcely denies that an engagement exists, and, goodness knows, they have been shepherding him for

years—ever since he could walk. I can't understand a man of the world like Lockstud not preferring Goldwin for his position. He is a bit of Oily Gammon, a clever dissembler, and doesn't want mercenary motives imputed to him. She is a good-natured, harmless woman; there's the difference.'

'Well, supposing it is so,' argued Lannager, 'if Frank is sensible enough to fall in love with a dot of a girl having a *dot* to give her due weight, let him try his chances.'

'I intend to, but still think she is either stupid or sly. I could have slapped her face to-night for being one thing or the other, she annoyed me so.'

Mrs. Lannager's smiling lips were compressed, and her opaque eyes sullen, when she reflected on Jessie's apathy or indifference when listening to the singing of her Frank's praises, yet she was determined to secure her for her son.

Jessie and her father drove home in the cab together. After a few moments of perfect silence, he said:

'You are very quiet.'

'I am tired.'

She was weary indeed.

'Too much dancing, I suppose.'

'I did nearly all the playing. I did not care to dance.'

'And the talking?'

'I don't think so,' replied Jessie, thinking that for tongue practice the palm might be awarded to Mrs. Lannager, but not daring to say as much to her father, to whom she feared to offer an opinion, believing she was not allowed to have or encourage one, and wondering why he was so unusually amiable and inclined to converse with her.

'Well, it struck me you were talkative enough to young Lannager; or was it the other way about?'

The question was mildly put, and suggested approbation.

'I could not hear half that he said, when I was playing.'

Jessie was getting tired of hearing Frank Lannager's name. It seemed there was to be a sequel to Mrs. Lannager's late infliction, and her accents now plainly declared *ennui*.

'That is a pity,' said her father less mildly; in fact, with a touch of aggression and sarcasm blended, 'because he is well worth listening to; know that. I wish your brother Jack promised to be as much a credit to me as young Lannager has

proved to his parents. Frank Lannager is a reliable man—a man who will always swim and keep his own head well up, as well as other heads depending upon him. He is a first-class fellow, and seems to be pretty high-wrought and fascinated.'

'High-wrought and fascinated!' echoed Jessie, with a stolidity so like her mother's that Lockstud, irritated, made an impatient movement.

'Yes,' he said; 'you know the meaning of the words, I presume. A poet would say his heart was throbbing with Cupid's arrow. Jack would say he was "gone." I say just what I have said: he is fascinated with a young lady, who ought to think herself very lucky indeed to attract such a man.'

There was utter silence on Jessie's side.

'In case,' he continued, 'your intellect finds the subject abstruse, I will be more explicit. You are the young lady, and it is my wish that you should encourage his attentions, and root out any silly romance that may be obscuring sound judgment. You understand now.'

Jessie understood well enough, even to his eagerness for her acceptance of the Lannager invitation—his desire to come this night for her, to reconnoitre the Lannager domain and note, if possible, how she accepted Frank's homage.

The little he had witnessed pleased him at the outset, but he was not so satisfied now. She was not in the habit of questioning her father's will; it was hers 'not to reason why'; so she maintained silence still, feeling as if the black cap had been set on her head—accepting a sickening fiat.

'Did you hear what I said? You are not playing the piano now.'

Taunting was natural to him; she did not mind it, she was only alive to the fiat, to the cap-pressure, as she meekly, faintly answered:

'Yes.'

At that moment the cab shot by a gas-lamp, the glare of which lit up for a second the faces in the cab, and he turned to her, and saw why she could not speak. He made a second jerk and looked another way. For the rest of the drive all talk seemed suspended, sound being confined to the clatter of the horse's heels, the rumble of the vehicle, or the crack of the whip overhead. Her tears annoyed him. He was not aware of showing any sternness; he was anxious for her as well as for himself that she should forget Goldwin and turn to another suitor, but he did not want to be unkind.

Habit made him sarcastic and authoritative with his family, yet he was not wholly without affection for his children, or this daughter in particular. He began with an unwonted cheerfulness to address her, but circumstances altered his temper very soon, for he was not inclined to meet recalcitrant humours in her, which he found existed, though they were not made manifest by outspoken rebellion. There were weighty reasons for his action, but he made an impolitic move on his own behalf. Instead of blockading opposition, as he believed he was doing, he gave it access in another direction, and so it stalked onward slowly and surely towards him as a grim and merciless foe.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEEL WITHIN WHEEL.

Lockstud, painfully energetic in his bulwark-raising against a threatened danger, was not to know that his efforts to repel at the front-door were to be counteracted at the rear—that where he was struggling to erect a rampart his wife was throwing open the back gates and inviting the very thing he feared to sit at their hearth—a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Jessie, sick and weary, and unable to bear this new burden imposed by her father, fell upon her mother's neck, the day after the Lannagers' dance, and poured forth all her bitterness and despair with wild sobs and vows to die or drown herself—all the truth about Roland's real feeling towards her.

Mrs. Lockstud turned white and sick with sudden fear, with indignation at her husband's inexplicable conduct, but would not believe that Roland's affections were given elsewhere.

He was somewhat surprised to receive, as the day advanced, a telegram from Mrs. Lockstud.

'Come to me as soon as possible—must see you,' it said, and set him wondering.

Immediately after lunch he obeyed her summons, and found her awaiting him in a cosy breakfast parlour. She was so nervous and agitated that he asked:

'Are you in trouble?'

To which question she nodded her head, giving a silent affirmative, as if words were blocked, and next, with a decided gulp and a desperate effort to speak, she began with hesitation, but gradually gained heart and waxed eloquent.

'What can it be?' asked Roland anxiously.

'I have something to say—something which pains me. It is about our dear Jessie.'

'Jessie—is she ill? She has been looking ill lately; but she can't be seriously ill!' he exclaimed, partly assertive, partly interrogative, and with an uneasiness which helped on the anxious mother to speak out her mind.

'Not seriously ill now—not yet; but she will be perhaps if—if what I hoped—if——'

'Good heaven, go on! What is it you fear?'

'Oh! how can I say it to you?' almost moaned Mrs. Lockstud, with eyes averted. 'And yet I must—must brave a certain delicacy to make you understand me; perhaps her life may depend on it.' She raised her eyes filled with tears, and looked at him appealingly. 'Rol, you are honest. I know you so well; you will tell me the truth. You are fond of her, are you not?'

'Fond of her!' he echoed. 'Why, I love our little Mid! You must know that yourself. Who says I am not fond of her?'

He asserted this much in the same way as he would have said, if questioned, 'I love Jack, or Louisa, or you,' for he was so fond of Mrs. Lockstud and all her children alike, and the word 'love' in this case was used to emphasize merely his strong attachment for Jessie, and as a challenge, perhaps, against professed doubt as implied by her mother's question; but Mrs. Lockstud did not construe it so, as she grasped at the supposed encouragement of an idea, and cried:

'She says so; she thinks so. The poor child thinks you don't care for her as she cares for you; and I know you too well to believe you capable of anything like perfidy or lightness of conduct. You have grown to manhood almost under my very eyes; you are like a dear son of the house. And, Rol, she is a woman now; it is no more playing at love, as when you were children, for she gives you a woman's heart now, filled with that undying love which a true woman can offer but once in her life, and then for ever, to the man she hopes to be her husband. And whether it is by word or action, or look of yours she has read you all wrong I don't know, for she believes your feeling for her to be cooled, to be not what she has confidently expected it to be. This is why she is pining and fretting, why her heart is ready to break, and mine too, I think. Why, marriage with another would kill her!'

Mrs. Lockstud ceased, and tried to wipe away her tears with her handkerchief, though they came in relays as fast as she wiped.

'Good heaven!' again exclaimed Roland.

It would be simply impossible to portray by pen the visage he presented to Mrs. Lockstud, who could scarcely see through her weeping, during this unexpected, most bewildering outburst. To say that it depicted consternation and distress is insufficient.

He experienced some such sensation as that given by a blue-forked, jagged dart of lightning, transiently blinding as it flashes in one's face and makes the blood tingle and hair stand on end with fear at the passing pain and dazzled eyeballs. His senses reeled for a moment, and then, ruled to steadiness, his mind saw what before had been obscured. His ears caught a smothered sob.

To see a woman's tears was disconcerting always; to cause them was torture. Whether unwittingly or not, it made little difference to his misery; the result was the same. And here was a woman whose every tear fell like molten lead on his heart, and whom he was ready to shield from all things causing pain. He started up from his chair and began to walk up and down the parlour, with his hands deep down in his pockets.

'Don't be angry with her for doubting you,' pleaded Mrs. Lockstud, recovering herself and showing her peculiar ingenuity for misunderstanding. The look on his face was perfectly unintelligible to her, yet she thought she read signs of

irritation. 'Don't be angry, be gentle, and as soon as she can see you, convince her how wrong she has been; teach her never to doubt you again; but don't on any account tell, or even hint, that I have been mediator between you. You are annoyed, I can see.'

She looked up at him as he stood still before her.

'Your distress annoys me,' he said; 'it hurts me. I was not prepared; I did not know I could cause so much unhappiness to my dear friends. I have scarcely thought of marriage yet, excepting as something in the distance. I will try and see Jessie soon.'

He had not the least idea what he was going to say when he did see her. His brain was whirling still; but he knew it was necessary for him to say something now of a pacific nature, and he said it.

'Soon—when?' asked the over-solicitous mother.

'I don't know, I can't say; but soon.'

And then Roland, unable to speak further, hurried from the room and walked out of the house, omitting the common courtesy of shaking hands, or wishing good-afternoon.

He was so much like one of the house, however, that this little breach of manners was considered pardonable, especially under the influence of an emotion that he could not hide, and which made Mrs. Lockstud sigh in soliloquy: 'I'm sure the dear boy is vexed, but his temper will cool quickly enough, and it will all come right between him and Jessie. I am so glad I spoke to him, though it was hard to do at the beginning.'

Roland walked with rapid strides towards his own home; his blood seemed sluggish and his reflective power paralyzed, for he could not reason clearly.

He strode on as if for a wager. A carriage passed him, its occupants talking and laughing. He did not recognise the ladies, although they were acquaintances; they had nodded affably to him without attracting his notice. His eyes were but mechanical guides to his destination—Goolgun—while his mental sight was only capable of holding in view just then two figures.

He saw Jessie weeping because of disappointment in *him*, and her sad white face rose before him like an apparition. She was a ghost, with a menacing forefinger that seemed to touch

his breast with its point as a bayonet, and make him draw his breath with pain. Behind her there stood a second figure; no ghost, but the outline of the goddess of his day-dreams, his Minerva and Venus combined in one human form—his oracle, his hope, his beacon-light, from whom he had been longing to gather some indication of that passion for himself which he had been told now possessed Jessie, to whom he had meant until to-day to breathe his hope on the day of his majority. He had been chilly before the poor little ghost, but the presence of the goddess sent fire through his veins, and the perspiration stood on his forehead in great beads.

Arriving at Goolgun, he went straight to his own rooms, consisting of bedroom and study. The latter was a pleasant little sanctum, with its library of useful and standard works, an escritoire, a couple of chairs, reading-lamp, a little ornamentation here and there in the shape of bronze and marble statuary, and a vase or two which Mrs. Dripper kept well supplied with fresh flowers. The floor was tessellated, and at odd places a rug of silky texture, either snowy white or crimson hued, was carelessly thrown. There was a fireplace, not in use at present, but prettily screened, and a mirror above it framed in oak—a mantelpiece draped with some of Jessie's own fancy-work, and one great paned window that lifted from the floor and led to a side balcony.

The sunlight was slanting through its green Venetian blinds, and fell in bars across the tiles that twinkled and blinked with dazzling colour beneath the glint. Here Roland renewed his peripatetic cogitation, walking through the bars of light to and fro, and kicking the rugs rather viciously out of his path as he tried to calmly study his position.

Strangers had congratulated him, he reasoned; not alone because of rumour, but because they had been more observant than he perhaps in detecting such signs in Jessie's general bearing towards him as provided sufficient reason for them to base certain conclusions upon appertaining to their future relations—signs to which he had been blind.

If Mrs. Lockstud had not spoken to him in her over-confidence of his more than brotherly affection for her daughter, what would have happened? Would Middie really have pined herself to death—pined away for him? He had been ardently

longing for such a devotion, but not from that direction. Yet was it for him to ignore at the risk of her misery, or to accept and destroy his own content? If the latter, what of the goddess? Would the acceptance affect her? Were all her smiles and sweetness, her counsel and wisdom, given to him for the sake of friendship alone?

The time had come for him to speak; something must be done. Here was a difficulty beyond cornucopia aid. He had not been asked to tilt it with an easy hand and a smiling face into some impoverished lap.

Something stronger, mightier, and sweeter was demanded from him. Was he to give it up—that hope which had lain like a talisman in the core of his heart, which made the world so bright and life a summer's day? If Una should love him, if he had not been worshipping at a mythical shrine, he thought, then God help poor Jessie to throw off her cloud of disappointment, to rise above it, and be prepared to bless another man in the near future—a man compelled to love her, as he was compelled elsewhere to bow down and do homage.

He would tell the tale to his oracle; he would learn soon whether the counsellor herself would suffer should he lean to the side of duty, and speak of Jessie as a future wife. Were there no Una there would be no hesitation; for her sake more than his own he resisted the idea of playing lover to one upon whom he had hitherto looked as a dear sister, and no more. He could do nothing until he had spoken to Una. He thought and thought till his head throbbed, and his two hands pressed it as he stalked to and fro, not knowing how the time sped, until a knock at the door disturbed his meditation.

Opening it, Mrs. Dripper appeared before him.

'Are you ill, Master Roland?' she asked, noting the misery in every line of his face, and for the nonce forgetting her message. 'Are you ill?'

'Ill?—no,' he laughed, with an effort. 'Do you want me?'

'Miss Pennacove is below, sir. Mrs. Goldwin is out, and she wishes to see you.'

'Miss Pennacove!' he exclaimed, with a vehemence that brought a smile to Mrs. Dripper's thin lips and wrinkled her countenance, and then, without another word, he shot past her

like a flash, and went all but flying down the broad staircase to the drawing-room.

'God bless him!' cried his foster-mother, as she watched him over the banisters. 'He is off like a rocket at the mere mention of her name.'

Una's arrival was scarcely a coincidence at this juncture, for she often went to Goolgun if Roland could not come to Una-ville; and, besides, she had been expecting him this afternoon, and his failing to appear accounted for this visit.

'What is the matter, Rol?' she asked, when he sat down near her on a crimson plush settee and had just released her hand.

'What should be the matter?' he replied with evasion.

The matter? Everything was the matter, he told himself, as he sought her pure face, so chaste, so cultured, so calm, framed in the prettiest of bonnets, with its shrimp ribbons tied daintily beneath her chin; for though Una was approaching a *bas bleu*, she did not scorn personal adornment. To the contrary, she exercised considerable taste, and always wore becoming colours. Roland thought she looked fresher and more charming than ever in her soft cashmere draperies and her delicately gloved hands, in which she held a light lacy sunshade.

'I don't know what should be the matter,' she said, quietly smiling; 'but you look as if you had had a fright.'

There certainly was a wildness in his aspect; he was unusually pale, and his forehead was still wet with heat.

'I have been walking very fast,' he explained. 'But never mind my looks, Una; let us talk. I am so glad you are here; I wanted to see you.'

He drew out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead with it, and flicked at the framework of the settee, and next at his boots, as she answered:

'Oh, you are! Well, how am I to reconcile that with having to seek you, when you gave me to understand you were coming this afternoon for a little recreation over Shelley?'

'Something put it entirely out of my head.'

'The "something" that has frightened you, sir, and of which you are ashamed to speak.'

She was 'jesting at scars,' and knew it not. He could not bear it, so put his hand on hers for a second, and said solemnly:

'It is something that you must know, that I want to tell you, but don't know how.' They looked fully at each other for a second, and then he averted his head, and flicked with his handkerchief again anywhere within reach. 'Una, answer me. Did you know—did she ever tell you—I mean did Jessie—our little Mid, upon whom we have been looking as a mere child all this time—ever tell you her most private thoughts and wishes? She did confide in you, I know.'

'And if she did, do you wish me to speak of them?'

Una spoke the least bit coldly, indicating her surprise that he should even hint at learning their nature from her.

'No, no; not exactly that. But if she did, it will be easier for you to understand why I am troubled—why I really have had a fright, and what my position is in regard to her.'

Una's face was quick now to reflect the pain that was in his, while the sunshade began to roll and unroll within her hands.

'Go on,' she said; 'tell me everything.'

She half expected to hear what he had to tell, but scarcely to hear it so soon.

'You know, Una,' he continued, 'I have told you almost everything since we have known each other that has touched my own interests. You alone have understood all my hopes and fears; with you I have discussed future plans; from you I have had aid; by you I have been advised. Advise me now. I want your help badly. Listen. A man stands at the junction of two roads; the one leads to a long-desired haven, where a gem shines like a beacon ahead, flashes light across his path, and draws him to itself; the other leads to breakers—perhaps to quicksands; the road is cold and dreary, and only the thought that one to whom he has been a dear friend, and who is a friend to him, may come to grief there makes him turn and hesitate which road to take. Yet he craves for the gem while he would protect the friend.' He ventured to look at her again; the sunshade was being rolled up neatly, her eyes were grave and fixed upon it, but she said nothing. His heart began to beat wildly. Oh, why could she not guess his meaning? 'Una,' he cried, forced to state plain facts, and not to dodge round the point, 'must I speak plainer? Well, I have been told to-day of something that you have known a long time, most likely—of Jessie's more than sisterly affection for me. I did not know—I had no idea it could be so; I have done nothing to excite it.'

'Who told you?'

Una's face remained perfectly calm; even the sunshade lay passive in her lap. Roland would have preferred an active annoyance or pain, as he replied:

'Her mother, to-day; she sent for me purposely—thinks Mid and I have quarrelled; is under the impression that her feeling for me is, and always has been, reciprocated, and thought to reconcile us, because Jessie has been ill, and apparently because the real state of the case has been borne home to her, I don't know how. Jessie has her foot on the quicksands, and——'

He hesitated.

'I understand now,' said Una very gently, without any bitterness, any manifestation of rivalry, her eyes clear, limpid, undimmed.

Roland's heart sank. Then he had judged her wrong; she was only his friend, after all. With a break in his voice, he said:

'You know I am the man calling for guidance, who craves for the gem, and, while aghast at the quicksand, yet believes it will not be quite ruthless, or destroy its victim utterly.' His voice changed—it trembled—and once more he wiped the damp hair from his temples. 'Should I leap to the rescue, will it not be at the peril of another? Not mine—not mine! Oh, Una darling, tell me! We are so young yet. I thought until now that life lay before us like a smiling green level—that we understood each other; and because of that I have only allowed my actions to speak until this hour, when circumstance compels me to bare my heart to you by words. How can I tell Mrs. Lockstud the truth until I speak to you, and learn from your own lips that I may do so? Shall the gem be mine, or—the sacrifice?'

Una, whose profile alone had been seen hitherto, now turned her face full upon Roland, and met his eyes glued on hers, and burning with passionate pleading. She was very pale, yet perfectly calm, and spoke with a quiet dignity—very softly, almost in a whisper.

'To give yourself to Jessie—to our Middie—is not a sacrifice. She loves you passionately, and love begets love. Don't say "sacrifice," Rol. She is so much in earnest about you that she

has considered you her property for years, and certainly will pine from disappointment. She has told me everything—you are right. She is not strong enough to contend against bleak winds, or to save herself from the quicksands without your help. Save her, Rol, and God bless you both!' She rose, and put out her hand; he likewise stood up, but did not, or would not, see her outstretched hand. He set his eyes upon a picture opposite—a painting representing Roderick Dhu and Fitz-James before the combat, with the lines beneath:

> 'Come one, come all, this rock shall fly
> From its firm base as soon as I.'

Her lips began to tremble; her voice quivered ever so slightly. 'Good-bye, Rol! I must hurry home. I am glad you told me this. Good-bye! Shake hands.'

His hand met hers in silence; he escorted her to the door, and parted from her without a word, because grief had set a vice-like grip on his throat and was choking him. Generally he walked with her to the garden-gates to say a last good-bye; to-day she went alone.

He returned to the settee, and buried his face in his hands.

'She did not shed a tear,' he thought. 'I have been a fool to think she cared more than as a friend. I have been a poor physiognomist, trying to read her, and unable to spell one thought of Middie's. All wrong—all wrong!'

The hope that had nestled so long at his breast, thus rudely shaken, now broke loose from its hold with a wrench that was torture; but its flight decided his future action towards Jessie.

Una walked swiftly towards her home; reaching there, she hurried to her room, locked the door, flung her dainty bonnet from her head, letting it fall unheeded on the carpet, and lastly sank on her knees at the foot of her bed. Like Roland, she let her face fall on her hands, and at length gave vent to the anguish that she had suppressed in his presence.

'Oh, Rol! my love—my darling! What have I done? what have I done? You will never know the truth now. Only God can see into my soul—can see how it has struggled to do the right. He will give me strength to bear it, as He has helped my tongue this hour to proclaim the death-warrant of my heart's desire.'

Now, the fact of a young lady deliberately sending the man who loves her, and whom she loves, from her feet to kneel before another may savour of the improbable, may point to a striking departure from human nature; but let it be understood and remembered that men, and women, too, before to-day, have sacrificed desire at the altar of duty, and accepted martyrdom to uphold a principle—men and women ranging above the ordinary level of selfish, poor humanity, thinking and acting from that moral altitude which, as the Alpine air for purity, cannot conceive any but noble thoughts, and so touches heroism. Of such was Una Pennacove, the friend and confidante of Jessie Lockstud, who, but an ordinary mortal, had poured out all her soul with its wealth of woman's love and sweet anticipations into her ears, who relied so thoroughly upon her friendship, and had upon one occasion refused to accept a gentle hint that he upon whom she had set her heart might have no thought of marriage with her. What would an acceptance of Roland's wooing mean under those circumstances but treachery to her girl-friend's trust? Was she to go to her and exclaim, 'You have been building castles in the air, for Roland is mine, and I am Roland's. Behold our joy!' or had she done wrong in not saying to him, 'Let us be happy, and let Mid get over her misery or die; we are not to blame if she should perish in the quicksands'?

Rather than debase her womanhood thus, she was ready to widow it for ever—to stifle the yearnings of her own heart. Yet the self-imposed burden was so weighty that it bowed her in suffering, while Roland's expression of dumb pain, graven on her memory, made it harder still to bear, though she tried to soften her misery with a dull hope.

'He is brave,' she told herself, 'and good; he will not be troubled for long, for Mid will comfort him, and he will be happy yet; but I——'

The sentence was only completed with a low wail.

There were two more individuals thrown into consternation through Jessie's love-sickness.

While Roland moaned and Una wept, Isabella Goldwin—by request—was having a private interview with Lockstud at the bank. She was sitting opposite to him, straight as a dart, and lily white; he was bent forward with his elbows on his

office-table, his hands clasped more in an attitude of despair than prayer, his brows knitted, his face colourless.

'The girl is ill,' he was saying; 'she has been ill some time, and is worse to-day. She cried last night when I spoke to her of young Lannager.'

'And no wonder!' came the answer. 'Could you expect her to do anything else? Why hurry one trouble upon the heels of the other? If you had sent her away to the country to recruit her health, and be off with the old love first, before forcing upon her the new, you would have been wise; now,' Mrs. Goldwin shrugged her shoulders, 'you have muddled the business. If she has any affection for Roland, it isn't likely that she can look favourably upon Frank Lannager all at once, and compulsion won't work. But you are making a mountain out of a molehill. Roland does not return the—the folly, let us say; his thoughts are centred elsewhere.'

'That may be,' said Lockstud, gnawing at his moustache and frowning more than ever; but the Fates are perverse. He is quixotic, you know. He will rush into fire at the risk of his own limbs to save a dumb brute; he will do more than that for a woman, especially for Jessie, if he once knows what ideas she has in her head about him, and why she is ailing.'

'I know he can do stupid things very often.'

'Your idea of stupidity is singular,' he answered, drawing himself up a little proudly, and then added, with much earnestness, almost dramatic force: 'He is noble. I am proud of him; I love him. I would like to be worthy to take him in my arms and tell him the whole truth—the miserable truth, if——'

'You do well to hang on to the "if,"' she said haughtily and imperiously; 'you *dare* not.'

'You are right. I dare not. I fear him.'

'Pshaw! you are a coward in your declining years. I don't fear him or Jessie, nor am I going to waste time in useless lamentations. I advise you to act.'

'You have no love for him; you can't feel as I do. He thinks me cold and indifferent, maybe, and God knows I am not. If I am a coward, it is because I seem to be groping in the dark, and don't know what evils lurk in it.'

'Come, enough of this!' She rose to her feet. 'The evils lurk for me as much as for you; but they shall not alarm me till I meet them, and that may never be.'

'How do you propose to keep them at bay?'

He looked up at her with a strange confidence in her aid, yet noticed that for all her bravado fear looked out from her eyes, and sat upon her lips in whiteness, as she replied:

'It is not too late to send her to the country, somewhere; her failing health will supply excellent reasons for the proposal. I will do my part. Roland and Una in the meantime shall come to an understanding. Then, when Jessie, by this means, shall be compelled to make a virtue of necessity, you can bring on your other man if you like, or leave him alone.'

'He holds an excellent position,' reasoned Lockstud; 'in time he would make her forget this trouble. You will help me here, too. When meeting with the Lannagers, you could cry up Jessie, lay some stress on the dowry I intend to give. Not that it will matter much to young Lannager, for he is already attracted; but it might facilitate matters by exciting family influence; and Frank's importunities will be irresistible in the end, and we shall be out of the darkness when once she is promised in marriage.'

'You scarcely deserve my help for trying to frighten me with that little stagey flourish,' she said.

'It was nature that spoke,' he answered, bowing his head; 'think no more of it, and accept my thanks for your suggestions.'

She settled her lace mantle and prepared to leave.

'There is nothing more to be said now,' she remarked, indifferent to his thanks; 'but you can write to me of progress.'

They shook hands, and he held the door open for her to pass out, and thus the interview ended.

There were no amorous glances, no smiles or caresses—that was but a dream; for Isabella Goldwin had gauged Lockstud's character since she had ceased to be of use to him. But if the love-knot were sundered, there still existed a tie to unite their lives, and which threatened them both, if clumsily fingered, as a mischief-knot to strangle.

Jessie appeared at the dinner-table that night with a little more colour in her cheeks, a sparkle in her eye, and was ready to meet her brother Jack's bantering humour in reference to a

fraudulent illness and convenient blind for indolence, etc., with her usual repartee.

Strange to say, Lockstud, who had never been over-anxious or indulgent if his children sickened, was now roused to interest; and his daughter's merry retort fell musically on his ears, as well as on those of Mrs. Lockstud.

'She is getting over it, after all,' he thought, 'and I have been frightened at shadows.'

And Mrs. Lockstud, who had lost no time in making Jessie understand that Roland was deeply hurt because she had doubted him, that he was coming soon, had really confessed his love, and had looked wretched, said, 'The darling! she is happier already.'

CHAPTER VIII.

LARRY SHOWS HIS TEETH AT THE MENTION OF LOCKSTUD.

ALTHOUGH close work was more imperative with him than ever, as the days of examination drew near, Roland could no more settle down to his studies this Saturday afternoon, when Una had bade him go to Jessie, than dance a hornpipe. Fortunately, the night approaching was not one of the seven in the week marked by his tutor's visit—the tutor still retained to read with him twice a week, and not to act in the general sense of a 'coach,' the driving being scarcely necessary here. Thrown as he was out of his groove by this jolting episode in his life, from which he could scarcely escape without an abrasion—an abrasion not coming within the province of the pharmacologist—he found something comforting in the thought that he would be safe from intrusion.

He spent the rest of the afternoon in his study in hard reflection, but not over books; and when the sun began to decline, he left the house, leaving word with Mrs. Dripper that he intended dining out, that his absence might be accounted for to his mother. Unable to dissemble, he was anxious to avoid her sharp observation, and, worse still, her interrogations.

Mrs. Dripper glanced at him uneasily, but made no comment. 'A lovers' quarrel,' she mentally decided, as she noted that something was wrong with her beloved young master.

Perfectly indifferent as to where he intended to wander, he roamed aimlessly through the streets of Virginia Bay, and found himself in another locality. For him to go to Jessie at once was impossible; as a friend in the old unrestrained freedom, yes; as a suitor—a lover, oh no, not yet, double-faced and double-hearted as he felt such a visit would prove at the present moment. He was too conscientious to go to her feigning a devotion, acting a lie; it was for him to strangle the old passion first—wrestle, slay, and bury, but wrestling needed strength.

Una had buckled an armour about him, which, in its newness and bad fit, was cumbersome; he would weary under it until use made it easy.

He stood hesitatingly at the corner of a lengthy street, beginning with a steep declivity and ending in a level stretch, and leading to the City Park; and then with a cigarette between his lips and a cane in his hand, he went on his way, forgetting all about his dinner, and only wanting to think; for his mental strides were as a rule, quicker and stronger for a simultaneous locomotion of body.

It was just at that hour when the hum of a Saturday's trade is temporarily suspended before the spring to energetic life, before the busy emporium gapes under the brilliant gaslight of street and shop, and extends its tongue like that of the ant-eater to allure flies, and draw in coin for transit to the commercial maw. The streets were dull, the lamps not yet lit. The shops were empty, and vehicular traffic was lulled, saving for a bus bound to time rumbling between city and outskirts. The quiescence suited his mood admirably, and invited him to continue his walk, which, being rapid, soon brought him to the park steps and into the park, where the loneliness was still more decided, and but for a passing footfall now and again telling of someone hurrying homeward, and a dark form full length on a bench face downward, announcing the loafer or inebriate, would have been solitude.

Heated with his perambulation, he was glad now to rest and drink in the pure evening breeze as it laved his face and

temples, and he lifted his hat to invite it to sport with his hair and cool his heated head.

He felt all the better for his walk ; the bodily exercise, while circulating the blood, had invigorated thought and purpose ; even Nature began to assert herself and declare a vacuum, the result being a realization of the necessity for food, a vulgar reminder of the animal in him ; nevertheless, the twilight deepened, the stars began to faintly twinkle, and the tall trees to loom gloomily under the mantle of night, before he moved on. All footsteps had ceased, even the loafer had slouched off, and darkness fell as he, conscious now of dreariness and the yawning vacuum, arose and sought his club, where he found refreshment for the inner man, and from whence he strode briskly on again in peripatetic reflection.

He entered one of the city's leading streets ; it was all alight, the shops displaying their wares under the full force of the gas. The rush of busy feet and the jostling had started ; the bargaining was lively ; the women with their baskets were gathering edible stores for their coming Sunday's consumption ; while easy-going, indulgent husbands carried sleeping babies in their arms, or a mother bore both child and basket, with a toddling two-year-old holding her skirt in its fist. There was paterfamilias doing all the shopping, and paterfamilias escaped from the noisy hearth to do his own pleasure and parade with his friends ; and there were dudes, and chatting girls, and Tom, Jack, and Harry, each with a Hebe on his arm, and ragged bare-footed urchins staring at pastrycooks' windows, their noses pressed against the panes, their eyes big with desire, their nostrils tantalized with the new sweet smell of raspberry tarts and jam rolls, so temptingly displayed, 'so near and yet so far.'

Roland was not so lost in his own meditation as to lose sight of this pathetic phase of Saturday night's sight-seeing. Two boys, more hungry and tattered than the rest, unable to tear themselves away from a window, such as described, riveted their eyes there until they watered.

Suddenly something toppled on each boy's nose—something that lightly laid on the frouzy caps, slipped, and went clinking at their bootless toes. Each stooped and picked up a shilling ; they turned round sharply to discover if possible the donor or loser, but could find no trace of either in the moving crowd of

men and women and lads and lasses. However, this did not trouble them ; for they at once appropriated the money, and gave the pastrycook the benefit of their windfall.

They feasted, but if they sickened Roland was responsible. Anxious to get out of the throng into which he had entered mechanically not pre-planning his route, he threaded his passage as quickly as he could, but in his haste collided with a man pushing on in an opposite direction.

'I beg your pardon,' said Roland.

'Thunder!' was the unexpected response.

'What, Mr. Larry! who would think of meeting you here?'

'And who'd ha' thought to meet you, eh?' echoed the old man. 'You didn't show up at the house to-day; we all expected you.'

Here Mr. Larry took possession of Roland by slipping an arm through his, compelling him to say farewell at once to further privacy.

'Let us get out of this street. I don't know how I got into it,' saying which Roland turned right about, to traverse ground just trodden and return to Goolgun.

'I might as well be in my study as where I am,' he thought inwardly, resenting Larry's companionship and heartily desiring to be alone. But Larry, being rather jubilant at the unexpected meeting, had firmly linked himself to his side, and was stepping out with him.'

'Which way is yours?' Roland asked presently, when his friend made no attempt to quit his hold on the arm, and they had walked some paces in silence.

'Yours,' said Larry.

'I am going home.'

'Very good, youngster; so am I.'

'The walk is a long one; perhaps we had better ride.'

'I'm on for a walk if you are. I came in on the 'bus, and I've got enough muscle and sinew yet for a tougher walk than from here to Virginia Bay.'

Roland accepted the inevitable ; so the two men, arm-in-arm, beat their heels together over the flags and under the lamp glare, the white-haired, yellow-skinned, ferret-eyed, stooping old man apparently supported by the stalwart youth he persisted in

clinging to, and who was so abstracted that the absence of his ready merry talk made Larry abruptly ask:

'What's up?'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, you're down in the dumps.'

'I? Not at all.'

Roland shook his head, and his lip waved upward with an attempt at a smile; but in reality he was not in the most generous humour, and was annoyed at the old man's too active demonstration of friendship just at this hour, when his mind was somewhat racked and his heart so sore with a trouble which was all his own, for which he was perseveringly constructing a sort of moral coffin, to be borne on his shoulders, and ultimately deposited in its grave. It was absolutely necessary for him to hide the peculiar obsequies and endeavour to appear as usual.

'You find me in a thoughtful mood, and I can't talk much when that is on me,' he added.

'Look here, youngster,' answered Larry, not at all satisfied, 'I don't want to pry into your secrets, if so be you have any, but when I see Jerry's boy, that's pretty lively like most times, forgetting that somebody's walking alongside of him, and looking mopish, I say, "Something's up." Now, what's up?—out with it.'

'Nothing.' This was muttered more than spoken, and Roland felt a wave of hot blood rush over his face, as the compulsory false word mocked at his keen sense of truth.

They had left the blaze of city light behind them, so that this conscience-flag suddenly hoisted failed beneath night-shadows to strike as a signal, but the low-breathed 'Nothing' suggested a sulkiness to Larry.

'I might be your father; if I'm not I feel something like one. You're not going to blind me; I know something's wrong,' continued Larry. 'I hear lots of things—how you spin your cash for one; and maybe you're up a tree; if you are, say the word, and Larry's the chap to fetch you down. I've got more than I want, and when you come in for your own (and soon that'll be) you can pay me back. Out with it now, and I'll give you a blank cheque to fill in as how you best like it.'

Roland was crestfallen, not at this unlooked for hypothesis,

but at the generosity following it, which by contrast with his own churlish humour shone in exaggerated brilliance, and made his heart ache, as the pupil of the eye weakened by darkness shrinks and waters before a sudden glare of light. He shook himself mentally, and tried to make amends for his neglect by turning a smiling face on his companion, and forcing his usual heartiness to his manner.

'You are a friend indeed,' he said, 'and I shall never forget your kindness. But you must think me a miserable fellow to need help of that sort. I really need nothing. I am only a bit out of sorts, and you will do me a kindness by taking no notice of it.'

'Well, now, that's a comfort right off,' answered Larry. 'It ain't quite square for a chap with your income to be overrunning the constable; but lads will be lads, and I thought you might be one o' them sort, and though I'd give you my last penny, still, I'm glad you don't want it, and young men——'

'Did you dine at Unaville?' interrupted Roland, with a thoughtless discourtesy, but anxious to cut short what threatened to be an unnecessary homily on the follies of youth.

'Yes; they said you had a notion of coming round there this afternoon, you know. I got tired of waiting for a sight of your face, so thought I'd take a stroll, and slap bang I run up agen you just when I want a talk with you! I want to ask you about that pretty creature.'

'What pretty creature?' queried Roland.

'Ah, you rogue!' chuckled the old man, drawing his arm from Roland's for a second, in order to dig a couple of fingers in the young man's ribs. 'What pretty creature? Gammon you don't know—do you think I haven't got eyes in my head? What pretty creature? You know well enough. Well, she's a daisy—a pearl—a—a queen—a—— Blessed if I know what she ain't that ain't good and sweet! I never thought that a woman could be such an angel, and so clever, too! Why, she talks like a newspaper and sings like a canary. She's a plum, an' no mistake, and you're a lucky dog. I've knowed a few women in my time, and sly things they could be, ready to hate each other and fool the men. She ain't that sort. What pretty creature?' Another chuckle and another dig.

'You speak of Miss Pennacove?' responded Roland, knowing

full well that Larry could mean no other, and wincing at the badinage.

'Ay, that's it, youngster; and I want your advice. I want to give her a tremenjus whack of a present. Now, what shall it be? I'd like to give her a heap of diamonds. She'd look like a duchess in 'em! What do you think of a what-do-you-call-'em on her head and a chain of em' round her neck, or a few on her wrists and fingers, eh?'

'She would prefer books,' replied Roland shortly.

'Books!' Larry scratched his head. He knew so little about books, and, somehow, gems seemed most appropriate for this girl, who had won his esteem, and even affection, in her character of hostess and friend. Gems would respond to the brightness she had shed about him in her uncle's house, and show her how earnestly he would reciprocate her kindness. 'What sort of books? She's got a power o' them already. I thought to give her diamonds. Do you mean Greek and Latin stuff?'

'No; but good standard books and works of reference. I know what she wants in books, and can give you a list, and they will please her more than the Koh-i-noor itself.'

'Bravo! so you shall. You must know more about it than me; that's why I asked you, you see. Do you think I might throw in a few songs and tunes? I like to hear her sing, but don't like the tunes; they ain't her—they belong to the pianner; but, then, she likes 'em, and I ain't everybody.'

'I can't help you so well there, for I know so little about music; but I know somebody who will be willing to help you.'

Roland was thinking of Jessie, but led Larry's thoughts in quite a different direction, for he answered quickly:

'Yes, yes; I know him too; but I don't like going to strangers. He's always hanging round her pianner. He's sweet on her; per'aps he thinks he'll cut you out; but he won't, eh?'

'I was not alluding to a man at all'—Roland spoke somewhat impatiently, for the reference to Charlie Mountfu set his nerves leaping unpleasantly—'but a young lady—a friend of mine, and Miss Pennacove's too.'

'Eh?' Larry stopped suddenly, as if an invisible obstacle blocked his path, unhooked his arm from Roland's again,

folded it with the other over his chest, and planted his legs, resembling a miniature Colossus of Rhodes. 'A young lady is it? What's her name?' he said, as he stared at his young friend.

'Miss Lockstud,' replied Roland, compelled to stand still also.

'Ah! I thought as much,' came the answer slowly and deliberately. Then his arms unfolded, and he put out a hand to grip Roland's shoulder. 'Look here, my lad; I don't want nothing to do with that firm, and I advise you to leave it alone.'

They were far away from the crowd at this time, and stood partly in shadow thrown by a terrace, which, receding from the street and with its closed blinds, gave no light to them.

'What firm do you mean?' asked Roland, now more astonished than irritated, wondering at Larry's attitude of defiance, his sudden change of voice.

'Lockstud and Co.—Lockstud and his sons and daughters. I hate the whole kit of 'em!'

'You don't know them.'

'I know him, ain't that enough? And'—his grip fastened heavily on the shoulder—'I've heard things that I wouldn't believe, and don't believe now, because I know who you've got in your eye. They say that girl of his is setting her cap at the young millionaire.'

Once more a rush of blood coloured Roland's face, and shadow befriended him. The whole conversation was to him, in his present condition, as acid on a raw skin, the smarting of which he was trying to bear without sigh; but the injustice in this assertion against the woman whom he had determined to marry, and whose love knew no baseness, could not be allowed to pass without vindication, and presented an outlet to vent the steam hitherto suppressed.

'They say what is false!' he cried loudly, forgetting he was in the street. 'Such vulgarity as is implied in "setting the cap" does not touch that young lady, and——'

'Sh—sh!' interrupted Larry. 'Your father's blood is up. Sh!'

'We have known each other since we were children,' Roland continued, dropping his voice, but speaking with passionate accents, 'and the whole family are friends of mine—have behaved well to me; and——' He hesitated, then plunged

boldly: 'And if I should marry her some day, it will be of my own free will, and no business of anybody's.'

'Marry her!' exclaimed Larry, under his breath, and looking up and down the street as if in fear of being overheard, while his clutch strengthened on Roland. 'Marry her! You don't mean it. You're on for the other one. *You* marry a Lockstud!'

'Why not?'

Larry drew the young man to him with both hands, and whispered in his ear:

'Because there's hell in it!'

His face worked; his eyes burned with rage and hate.

'If you have a hatred against the father, you surely must have a reason. I am not going to plead for him; he may deserve your ill-will; but why extend it to those who are innocent? Is it fair to ask how he has so offended you?'

'Fair enough; but not fair for me to tell you. He is a double-dyed villain; I can tell you that. Don't press me to say more. I can't answer for myself.' He paused, and, letting go his hold on the shoulders, passed his arm again through Roland's, and said: 'Come on; come away from here; let us walk, but don't talk about marrying *that one*—that's nonsense, that is!'

The walk was continued, and both men were silent for some minutes—both were thinking of Lockstud. Roland could not overcome a certain dislike for him, although he was the head member of the family to which he was endeared, and he was more inclined to blame him than Larry for whatever breach had separated them.

Knowing that Lockstud vilified Larry whenever his name was touched upon, and remembering his mother's wild declaration of animosity against the same individual, he was not slow to believe that Larry had incurred their malice and displeasure over one and the same thing; but how had he done it? that was the question. Perhaps both alike had repelled him with their haughtiness, had sneered at his ungainliness. Whatever it was, he leaned to Larry's side, but, urged to resent his demeanour towards the family generally, he said, after a lengthy pause:

'You may not know that the Lockstuds are my earliest friends; the sons and daughters are like my own sisters and

brothers. I have been reared with them, and when you include them in your anathema against their father, you are unjust, and my friendship for you alone forbids me saying as much as the offence warrants. You must not expect me to stand by quietly and hear you denounce wholesale in this way.'

Larry took this very submissively; he did not speak for a minute, but his quick step never relaxed, nor his hold on the arm. They were about entering Virginia Bay, and were not far from Unaville when he replied, as if he had been thinking out his answer:

'You are Jerry's own boy. I'm not going to say a word agen you for sticking up for your friends; but if you knowed him as I do, thunder! you'd be my way of thinking and hating. And you riled me when you talked of marrying his girl. Of course that can't be. You never meant it; it was a spar, that's all. You're going to have the Daisy; and she'll be rich, I'll take care of that. Washington Larry may be an ignorant old man, but he knows how to be grateful, how to love, and how to hate too; and when Jerry's boy talks to him about marrying a Lockstud, love makes the hate stronger. Ah! there she is, hard at it still, I'm blessed!'

They had reached Unaville, and had halted at the garden wicket, and Larry's last remark was provoked because music was borne to them from the Unaville drawing-room.

'She can play,' thought Roland. 'She is happy.'

'Coming in, of course?' said Larry, with a hand on the gate-latch.

'No, not to night. I must get home now.'

'Very well, as you like,' answered Larry, trying to look into the face of the other and read some confirmation of certain suspicions which began to trouble him. He drew his arm away from Roland's, and detained him a little while longer, holding on to his coat button. 'Don't you be misunderstanding one another, eh? Is that it? Look here, youngster, that chap ain't a patch on you, for all his singing; and she thinks so, too, and don't be thinking'—here his words shook as they escaped him—'of that man as a father-in-law, even if you've changed your mind about *her*'—he pointed to the house which sheltered Una—'and don't marry a Lockstud. He ain't a

murderer in the eyes of the law; but, for all that, he broke a good man's life, as sure as there's a God above us! And I say, Curse him!'

He let go the button, added an abrupt 'good-night,' and shuffled away over the gravel path, leaving Roland staring stupidly after him.

'What is it he knows of Lockstud?' thought he. 'There's bad blood between them. Mother must know all about it. I'll ask her; I'll make her tell me. It is a mystery. But should Jessie suffer for this rancour, to humour an old man? Is it "the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on an edge"? Am I to set hers aching so? No, no, my friend; it must be mine henceforth to shield her from, not to add to, her troubles. I have made up my mind.' He thought of the lines under the picture of Roderick Dhu and Fitz-James, and repeated them:

'"Come one, come all, this rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I."'

But at that moment a man's voice floated to him pouring forth in song some grand impassioned strain to a flowing accompaniment, beneath Una's hands evidently, and then the air was caught midway by a sweet, clear treble, and two voices blended. The melody, sustained in exquisite time and sweetness by tenor and soprano, vibrated to his heart, and, paradoxically enough, fell in discordant, distorted sounds on his ear.

He thought of Larry's words, 'He won't cut you out,' and smiled bitterly.

'She is able to sing and be happy,' he muttered. 'And that fellow, who hasn't got a second idea in his head, can make her so—that——'

'Stop! And if she is happy,' sneered an inner voice, 'what is that to you? You are jealous—vulgarly jealous. You are made of pretty stuff to make a hero, are you not? You are made of ordinary clay, Roland Goldwin. You should be pleased, not dejected. You are assigned elsewhere. Go and do the work allotted to you.'

In spite of this inward monitor, Roland could not look pleased as he sauntered away to Goolgun.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SAINT VICTORIOUS.

ROLAND walked on to Goolgun with the chiming voices sweeping at his heart-strings; his heart, like a faulty Æolian harp, not tuned in unison, only gave forth a wail and no melody in response to the wave of music.

'She is happy,' he repeated, 'and I have been all astray. She does not care for me.'

'That is fine; I like that,' said Captain Pennacove as the duet closed and Larry, who had been lingering in the hall till its finish, entered.

Washington had no desire to disturb the singers with his creaking boots, and he wished to let his temper run down and cool, it having been at fever-heat, as it always was at the thought or mention of Theodore Lockstud.

Una rose from the piano; her face was flushed, her eyes bright—hectic-touched—her manner electric. She had been playing and singing ever since dinner, rattling off dashing galops and spirited airs until Mountfu had requested the duet, its words just harmonizing with his own sentiments, for it teemed with romance and passionate love.

The sweet rich tenor had warbled out the very soul of the man in stirring pathos. He had never sung so well in his life. The Captain was moved to clap his hands; even Larry nodded his head in approval; but Una, who had not done her best at all in giving force to the expression needed, said, as she left the piano: 'I think it is a stupid song,' with a pettish defiance directed at Mountfu, who looked at her rather reproachfully. 'Mr. Larry, you were sensible not to stay indoors such a glorious night as this.' After which remark she left the room for the veranda.

Had Roland not walked off quite so soon he would have seen her standing there at the rails, her hands clasped over them, her eyes raised to the clouds, but unobservant of the grandeur she had just extolled.

Through the open window her uncle's voice came to her in sportive words:

'That's rather hard on that musical box of yours, seeing you've been taking it out of it for the last two hours.'

'Ay, it's a fine night,' put in Larry; 'I had a nice little trot, too, and not alone, neither.'

'Hollo! hollo!' roared the Captain, in noisy good-humour, and with a mirthful shaking of body, 'you've been playing gallant, have you? You're a sly cove! Who was the damsel, you Lovelace?'

'Bah!' contemptuously from Larry, inclined to take the joke in earnest. 'A lad it was. It ain't often we run up agen the very thing we want, but I did to-night. Jerry's boy and me ran into each other's arms, that's all.'

'Do you hear that, Una?' called out the Captain. 'And the rascal hasn't been here for two days!'

'It is lovely out here, uncle,' said Una, as if she had not heard his question and remark correctly.

'Mind you don't take cold,' went back the answer, 'going out of this warm room.'

She was quite startled when Mountfu spoke at her ear, having followed her unheard.

'May I find you a wrap or something?'

'No, thank you; but you may do me a favour, if you like.'

'Sing another stupid song, perhaps?' Mountfu looked decidedly surly.

'No; I think we have been selfish, dinning too much music in uncle's ears. Please reward him for his patience, and give him a game of chess.'

Mountfu was not disposed to play chess. He was nettled. The fact of the duet being called 'stupid' had an inference which he was unwilling to accept; moreover, this opinion of a grand conception of words and melody so harmoniously wedded was quite antagonistic to one previously expressed.

'You are music on fire to-night,' he had said to her in an undertone during one of those frenzied, fantastic galops which she had produced within the hour.

'It will burn itself out directly, then,' she had replied, and it was already burnt out.

He failed to understand these new glimpses of her character just presented: her wild, harum-scarum canter over the keys first, her chilly indifference second. He made no response to

her solicitation, but also leaned on the veranda rails, and looked at the clouds, while he pursed his mouth for an attempt at a nonchalant whistle.

'You will not play, then?' she asked presently, after an awkward silence on both sides.

'Yes, I will,' he answered; 'that is, I might if you will say outright you would rather be alone.'

'For a little while. I am tired.' She spoke wearily.

'Tired, and still standing?' He was on the alert immediately, and drew a veranda chair towards her, as he said with less frigidity: 'Perhaps you would prefer sitting down?'

'Thank you, I would.' She accepted this attention with her wonted gentleness.

'Will you answer me a question or two before I do as you wish?' he asked, bending over the chair-back.

'Conditionally—if answerable,' she replied, beginning to harden as he softened again.

'Then what is the matter with you to-night?'

'That is unanswerable. I was not aware that anything particular was the matter. You are under a delusion.'

'Am I? I don't think so. Why did you call that song "stupid," when not so long ago you said it was divine?'

'I alluded to the music, not the words, which struck me to-night as a bad imitation of Romeo and Juliet.'

'I can't agree with you. Music and words alike are grand to me. Let me tell you why.'

He bent lower.

'Please don't; I really am not anxious to know.'

'You are tired; you are—well, I won't say what. Good-night.'

Mountfu disappeared.

As he had not held out his hand, she concluded that he had gone inside to propose the game of chess. He did go inside, but passed through the house and made an exit at the side garden-gate, to avoid passing her to reach the front wicket.

They were quite old friends, and she would have considered a breach with him a trouble; but an irritability was always roused in her when he persisted in stepping over friendship to stand on new ground before her. The disposition to do this had been to the fore this night to a more alarming extent than

ever, compelling her to take refuge behind a tantalizing barrier of caprice; and as her action of the afternoon with Roland was working its effects, Mountfu unwittingly was making her desperate. She ran to the piano to escape him, and there mounted a sort of musical Pegasus, which made him think she was music on fire, and say so.

She remained quite an hour on the veranda when he had gone, never heeding time or the silence that reigned in the drawing-room, where, when she returned to it, she found her uncle and Larry quietly reading.

'Where's Mr. Mountfu?' she asked.

'Mountfu! Lord bless my girl! don't you know where he is? I thought he was on the veranda talking to you,' said the Captain, looking up from his paper and over his glasses at his niece.

'And I thought he was playing chess with you. He must have gone home,' decided Una, rather gravely.

'Polite—very,' grunted the Captain.

'Oh, he said good-night to me. I suppose he did not like to disturb you in your reading,' Una now defended.

Larry's book shifted in his lean hands slightly, and he smiled behind it knowingly.

'"I smell a rat, I smell a rat!" as somebody says,' he mentally cried.

'I am going to bed, uncle,' said Una, stooping to kiss the Captain.

'To bed—so soon?' he said.

'I am tired, and have a slight headache,' she pleaded.

'Too much pianner,' interpolated Larry, setting aside his book. His shyness before her had worn off considerably with constant association. It struck him that an hour or so at the piano, with both hands flying to and fro, fingers hopping from key to key, and wrists leaping over each other, was enough to knock over a navvy. How a young lady could get through so much hard work without showing fatigue would have puzzled him. Piano-playing he considered real hard work for the performer, and yet harder work for the listener to sit out. 'But,' he reasoned, 'it is fashionable-like, and if a girl can't grind out a tune or two she's nowhere; can't get a pass into high life, I s'pose.'

This argument induced him to accept his share of the hard work thrust upon him, but her mad cantering this evening had jarred on his nerves, and if he had told the truth to Roland he would have admitted that the 'tunes' had driven him from the house and led to their meeting.

Quite naturally he attributed Una's headache to 'too much pianner.'

'Is it so, Una?' asked her uncle anxiously. 'Why, I've known you to play for hours. What is it, my dear? I thought you were looking so well before. You are white now. What is it?'

He threw down his paper, and, rising, put his strong right arm about her with a woman's tenderness.

'Nothing, uncle—nothing to make a fuss about. It is just a slight headache, and will be gone to-morrow.'

'And it ain't the pianner?' from Larry.

'No, no,' she laughed, in spite of her suffering. 'I could play all day. Good-night, Mr. Larry.'

'Then it's Mountfu,' said Larry once more wisely to himself; 'it's Mountfu. I've seen it coming on, but she won't tell; he's been jilted. Go ahead, Jerry's boy, and win!' But he only said 'good-night' to her in response, and smiled again behind his book.

The Captain was not so easily pacified.

'It's queer for her to feel ill; she's always so bright,' he said to Larry when Una had gone to her room.

'She's all right,' Larry positively winked. 'Don't fret. "Young love would a-wooing go."'

'I'm not going to; but I don't like a finger of hers, or a quarter of a finger, to ache if I can help it. She is all the world to me, and I'd bargain to take her share of aches on my own shoulders if I could.'

No allusion was made to Larry's latter sentence; his habit of inserting irrelevant quotations in conversation accounted for this, for they were mostly politely ignored as a personal peculiarity would be.

'Well, you'll have to get over that. Folks can't get through the world without their own share of aches—fingers and bodies. She told you she'd be right to-morrow, and so she will. Don't fret,' repeated Larry.

In the meanwhile Una, unaware of Larry's private diagnosis of her case, was in her room and on her knees again, and weeping bitterly, full of self-reproach because all that was earthly in her nature had arisen to a rare mutiny against the fate pursuing her. She had prayed for strength to do the right, and the prayer was not yet fulfilled. Instead of calm there had been tempest; instead of endurance, actual viciousness. If she had snapped half a dozen strings of the piano it would have pleased her.

She had gone through the mimicry of eating dinner with the food choking her, with her uncle's talk, and Larry's few short, dry remarks, and sometimes medley of sentences, dinning in her brain as mere sounds, with an artificial smile on her lip, and the hectic glow in eyes and face, which made the Captain compliment her on her bonny looks, and Larry follow suit.

It was a relief when dessert was cleared and Mountfu joined them, until he relapsed into that cooing, wooing style of his, which she never would accept in earnestness, but parried with smart repartee and girlish fun. To-night even repartee was denied her; in sheer despair she had rushed to the piano, there to vent her feeling in the delirious clash of music.

When Mountfu asked her to sing with him, she did so, but it was the last straw on the camel's back; her bitterness had reached its climax; she condemned the duet, and rushed out of the drawing-room to breathe freer.

It was this rebellion which tortured her; it was her unusual inability to exercise the mind over matter that stung her self-respect. It did not occur to her that Roland would suffer more than a transient disappointment; she could not be as precious to him as he was to her, and he would surely find consolation in Jessie's pure devotion.

Only she herself would be the sufferer, and why could she not take up her burden with stronger arms? Why was there a rebel at her heart, drawing swords with the weak saint confronting it?

There was more zeal in this second outburst of anguish, of supplication, less of mechanical force; more soul, less self-condolence.

The rebel began to crouch abashed; the saint arose, weary and white, but victor.

She did not see Roland at all the next day, excepting in church and at a distance; and on the following Monday she received a note through the post. She recognised the writing, and broke the envelope to read as follows:

'DARLING OLD GIRL,

'You know I can't come to you because of your guest, whom I *might* meet and must not speak to. It is the king's command. How long is he going to stay with you, I wonder? But I want to *talk* to you, oh, so badly!—I ought to say goodly—that *you* must come to me, and let me have my say. Come to dinner. I am not miserable now; I have been a little fool, but that all belongs to what I have to tell you. *Do come!*

'Your loving

'MID.'

Una responded to the invitation for the desired talk, but not for dinner.

'Oh, you have come!' said Jessie, flinging her arms enthusiastically about her beloved girl confidante, as she stood within the Cecillambda hall. 'Now let us get away where we can have a fine old chat. You'll stop to dinner, of course? Come on, and take off your hat.'

All apathy vanished, and the natural flow of spirits no longer dammed by misery, the buoyant Middie led the more staid Una to her own bedroom, chatting the whole way, and scarcely observing at the outset that the brightness was all on one side. With an arm about Una's waist, she conducted her to the room and then to a couch, and all but pushed her on to it, proceeding immediately to draw off her hat, her fingers busy at the knob of the pin which secured it.

'No, dear, don't take it off, and don't press me to stop. I am in arrears with my studies, and must work,' explained Una.

'Then I'm disappointed. I counted upon you spending a whole evening with me—with us; but must be thankful for small mercies,' said Jessie; and then, noting an unusual drawn look in Una's face, she added, 'You are not feeling well, Una, and yet you have come to me. What is the matter?'

'I am quite well, Mid, quite well,' replied Una serenely enough, but decidedly a shade or two paler than hitherto, and

lacking that cheeriness which she was wont to reflect upon all coming near her; 'but it is warm weather now, and one does feel so limp in the summer.'

'You would never do for a Knutsford summer, then,' predicted Jessie, sitting down close to her friend.

'Mr. Larry says it is not half so bad as people think. It is hot, of course, but civilization makes it bearable. People know how to live there now, how to build their houses, and how to dress to suit the climate; and, then, the winter is grand. But,' added Una, with a nervous twitching of her lips meant honestly to be a smile, 'you did not want me to discuss with you the merits or demerits of Knutsford, did you?'

'No,' and Jessie, blushing the least bit, cast her eyes down, and began to goffer her handkerchief on a little brown forefinger, 'no; it's something a great deal more interesting than Knutsford, something that won't quite surprise you, something that has turned sorrow to joy; the sorrow I couldn't speak about before to you. I can now, and that alone makes me happy. I never had to keep anything from you before, Una, but this had to be kept back.'

'And now it is all different,' said Una, as calmly as if her heart were not in her throat and palpitating to pain. 'You were thinking all sorts of foolish things about yourself, and—and Rol—is that it?'

'Yes; how did you guess? And about you, too—did you guess that?'

'About me?'

Una's clear eyes expressed alarm as Jessie raised her own and met them.

'Yes, *you*, dear; don't look so distressed; it was through no fault of your own. I was led to believe that all my hopes—all those cherished hopes which you have heard over and over again—were doomed to be blighted; I was led to believe that he loved you.'

'Indeed! By whom?' Una spoke almost in a whisper.

'By his own mother; she did not say so directly to me, but I heard enough to be deceived. And then, again, I was misled by certain things noted afterwards, and then it came to me all at once that it was not right to aspire to his love, that you were the true mate for him. You are clever and beautiful, and just

everything that I am not; and I love him so that I would die for him if I thought it would make him happy. I was willing to give him up—to you; but I wanted to die, and the hardest part of all was having to lock this secret from you. I was schooling myself to deceive you, to make you think I had suddenly discovered I did not care for him at all—that is, as a husband—and believe I might have done it but for another misery. Papa was trying to force me to accept Frank Lannager. I hate him. You know when papa says, "Do this," it must be done. It was too much for me; it made me ill, and mamma so anxious that her anxiety and sympathy forced me to tell her everything, and she did comfort me so, for she would insist that I was all wrong, and, as it turned out, so I was, and she was right; and, oh, Una, I am so happy; it is so wonderful—so beautiful—like a lovely dream! Sometimes I think I shall wake up from it again, and be miserable, with mamma crying over me. He—he said things to me last night never said before. First he asked me why I had been cold and distant, and then said he had been annoyed, but had determined not to quarrel; and then he kissed me, and said—oh, so solemnly—"Mid, if we have to go through our lives together, let us understand each other henceforth; avoid slights, and ever try to make wrong right. Put your hands in mine, and trust me. As there is a God above, so I will try to be worthy of your love for me." I just hid my face on his shoulder, and burst out crying. I was ashamed of myself. I couldn't help it. My heart seemed to fill my whole body, and beat everywhere. I trembled from head to foot, but felt so happy—so happy.'

'And has he spoken to your father or his mother about it?' whispered Una once more, as if afraid to lift her voice, and making no attempt to put an arm about the happy Jessie's neck, or congratulate her, or take her hand, or kiss her in a girlish exuberance of friendly delight.

'No. You see, we are engaged, and we are not—that is, we have been all in all to each other for years. *You* know that. "Engagement" sounds such a cool business word in connection with us; it suggests an agreement and a lawyer's office, instead of——'

'A rosy Cupid holding out a spiritual bond to be felt, not seen,' interrupted Una, wishing to assist with a comparison.

'Yes, yes, that's more like it,' said Jessie, quite gratefully; 'that's how it is. After all, we are just in the same position as ever, but my stupidity upset things for awhile. When he takes his degree and comes of age, he will speak out, not before; he has said as much. The "engagement" will come in then all right and proper, for he will be his own master. There, dear, that's my news, and it is such a delight to tell you. But'—she put her hand on Una's shoulder with a soft caress—'surely you are not out of patience with me for my blunder about you and him—you have not said one of your kind words yet, or given joy or anything. Wasn't it natural for me, after all, to think he must love you best, when some evidence was thrust before me, and you have always been such friends too, and studying together? My only fear was that you could not feel for him as I did. You have never opened your heart to me about anybody in that way, and if you cared for him very, very dearly, you would have told me as I told you, wouldn't you, dear? Well, you did not; you were and are his stanch friend, as you are mine; but love is quite another thing, so don't be cool or angry with me, dear. You will mar my lovely dream. I have never for one single moment had a jealous thought of you, or loved you less than I do this minute; and I pray—oh, I do pray!—that another Roland will come for you.' Una—who within the last two days was quite a new Una—never quick to display emotion, felt hot tears gush to her eyes, felt sore with compunction for whatever bitter sentiments had been evoked within the half-hour of Jessie's unsophisticated recital of her joy, and suddenly embraced her and wept hysterically, sobbing out broken words:

'God bless you, Mid, and send you and him all the happiness you deserve! Angry with you? No, no—fifty times no! You are nobler than I. God bless you!'

'Oh, don't cry so, dear, don't! it pains me so. I never saw you give way before,' said Jessie, who was not prepared for this rain of tears, and felt a superstitious chill pass through her.

She had heard that it was ominous for a bride-elect to be baptized with joyless tears, and there was no joy in Una's, for Jessie thought she cried from pain at being misunderstood.

'Don't cry! don't cry!' she pleaded.

Very soon Una controlled herself, and throwing back her head, said, with a desperate effort to laugh at her weeping:

'Like you, Mid—I could not help it.'

'You are not hurt because I fancied you might be, or ought to be, annoyed with me?' Jessie asked plaintively.

'No, dear, no; I can be hurt at nothing you do or say. Did you think I could listen to your pretty story unmoved, or to your generous words?'

Una swept her handkerchief across her eyes, impatient with herself still for want of a powerful curb on nerve and emotion.

'Now I feel better,' she said, with a determination to appear thoroughly at ease. 'One must be pardoned for "giving way" sometimes; and I believe this weather tries me. I will take a little walk now, and come again some other day.'

'I never heard you complain of being tired through the weather. Let me order you a cup of coffee; it might revive you.'

'I would rather have the walk, my dear Mid, and think over this pleasant news.'

Una rose.

'One moment.' Jessie half pulled her back to the couch. 'Answer me, Una: have you never been in love?'

'I am wedded to the University—to my books at present, and shall be to a profession by-and-by,' was the answer, the equivocation of which escaped simple Jessie, who looked archly at Una, and interrogated again:

'And you don't care the least bit for Charlie Mountfu—not like I do for Roland?'

'Yes, I do care for him,' replied Una, 'but not as you do for Rol. Are you satisfied?'

'Yes. I knew you would tell me the truth. I knew I was right in thinking you did not care for him so, and told Rol as much.'

'Then, you and he have been discussing the subject?' Una's eyes declared gentle rebuke. 'Now that you have settled your own affairs, you want to take up somebody else's.'

'No,' explained Jessie, 'don't think that; but he thought you favoured his society a great deal.'

'He is right,' Una asserted with desperate decisiveness; 'I do. I love music, and so does Charlie; that is the bond

between us.' She rose a second time. 'Let me get out in the air, Mid; and good-bye.'

Out in the street and alone, she inwardly cried: 'Who knows the whole—the real truth but me? Only One—only One, and He will support me.'

Pondering over Jessie's 'pleasant news,' she went her way, and was quite unwarned of the approach of a barouche, which dashed up to the curb and there halted.

'Miss Pennacove—Miss Pennacove!'

Mrs. Goldwin was leaning towards her from the barouche. Una went up to her.

'Are you in the clouds, or doing a problem?' queried Mrs. Goldwin.

'Doing the problem,' answered Una, without a smile.

'Where are you going?'

'For a walk.'

'Come for a drive instead. You are looking moped, and I want company, but am going to pay a duty call first on the Lannagers—it is their day "at home."'

Una debated the matter in her own mind. She and Mrs. Goldwin were not congenial souls, but polite acquaintances; and she did not wish to be ungracious in receiving this spurt of attention from her. Moreover, she felt rather glad than otherwise to find diversion of thought.

'I will go with you. I owe them a call too,' she said.

'That's right; jump in,' said the lady of the barouche, more affable than ever; and then to the coachman, as Una took her place by her side: 'To Lahraloo.'

They rolled away to Lahraloo.

CHAPTER X.

SCATTERING SEED ON BARREN GROUND.

AMIDST a hum of voices and the gentle clink of china, Mrs. Goldwin and Una were ushered into the long Lannager drawing-room, where Mrs. Lannager was already in full tongue tilt, with the Misses Lannager as allies, engaged with guests.

The Misses Lannager were apples of the Lannager tree, but of an improved quality to the original crop—rosier, rounder, and sounder at the core.

The perpetual smile and elevated brows were happily not repeated in either of these young ladies, yet the tendency to tinsel their utterances, as their mother did hers, with the idea of pleasing, as a nurse shakes a rattle in a baby's face, was fully inherited, but modified; for where Mrs. Lannager smiled and smirked and gushed to excite approbation of herself, her daughters fawned and flattered more often than not to put their friends in an excellent temper with themselves; and it is remarkable how easily most people swallow these sugar-coated words, and what an immediate effect of self-complacence arises therefrom to send a glow of personal pride through their receptive veins.

As Mrs. Goldwin and Una entered the hum ceased, but the clatter went on, for a footboy was gathering empty cups and plates—the débris of the orthodox four o'clock onslaught—and a maid, smartly capped, was handing around fresh cups of tea and relays of cake or wafer slices of bread-and-butter.

Mrs. Lannager advanced half-way to meet the new-comers, all smiles, ecstasy and fuss; and the youngest Miss Lannager, with a fervent osculatory salute to Una, caught her by the hand, and drew her to a chair as soon as greetings were exchanged all round, leaving Mrs. Goldwin to her mother's charge. The eldest Miss Lannager, stationed at a small table behind a silver tea-urn, which discharged its contents into dainty pink porcelain thimble-shaped cups beneath her manipulation, was content to rise and pay homage quietly, the tea-urn demanding most of her attention.

'I am *so* glad to see you, dear,' said the youngest Miss Lannager to Una. 'It is an age since we met.'

'Last week in the gardens, I believe,' Una reminded her, with a quiet smile. 'You would make a moment a century, unlike the scientist, who says time is a moment.'

'Now, that is *so* like you—you do say such *clever* things; but, you know, a moment *is* an age when we are waiting and longing, and it is such a long time since you came to see us. You are so devoted to your studies, I suppose. Perhaps you work too hard; perhaps you have not been well. Have you not been well?'

Miss Lannager's pleasant brown eyes were not slow to observe that Una was not looking so well as usual.

'I am quite well, thank you; I am never ill,' was the reply, given confidently enough, and yet with a little flushing at the question.

'Not that you look ill,' was the quick rejoinder, intended to correct any unpleasant inference likely to be drawn; 'but you are always so bright. My sister and I sometimes envy you.'

'Which means I lack brightness to day. Well, the loss has its compensation for me. It must be an advantageous disadvantage which spares me your envy.' The flush died out and left her wan, as she added: 'I believe the weather makes me droop, and it is quite summerish to-day.'

'You don't like hot weather, then? I prefer it—if not *too* bad—to chapped lips, red noses, and chilblained fingers.'

'Miss Pennacove, do you take sugar and cream in your tea?' came a voice from behind the tea-urn.

Miss Pennacove did take sugar and cream.

On the other side of the room a white-haired, stumpy, jolly-looking old gentleman, present with his wife, was talking to Mrs. Goldwin.

'That's an awfully pretty girl,' he remarked, while his wife was sipping her tea and quietly estimating the cost of the china, so *chic*.

'Of whom are you speaking?' asked Mrs. Goldwin.

'Miss Pennacove, to be sure.'

Mrs. Goldwin raised her lids languidly, and looked towards Una.

'Do you think so? She is too stern sometimes for prettiness. She looks so to-day, or perhaps she assumes the sternness as most becoming to a *bas-bleu*. You know she is one—an execrable *bas-bleu*.'

'Execrable! That's rather harsh, isn't it?'

'Not in my opinion. I am not partial to blue-stockings.'

'Ah, my dear lady, there are blue-stockings *and* blue-stockings. "Save me from a Mrs. Jellaby," I cry. One time I had an antipathy to the *bas-bleu* order of creatures, but I've lived long enough to see my error. A *good* woman learned is more reliable than a good woman simple; a good woman learned will make a better wife and mother than the good woman unlearned,

and therefore ought not to be called "execrable." A woman, for instance, who knows thoroughly the laws of chemistry will make a better cook than the woman who knows nothing whatever about it, whose culinary craft is nothing but a poor imitation of the craft of other silly cooks who unwittingly turn meat into poison. A female domestic economist will be perfected, if a political economist. Give me that sort of *bas-bleu*, and I'll honour her; but when she has a Psyche face and glorious eyes, why, I'm ready to worship her. Don't say "execrable."'

His eyes twinkled with merriment and satisfaction as they turned again on Una, and Mrs. Goldwin vented one of her forced hard laughs.

Everybody turned towards her and expressed amusement and lurking curiosity.

'Now, Mrs. Goldwin,' cried a young clergyman, a Mr. Jilk, who was supposed to be attracted by one of the young ladies of the house, 'she is the happiest who shares her happiness. May we not laugh too?'

'Oh, certainly,' was the response.

The champion of blue-stockingism glanced at his wife and coughed.

Mrs. Lannager and daughters, with the rest of the company, turned smiling and expectant faces to Mrs. Goldwin; Una alone was uninterested, and with eyes cast down on a photograph album, with which she was amusing herself, went on turning over its leaves and inspecting the photos.

'Mr. Bagwag,' spoke up Mrs. Goldwin, with a little mischievous delight in repeating the fat old gentleman's sentiments in her own way, 'has been expounding some peculiar ideas. There is to be a new form of advertisement organized for any lady wanting a *chef*—simply: "Wanted a blue-stocking as head cook; no other need apply."'

The attendants, male and female, supposed not to have sense for aught in that room but their duties, glided about automaton-like and stolid in feature, but tittered comfortably as soon as they were outside.

'Pardon me,' said Bagwag, politely bowing to Mrs. Goldwin and the company. 'That is an ingenious twist of our friend's. I merely wished to prove that a woman with cultured brains, as well as a noble nature, might dignify and elevate the position

of cook. Our longevity depends more upon the cook than ourselves. She holds our liver in her hand very often, and our life is on her head.'

'And if she is pretty?' interpolated Mrs. Goldwin.

'She is a divinity,' asserted Bagwag.

At which everybody but Una laughed; she was still busy with the albums, until an æsthetic young lady sat down by her side and said:

'You are fond of studying portraits, Miss Pennacove?'

'I beg your pardon.'

Una looked up abstractedly.

'I asked if you were fond of studying portraits. I am, and that led to my question. Seeing you so absorbed, I thought you must be.'

'Yes, I'm fond of it sometimes, when I know the people represented.'

'Oh, I am, even if I don't know the people; I know something of physiognomy.'

'Can you judge faces by photos, then?'

'Well—not *always;* but very often, I think. Lavater confesses to have made mistakes occasionally, and of course, you know, he was a real physiognomist.

Una smiled, and said:

'If the master, then, after giving to the world a volume of facts and theories, admits that his decision is not always reliable, what shall be said of his pupils?'

'That they may be an improvement on the master, perhaps,' said this Lavater disciple with decided hauteur, ready to resent what she believed to be an implied contempt of her own ability to interpret features.

'And still fail to arrive at correct conclusions. I believe in phrenology to a very great extent, but physiognomy must be often misleading.'

'You have not studied it.'

'No; but I think face-reading is an inborn sense with us, just as we know by touch what is soft, what is harsh. There are faces that attract, and, again, that repel; and this is exemplified even in babies, who, without reason for a guide, will shrink from some and leap to others. They seem to know their genuine admirers, who is inclined to be gentle and kind, or the

reverse. Everybody is a physiognomist, more or less, according to the impression the face makes; and I don't think the study of physiognomy is an invaluable assistance in judging correctly, nor do I think it quite fair to judge faces by all photos, which, after all, bear a set expression, and where outlines are modified by art.'

'Ah! you want to make me dissatisfied with my pet study, Miss Pennacove; but you won't. If I chose, I could tell you everybody's character in this room.'

'Tell me mine, then,' said Una, 'and I promise I'll not take offence at truths—bitter truths.'

'Supposing I say that there are no *bitter* truths in your case?' asked the æsthetic young lady.

At this Una smiled again.

'Out of your own mouth you have confirmed my opinion. Who is there living whose character, read aright, would fail to show some "bitter truths"?'

The physiognomist bit her lip and tossed her head; she was a little puzzled over Una's face, and, to be safe in substantiating her own opinion of the science she extolled, she, guided more by manner than countenance, said shortly:

'Well, if you must know, you are obstinate, self-willed, and you will make enemies.'

And with this the young lady rose and hurried away, as if she had had enough of the discussion. Shaking out her olive-tinted, scanty skirt, she glided from Una to talk to somebody else.

'Has anybody read last Saturday's *Wheel of the Press?*' asked Mrs. Lannager, 'and the "social" column all about Mrs. Perkings' ball?'

Everybody but Una and the two gentlemen knew all about the ball and the 'social' column too.

'It must have been on a grand scale,' said one.

'Oh, it was perfectly lovely!' said a plump little personage nearly out of her teens, who had figured as one of the guests, and whose dress had been praised.

'Trash!' muttered Mr. Jilk, who had made his way to Miss Pennacove's side. 'What do you think of the "social" records?' he asked her.

'Very interesting to those whose dresses have been lauded,

I suppose. If they avoided details, and were satisfied with a passing allusion, they might be admissible. As it is, I would expunge them.'

'Just my opinion—just my opinion.'

'Oh!' exclaimed the young lady whose costume had met with honourable mention, and who had partly overheard Una's comment. 'What do you think Miss Pennacove says? She would expunge the "social."'

Una looked annoyed. She had given a private opinion, as desired, and here it was hurled at everybody's head, with an ill-bred vehemence, by one who was almost a stranger to her.

'So they ought,' spoke up Mr. Jilk.

'So they ought not,' chorused the ladies.

'I never meant that exactly,' said Una; 'but a report of festivities can be made readable and interesting, I fancy, without detailing points of dress or making invidious distinctions; otherwise it is pernicious. People who can't afford to dress magnificently do their best to ape those who can, for the gratification of seeing their names printed and dress described. Fathers, husbands and brothers, too, I dare say, know what it entails—this extravagant competing.'

'They have no right to compete if they can't afford it,' asserted Mrs. Goldwin rather contemptuously.

'Cripples are not expected to fight,' said Mr. Bagway jocosely.

'That is true,' said Mr. Jilk; 'for they might get hurt. Miss Pennacove is quite right. It is only within the last ten years that we have been mimicking the *Morning Post* of the fashionable English world, where people are entitled to be extravagant without stinting the larder. With us it is different, with a handful or so of wealthy families and a majority of strugglers. An undue extravagance must be fostered in the minds of our girls, and must make the outlay far from commensurate with their position, if only to secure their eulogy in the public papers. What a noble ambition to foster! I rise to second Miss Pennacove.'

'Oh!' simpered the plump young lady. 'What should we do without "our social"?'

'The *Wheel of the Press* wouldn't go round,' said Mr. Bagwag, inclining to irony.

'The pie would lose its best ingredient,' quoth Mrs. Goldwin.

'Tastes differ, fortunately,' argued Mr. Jilk. 'The right of that ingredient to be called "best" is to be questioned.'

Una nodded her head approvingly, and maintained that it was a stimulant to excite an undue love of display.

'It is such absurdities that make dress the be-all and end-all of some women's lives,' she said.

The rest of the ladies were opposed, and tried to frown her down, and all began to offer opinions simultaneously.

One said, if everybody thought like Miss Pennacove, women might be Quakers, and she did not see why a woman should not do her best to look well; and to dress becomingly was not always a question of means. Another vowed that Miss Pennacove would ruin trade; that but for fashion miserly folks would never spend a penny more than necessary.

'You are quite mistaken,' answered Una, half regretting the prominence of the discussion. 'It is part of a woman's duty to try to look her best. My argument is *not* that we should despise dress, but that we should not make it a kind of fetich.'

Here Frank Lannager, returned from his office, entered the room, and Mrs. Lannager, evidently following some train of thought, piloted colloquy into another channel, by asking generally how it was that the Lockstuds were not at Perkings' ball?

'Some gentlemen I know were quite disappointed,' she said archly, and smiling with painfully stretched lips. 'Does anybody know?'

'Miss Lockstud need not have feared that her dress would be overlooked, I'm sure,' said her daughters.

'Jessie was not well enough,' Una announced.

'Not well!' exclaimed Mrs. Lannager. 'Miss Lockstud not well. What is the matter?' echoed her daughters.

They expressed such evident distress, that Una was quick to relieve them by saying:

'She is perfectly well now. I only saw her an hour ago, and never saw her looking better.'

Una, only looking at Mrs. Lannager, only listening to her over-coloured reception of this information, trying to believe her sincere, did not see how it affected Mrs. Goldwin.

'He has left off worrying her, as I advised,' she said to her-

self, thinking of her late interview with Jessie's father; and then aloud to her hostess: 'She would have been the belle had she gone. She's a sweet little thing; don't you think so?'

Mrs. Lannager drew her chair closer to Mrs. Goldwin, and lowered her voice:

'Well, yes, she is. Now, tell me the truth, I'll not mention it to a soul. Is there really anything between her and your son? You know people will talk.'

'And people will believe, I suppose. Absurd to think of such a thing! He is a mere boy yet, and when he does look out for a wife, it won't be in that direction.' Mrs. Goldwin spoke confidently, and in such a tone that Mrs. Lannager understood at once the alliance would be far from satisfactory. 'It would be a money match on both sides, and that spoils the romance. Of course you know that Lockstud will dower his daughters well. He is able to do it, and is not close-fisted. And, then, you know, too, that there is a rich old aunt in the background, and Jessie is her favourite.'

'Yes, she ought to weigh well, as they say.'

'There's no doubt of that,' said Mrs. Goldwin, who, having affirmed this much, thought it time to take her departure.

When she and Una were in the barouche again she threw herself back wearily for a second, and then suddenly brightened with an effort, as if just recollecting she was not alone.

'Where would you like to drive?' she asked.

'Anywhere,' answered Una; 'just as you please.'

'Wicknar Road,' said Mrs. Goldwin shortly to the coachman.

Wicknar Road was one of the prettiest drives in Phillipia; Wicknar itself, a large suburb, presenting rural and palatial homes and picturesque aspects.

Mrs. Goldwin seemed to be desperately voluble: she pointed out this and that place as they shot by park and field, mansions and gardens, terrace and church, and made running comments, to which Una scarcely listened. Mrs. Goldwin had never paid her so much attention before, and instead of heeding the sense of her remarks, she was endeavouring to discover the meaning of her novel demeanour towards her—to understand Roland's mother. She succeeded in neither.

When they had been driving about half an hour, Mrs. Goldwin abruptly changed her theme:

'That is a very promising young man,' she remarked, as if continuing a subject.

'Mr. Jilk, do you mean?' Una glanced at her inquiringly.

'No—no!' sharply. 'I allude to young Lannager. I am sure he is real good fellow—a gentleman.'

'He is a fair specimen,' was the response, rather lukewarm and neutral.

'You don't know him well enough to judge. If I were a girl, I'd fall in love with him; and the girl he honours with his love should consider herself particularly favoured. Jessie Lockstud should.'

Mrs. Goldwin said this very rapidly, and fixed her penetrating eyes full on her companion.

'Jessie!' exclaimed Una, startled out of apathy.

'Yes. You have had no opportunity of seeing, perhaps, as others have, or you have been less observant. Why, he is madly in love with her!'

'Is he? I am sorry for him,' Una said very quietly.

'Why sorry, may I ask?'

'Because Jessie is not madly in love with him.'

Una was staring at the coachman's back.

'Ah! she confides in you, then.'

Mrs. Goldwin, still intent on the clear-cut profile, drew a long breath one minute, and laughed the next—one of her counterfeits of mirth—a distorted sound like that of the clapper swinging within a cracked bell; it fell gratingly on Una's ears. There are so many kinds of laughter, that it is difficult to define each. There is the hearty, jovial, genuine laugh—a joyful exuberance of spirit that vibrates from heart to heart—bound to find an echo; there is the meaningless laugh—'the crackling of thorns under a pot'; the scornful laugh, which sets the teeth on an edge; the egotistical laugh, not unlike a donkey's bray; and ever so many more; but the worst laugh of all is the cruel, cynical laugh, which might be called the voice of a sneer, and it was such as this last that escaped Mrs. Goldwin now.

'My dear girl,' she said, 'your innocence amuses me. Don't you know that a mad love on both sides is not absolutely necessary to perfect a betrothal as long as the balance brings down the scale on the masculine side? A man is an idiot if, when he is fond of a girl, he can't succeed in wooing and

wedding her. A little wise adulation, plenty of patience with her coyness or caprice, constant attendance, presents, deference to her wishes and opinions, unlimited promises of future happiness—that is the recipe—and Frank Lannager is not an idiot.'

'He will be, if he persists in forcing his attentions where they are certain to be repulsed. Your recipe won't answer in Jessie's case.'

Una spoke out plainly.

Mrs. Goldwin did not laugh at this.

'You are inclined to favour her determination to repel,' she said. The dialogue, carried on in an undertone, was falling to a whisper. 'You are unwise; although you are her friend and confidante, you don't know her as well as I do. She has that pretty little head of hers stuffed with romantic nonsense, the result of "yellow-backs." You young people never will be practical, and won't listen to older and wiser ones. If you have her interest at heart, you will use your influence over her to eradicate this romance. I need not mince matters with you. She thinks she is in love with somebody else—she only thinks so; she is mistaken, and you would be conferring a lasting benefit if you would go to her and tell her so, because'—she hesitated, and then, sinking her voice lower still and glancing uneasily at the coachman, she said right in Una's ear—'she can never be anything more to my son than what she is already.'

Una started and coloured.

'What can you mean?' she asked.

'Just what I say—no more, no less. Depend upon it, when the scale of love comes down too heavily on the woman's side, it is a mistake: the marriage is a mistake.'

Una made no reply. What could she say? She was hot and cold, red and white; she lay well back against the cushions, and was full of perplexity. She could not breathe the fact of the secret betrothal, nor could she promise to make Jessie look favourably upon Frank Lannager, or believe she was not in love with Roland. Her face was as a barometer to Mrs. Goldwin, pointing to a disturbed atmosphere. After a pause, Roland's mother said:

'You have nothing to say to that.'

'What do you wish me to say? I don't know how to answer you.'

Una looked straight before her still.

'Say that you will help me.'

'Help you!' exclaimed Una, with emphasis on the pronoun.

Mrs. Goldwin looked annoyed, whether with Una or herself it is hard to judge.

'I mean, help me to befriend Jessie,' she explained; 'I have known her since she was a baby, and I am speaking for her sake; I wish her to benefit by the experience of others. She doesn't care for me as she does for you; for me to attempt to advise her would be a waste of words and breath. One word from you will have more effect than fifty from me. Now, *comprenez-vous?*'

Her sentences followed each other as glibly as if they had been rehearsed—perhaps they had—and mystified Una, who answered:

'I am afraid I don't understand. Why should she never be anything but what she is? You bewilder me.'

Mrs. Goldwin could have stamped her foot—could have screamed at this tiresome girl who was not to be won over. Had she been in her own room she would not have held so tight a curb on her passion. The forced suppression drove the blood from her lips, and looked out of her eyes in rage.

'Haven't I told you?' she muttered behind her teeth. 'He doesn't care for her, that's why. You are not so dense; you need not look so far away for an example of my theory. You know Theodore Lockstud never cared for his wife as his wife cared for him. Are they happy? You and I, having been behind the scenes, can answer this question, if strangers can't. Are they happy?'

Una could not reply in the affirmative to this. But she also knew that old Mr. Goldwin had worshipped his wife, and having learned much of the conjugal relations of Mr. and Mrs. Goldwin, she made use of this knowledge in her desire to strengthen Jessie's cause, and said:

'There may be some truth in that, but by the same theory yours must have been a most felicitous marriage, for I know your husband idolized you, even if you did not idolize him.'

A sharp, malicious glance was directed at her, but not

observed, for Una did not dare to look at Mrs. Goldwin, for fear of betraying the pain which she could not conceal; she was looking in quite an opposite direction, as if interested in the street.

'Of course I was very happy: who says I was not? What has your uncle been telling you?' asked Mrs. Goldwin quickly.

'Let us talk of something else, please,' urged Una, who, having been tempted to fire a shot, was now wishing it recalled.

But Mrs. Goldwin was not desirous of changing the subject.

'No; I have not done with this yet,' she said, still below her breath. 'You have not answered my question. I will not enforce it; your unwillingness to reply is an answer. But your uncle is wrong to tell you Mr. Goldwin idolized me; he did not. He treated me shamefully; he worshipped my beauty —for I was beautiful once—and grudged the possession of it to a successor, which accounts for the intensely selfish conditions of the will, of which you have also been told, of course.'

'I only alluded to your past,' said Una, half in apology, 'that you might not ask me to bring such experience forward to Jessie as you have suggested I should or ought.'

'You refuse to speak to her about it?'

'I must,' very gently.

'With all your learning you are a fool.'

Mrs. Goldwin was too irritated to pick her words; it was struggle enough to speak without raising her voice. She could have struck Miss Pennacove, but only clenched her gloved right hand instead.

'Excuse me,' said Una stiffly, 'but it seems we are quarrelling. If you ask your coachman to stop, I will get out and walk; we are not far from Virginia Bay now.'

'I beg your pardon,' came the answer, almost bordering on penitence. 'I don't wish to quarrel. But if you strike a match you must expect to see fire. There's a lot of sulphur about me. I don't pretend to be anything but what I am. I'm not a goodie-goodie. You provoked me to call you a fool because you are a fool to yourself.' She softened again; she drew nearer to Una; the clenched hand relaxed and caught at

one of Una's. 'Let us understand each other. I am not blind. I quite expected to see Rol bringing you up to me before this, to hear him say, "Here is my choice."' Mrs. Goldwin was bending forward to pour all this into Una's ear. Una's head was averted. 'He loves you. I've seen it for a long time, and I—I only wish to study his happiness, though he never confides in me; but I know more than he may give me credit for. Since Saturday he has changed; even Mrs. Dripper can see that. You were with him on Saturday. I am his mother, and have a right to ask: can you have refused him?'

'Yes.'

Una longed to ask how he had changed, but could not. She felt the hand lifted swiftly from her own. The barouche rumbled on; the coachman sat as if carved in stone, heeding his horses and hearing nothing but murmurs of voices; and Mrs. Goldwin looked as wretched as if the peace of nations were affected by such a refusal.

'You have!' she cried—almost moaned. 'Why, when he idolizes you? He will be a millionaire. He is young, handsome, clever. What do you want? Is it any wonder that I call you a fool? Be wise, and think over it again.'

'I don't wish to marry,' answered Una with some annoyance, 'and I decline answering any more questions on the matter. Let Rol marry whomsoever he will, he will never find a sweeter, truer wife than Jessie Lockstud.'

'One more question.' Mrs. Goldwin's lips were parched and blue as if from cold. 'Does he know that she indulges in this romance about him?' She gripped Una's arm now as if to shake a reply out of her.

'Yes; I think he does.'

'I know enough.'

The miserable woman leaned back in her carriage, and looked exhausted. Una was in purgatory, but did not know she was not alone in her suffering. It was only in the after months, when the whole conversation recurred to her, that she knew.

Both ladies reclined in silence. They neither looked at nor addressed each other till the barouche drew up at Unaville.

'Good-bye,' said Una, with her hand extended.

'Good-bye,' returned Mrs. Goldwin, ignoring the hand, and thus proclaiming offence.

Una stepped out of the rack, released at last.

'She is offended with me,' she thought, 'for my audacity in refusing her son, for my determination not to break Jessie's heart. It is as that girl predicted but an hour ago: I have already made an enemy.'

'I must try another plan,' muttered Mrs. Goldwin to herself. 'We must catch at any straw. I have wasted my time on her.'

All her affability and attention had been thrown away.

CHAPTER XI.

FAILING TO STEM THE CURRENT.

THE day after her drive with Mrs. Goldwin Una received another note from Jessie, a very hurried one, announcing that she and her mother had been 'ordered' to take a trip to Wondoo (Wondoo was a pretty country town on the southern line, and something like eighty miles from Phillipia), for her father would have it that she needed change. They were to leave as soon as possible—perhaps to-morrow—would Una come and spend that evening with her? It would be the last for quite a long time, as quite three months were down in the 'sentence' which was to exile them from home.

Una mused over these tidings, and debated whether she should spend an evening at Cecillambda or not, for Rol was certain to be there, and she shrank from meeting him. With a stoical resolution, however, she decided the matter very soon.

'I will go,' she said; 'I must go and learn my lesson properly. If I don't accustom myself to seeing them together as promised man and wife, to laugh and talk with them in the old way, I never shall learn it. I am glad she is going away for a time. Poor Mid! it will help Roland and me on. For once I am thankful to her father's imperious dictates.'

That same night she went to Cecillambda and dined there.

She was glowing with excitement and colour, as she had been the Saturday night previous, when she had nearly broken the piano strings.

With Mr. Lockstud — who admired her as a sensible, witty, beautiful girl must be admired even by the would-be misogynist, which he certainly was not—she conversed over the dinner table with sparkling fluency; while Roland — also especially asked to dine by Jessie—ate and drank in comparative silence. 'Oppressed with the thought of parting, poor fellow!' Jessie told herself.

After dinner Lockstud went to his own room, called the library, and while Jessie and Roland for a little time promenaded the balcony arm-in-arm, Una played and sang to Mrs. Lockstud and Jack.

'I am getting on,' she thought; 'I am learning my lesson.'

But later on, when she was in her own room, grave doubts arose relative to her progress.

Roland had seen her home, and they had not been alone together since the previous Saturday.

Una, with that will which the girl physiognomist had alluded to as 'obstinacy,' nerved herself to rise to the occasion. She knew what was in his mind, but he could not see into hers. She was utterly wretched, and he believed she was thoroughly happy. Well, that was part of the play. He must continue to believe it.

'You are approaching the great end now,' she began. 'We shall soon have you a B.A.'

'I hope so,' he replied, as they stepped out side by side briskly from Cecillambda to Unaville. 'Will you take my arm?'

'Yes. Mid scarcely likes leaving Phillipia.'

'"The king commands," she says.'

'But it may do her good.'

'It will, and do me good, too. I have been retrogressing lately. My time is short, and I have much to do if I am to succeed. I want to win, to be something more than a millionaire. At present it is "to be or not to be."'

'It is "to be."'

'Thank you for the comforting prediction.' He paused as if to collect his thoughts, and then went on with an irresistible spontaneity: 'You will not think it strange if you don't see me

quite so often at Unaville as hitherto. I must pull up for arrears. Jessie has my negligence to answer for—poor Jess, poor Mid! Has she told you anything—that she is happier now? You are our—our sister; you have a right to know.'

'Yes, everything. I wish you—oh, you know what I wish you both.'

Her voice trembled in spite of resolution. His accents of resignation pained her.

'Thank you again. I know—we know you have our interests at heart, of course,' he said quietly. 'Your wish may be fulfilled—in time.'

And then he spoke of other things till they parted at the wicket.

'You will be at the station to see Jessie off to-morrow morning? She told you they would start in the morning?'

'Yes. Good-bye.'

There followed no fervent, lingering pressure of the hand, no steadfast gaze into her face. He considered himself engaged to Jessie, and honour was his watchword. In her own room her hands went over her breast as if to still a pain there.

'His mother is right!' she cried. 'Oh, he has changed! I wonder if Galileo looked so when, down on his knees and Bible in hand, he abjured the truth before his persecutors, swore away his own convictions. We are both acting a lie. What have I done? I can't undo it; but it is hard—it is hard. God help us both!'

After a sleepless night she slept later in the morning than usual, but hurried through her toilette and breakfast in order to be at the terminus to see Jessie and her mother off. She reached there rather late, but in time.

Jack Lockstud was superintending the luggage and taking tickets; the second bell was about to ring. There was a babel of sounds—the clanking of heavy heels on the flags to and fro; newsboys shouting; hawkers crying fruit; people talking, laughing, saying adieu; babies grizzling; while those who were about to travel were taking their seats, or piling their bags and rugs within the carriages.

Mrs. Goldwin was there, very much to Una's surprise, and increased her astonishment by showing a friendly bearing again towards herself when she quite expected disdain.

Mrs. Lockstud and Jessie were already seated in their carriage, and Roland stood at the window talking to them.

Una had no opportunity to say more than a parting word or two, and give a bright smile, for the bell began to swing, and next the signal of departure clanged above all other noises.

Mrs. Lockstud, happier than her daughter in the prospect of a quiet life in the country, was laughing and nodding her head to her friends, and Jessie, whose face was framed at the window with dimmed eyes and pensive mouth, scarcely knew whether to cry or laugh, as she looked her last upon Roland for a few months, and told herself there was nothing to cry for now, for they would soon be reunited to be parted no more. Nevertheless, she lowered her gossamer as the long line of carriages began to move slowly out of the station into the open air. Arriving there, it gathered strength, it flew; it was out of sight, and on the Southern line.

'We can drive you home, Miss Pennacove, and Jack too,' proposed Mrs. Goldwin very graciously.

Una, not desirous that Roland should know aught of what had passed between her and his mother, accepted courteously, and she actually found herself once again where she had yesterday determined never more to enter; it was only the beginning of the undermining of her preconceived plans.

She, Roland, and Jack Lockstud returned to Virginia Bay with Mrs. Goldwin in her barouche.

'The Siamese twins wrenched asunder! who'd have thought it?' said Jack to Una, referring to her separation from Jessie.

'"So we grew together like to a double cherry, seeming parted, but yet a union in partition,"' quoted Roland.

Mrs. Goldwin bent her eyes on Roland.

'Which is Helena—which is Hermia?' she asked meaningly.

'Perhaps Una can tell,' he said, only thinking of the bond of sisterhood as comparison.

'Suppose we call Una Hermia, and Jessie Helena?' suggested Mrs. Goldwin lightly.

Then Una turned, and said:

'I don't see how the names apply. Jessie and I will never quarrel as they did, that is certain.'

'They were only the victims of Puck and Oberon. There are mischievous imps in the air in these days, I'm thinking,'

said Mrs. Goldwin again, with much meaning, 'controlling movements, upsetting plans and hopes.'

To this no answer came, and she and Jack seemed to have all the talk to themselves until the drive terminated, Una and Roland merely interpolating a word here and there.

After this, the ensuing weeks rolled by very quietly for Una. She saw Roland but seldom; and even the quaint society of Washington Larry was denied her, for he had left Phillipia temporarily to take a run over to the neighbouring colonies, and so kill time till Roland's attainment of his majority. As Roland had hinted to him his intention of visiting Knutsford, he determined to wait and accompany him. And he did not forget to send Una 'a tremenjous whack of a present,' for, provided with a list of books and another of music by Roland, he attended to the former guide from A to Z, and forwarded a handsome cabinet filled with choice works; but the latter he viciously tore to shreds, for he recognised a woman's handwriting in it, and the ogre of the nursery rhyme, who growled,

'Fee, fi, fo, fum!
I smell the blood of an Englishman,'

was not more sanguinary in his intentions than Larry felt over that scrap of paper, with its angular legible characters that he felt were traced by the hand of a Lockstud. He sniffed and grunted out, 'I smell the blood of a Lockstud!' and thereupon consigned the music list to perdition.

The receipt of this handsome gift was an exquisite momentary pleasure to Una, and if he had seen her glowing face as she examined each book, he would have been more than repaid, even if he had heard her ripple of laughter over a couple of lines scrawled on a sheet of letter-paper which he placed in the parcel, which read thus:

'May they give as much pleasure to you as to him that sends them! May they be twice blessed, "him that gives and him that takes," as the Scripture puts it!'

Mountfu, who had long since forgotten his repulse, still hovered about her whenever he could get the chance, but thought she was neglecting her music. Neither music nor books seemed to give her the same delight as formerly.

Letters came from Jessie to her frequently—bright letters.

'I like Wondoo very much,' she wrote; 'and mamma looks splendid. It was she who wanted change, not I. There are lots of nice people here, and really it isn't dull a bit, with concerts, entertainments, and amateur theatricals; and with it all there is a delightful freedom somehow, which one doesn't find in the big city; and, oh, I was nearly forgetting to tell you that the Lannagers are here, too, recruiting. The smiling mother, and the two eldest girls, and their adorable brother came up last Friday to remain till the following Monday; this arrangement is to be repeated every week, I believe. You will pity me, for he was my shadow, and will be every time he comes; but I don't care now, and I snub him unmercifully. Mrs. Lannager and the girls are overpoweringly attentive to us. The former makes me sick, with her "my *dear*" and "my *darling*" whenever we meet; and if I were a fool—she evidently thinks me one, else she wouldn't behave so—I might get conceited in believing all she says about me to my face.'

'They are all conspiring to get her for Frank Lannager, I think—his family and her father and Mrs. Goldwin,' commented Una, puzzled to know why Mr. Lockstud and Mrs. Goldwin could possibly object to her becoming Roland's wife. She gave it up.

Like Roland, she was studying her hardest. Like him, she wanted to win for the glory of achievement the 'something attempted, something done,' that lifts us above the pettiness that clogs the world and makes us feel life is not the mere racing for pleasure and sordid gain. So the weeks sped, till one morning Una received a telegram containing but two words, 'To be,' and signed 'Roland Goldwin'; and she knew he had successfully passed his ordeal, and was what she hoped to be a year hence—a Bachelor of Arts.

'He would not come and tell me himself,' she said, and sighed. 'He will be of age soon, and what then? Oh, what a fool I am!'

With the folly still her master, she folded the telegram tenderly, and put it away carefully in her desk. Jessie received a telegram, too, only the tidings were couched in the ordinary jerky way, but so excited the recipient that she all but cried for joy. Mrs. Lockstud could not blame her, for she was likewise pleasantly agitated, for she loved the lad to whom her daughter

was affianced. Having written to her husband glowingly of the pleasure she experienced in the change to Wondoo, he wrote back, desiring her to extend her stay by all means. The fact of his desiring it was looked upon as a mandate, and accepted by wife and daughter with the usual submission, but it led to their absence from Phillipia when Roland, having emerged from his legal infancy, took the millionaire's cloak on his shoulders. He had especially requested his mother to let the day of his majority pass without ostentation of any kind; he did not want a purposeless expenditure on himself, and it suited her to yield graciously to his wishes. Yet it dawned with oppression; its strength was maimed, and he could not welcome it with that eagerness with which he had but recently anticipated its coming. He delighted in his inheritance—he loved it as the primary factor in his future actions. Upon the mere thought of it he had constructed mentally innumerable monuments which should hand down to posterity his father's name with reverence, blessing, and gratitude. All this was unchanged; the airy palaces floated still before his mind's eye, only they were seen no more through rose-coloured glasses. Perhaps the imps—as his mother had observed in reference to their present existence and mischievous pranks—were hovering near, and had snatched them from him to substitute a jaundiced pair. The ardent longing to possess was gone, and he took his wealth as a man without palate swallows his food; naturally craving nourishment, he yet eats without relish, without that exquisite, indescribable sensation which is known as taste, and constitutes one of the leading pleasures of vigorous health.

But Roland was too much of a philosopher not to make the best of what fell to his share—not to try and draw honey even from nettles.

'Perhaps,' he reasoned, 'we are like greedy children, wanting to clutch at more than our due; should we, like them, rebel because it is withheld? This constant fruitless craving compels us to look towards the Golden Shore, where, if we may touch it, we may find at last the pearl of price—sweet content. Who can say here, "Hold! I have enough"?'

The morning of his twenty-first birthday arrived, with low, murky clouds and drizzling rain; it was quite chilly and unseasonable, and seemed in sympathy with his own humour.

Saving for birthday cards and written congratulations from Wondoo and Unaville, a visit from Mr. Lockstud and Jack quite in the early morning to give him joy, and an urgent telegram from Washington Larry, stating that he would be in Phillipia on the morrow, was detained through an attack of lumbago, and wishing him luck, the day passed as all other days. It was the morning after that brought distinction of a kind.

It was still cloudy and cold, and when he met his mother at the breakfast-table, the weather seemed to be reflected on her face with an additional heaviness of electricity, repressed fire, and threatening storm.

Roland was weather-wise regarding the domestic atmosphere. He knew she was angry at something—whether with him or somebody else he waited for time to disclose. He said 'Good-morning,' and took his place at the table. She gave him a chilly, stiff response, and began to help him to his coffee.

He assisted her to a rissole, and next himself, but remained mute for two reasons: a servant was in attendance for one, and his experience of her disposition for another. He knew it was best to maintain silence until she chose to break it. As soon as they were quite alone she did break it. He threw a covert glance at her as she, stirring her coffee, was gazing into the cup with that sternness and severity which he knew meant aggression. She might have been a priestess of the Delphi oracle, trying to gather a forecast from the coffee-fumes. Then she slowly raised her eyes and looked at him. She spoke with a studied calmness.

'You look as if you had lost a property, instead of having just been put in possession; and you *ought* to be elated—that is, if your conscience were clear.'

He stared at her as if she had spoken to him in an unknown tongue.

'I don't understand you,' he said, not very good-temperedly, and disinclined to find fault with his conscience.

'No!'—lightning flashed from her eyes; there was suppressed thunder in her voice—'because you are the model son, because you can never do wrong, not even when you have attempted to hoodwink—only attempted, mind, not succeeded

—your mother, even when the "serpent's tooth" is poisoning me. You ungrateful, double-faced, treacher——'

He rose before she could finish the word; his countenance changed utterly; all its boyish frankness gave way to sullen anger. He tried to speak—to demand an explanation, but could not; and she, glaring at him with the frenzy of a wild cat bristling before a mastiff, saw the passion struggling in his face—the knit brows—saw the resemblance that Jessie had once seen, and, with an exclamation of distress, covered up her eyes as if suddenly smote there, and then rose too and hurried from the room.

He stared after her, wrathful, dumb, wonder-stricken. Her conduct was incomprehensible, beyond endurance. What had he said or done to deserve her rebuke—to be called ungrateful, double-faced, treacherous? His conscience was clear enough, but his heart was in a ferment, his brain in a whirl.

He also left the room, and strode to his study; on his way he passed his mother's door, and he heard a bitter weeping, but felt no pity. There came a painful tightness at his throat, and hot tears to his eyes, as he paced his study to and fro. This injustice threatened to flood his philosophy; the unmerited reproach was harder to bear even than Una's refusal; for there his self-respect had not been wounded. Presently he ceased to walk, and stood before a window, where the sun shone on his hair, and the scent of flowers from the terrace beneath was wafted; but he was insensible to both.

He might have been ten minutes thus, when he, standing with his back to the study-door, heard its handle turn. He knew nobody would enter there unbidden but one, yet he never turned, as with ears intent he was aware that the door was being shut to again and locked, and that somebody was advancing with a rustle of drapery and softest of footfalls.

'I must speak to you,' said his mother with her usual decisiveness, but huskily, as she took a seat quite near him.

'I am listening,' he said, without a movement.

'Well, sit down,' she commanded.

With an obedience like second nature, he drew a chair and obeyed, but half turned his back upon her.

'You hide your face—you are right,' she said. 'I never

knew you had so much of the fiend in you; it terrified me—it made me run away.'

'Is that all you came to speak about?' he asked.

'No; it has nothing to do with it. I have recovered. I am calmer. I was angry—you were angry. People can't talk rationally when they are mad with temper. I must talk rationally. You have deceived me.'

Mrs. Goldwin spoke spasmodically, chokingly, but with a remarkable drop from severity to gentleness.

'Yes, you have deceived me,' she went on. 'Have I not done a mother's duty? You treat me like a nonentity. Your crowning sin is your clandestine engagement—you are engaged to Jessie Lockstud.'

Roland, having meant to acquaint his mother with that circumstance this very week of his majority, did not feel convicted. He started slightly at her premature knowledge, but, nothing abashed, and with his eyes on the window, he replied coldly:

'You have deprived me of a duty meant to be undertaken this week. I intended to tell you everything.'

Mrs. Goldwin, scarcely prepared to meet this avowal, gasped.

'You don't deny it, then—YOU ARE ENGAGED?'

'Why deny it? May I ask your informant?'

Mrs. Goldwin did not answer for a moment. Had he glanced at her just then, her death-like whiteness would have alarmed him. After a pause, she said:

'I will tell you my informant presently, and you may think what you like about me. The end justifies the means. No woman likes to think that her son is determined to marry a girl without half a dozen ideas in her head—a silly sawdust——'

'I must remind you,' he interrupted sternly, 'you are speaking of my future wife.'

Mrs. Goldwin winced ever so slightly, and the death-hue was still in her face. She clasped her hands and raised her tones; there was a wild entreaty in them.

'No, no; you must not say so, you don't mean it! She will NEVER be your wife! You don't love her. You love the beautiful blue-stocking, and she has refused your love.'

Roland turned sharply and faced her at last, but was too agitated to note her deathly pallor.

'Why should I speak of my private affairs, since you can divine them?' he said.

'I don't divine. I use my eyes and ears and tongue if necessary. The more reticent you are, the more watchful I am, understand. You have changed lately in face, in manner. Do you think I put it down to your over-study? Pshaw! You might have spared yourself unnecessary pain, had you consulted me; but I have had to bide my time and worm out your secret —would-be secret—even if compelled to resort to jesuitical means.'

Her right hand stole to her pocket—a satin lap on her maroon morning-gown—and drew out a letter, which she tossed to him with:

'There! that is my informant.'

It fell at his feet. He stooped and picked it up. It was one received from Jessie the day previous, full of congratulations and passionate yearning to be near him on that day. He slipped it into his breast-pocket without a word, and resumed his standing position at the window, again with his back on his mother.

'Well,' she asked impatiently, and with her ire rising once more at his contemptuous silence, 'is it a reliable authority?'

'Certainly.'

'Is that all you have to say?'

'If you force me to speak,' he answered, with bitterness surging at his heart, and filial honour suffering a twist in the wrong direction, 'I may say too much. You have not trusted me; you might have done so, for I can lay my hand on my breast and declare before God'—he raised his hand—'that in my duty to you I have never failed; and you know it!' he swerved round for a second. 'You might have known that no irrevocable step would have been taken without first consulting you. As to our engagement, why, as Jessie says, it began when we were children, and she has looked upon me as her future husband for years. Before any actual engagement can be established between us, one known to all interested, her father has a right to be consulted; but before doing so I intended speaking to you.'

'Also of your asking Una to be your wife, and her refusal, I presume.'

She was striving to be gentle, but could not resist flinging this taunt at him as he stood facing the window, his arms hanging listlessly at his sides, the blood impelled to his hands, disfigured, like his face, with swollen veins.

Unheeding her insinuation, he went on:

'I intended speaking to you, I say, but, as treachery or theft have been your aids in gathering information, there is no need for me to speak. Only you may rest assured that I shall now marry Mid with or without your consent. Your action and cruel words this hour have forfeited your future authority over mine.'

Then, as if wishing to intimate the interview was over, he turned to leave the room, but did not.

Mrs. Goldwin, sick and faint, felt her senses swim; she stood up and reeled towards her son. Her will was potent; yet she all but screamed as she cried out in agony:

'Roland! Roland! I see my fault; forgive me!'

And then if her next move had been a blow it would not have so surprised or affected him. Her appeal for forgiveness stirred him strangely; full of emotion, he stopped short at the point of exit, and returned, with her call to him ringing in his brain, to see her at his feet, with her hands uplifted in supplication.

'See,' she cried, 'your mother kneels to you!'

Again the bitter salty tears rushed to his eyes; hot and unforgiving hitherto, he could not quite resist such a sudden reversal of disposition, especially from one to whom humility and submission were but words. He stooped to lift her; she would not be lifted.

'Don't kneel to me, for heaven's sake!' he almost sobbed.

'Yes, yes, I must. I stole that letter from your escritoire; it was done for your sake, but it was wrong.' She screened her face, and spoke from between her hands. 'You have altered; you look older, haggard. You have told me nothing, and out of pity for you I got at the truth. You have engaged yourself to Jessie, and yet you love Una. I swear it! and I know more than that: SHE LOVES YOU!'

'You are wrong—all wrong,' he answered, looking down upon her helplessly.

'It is God's truth!' she exclaimed; 'but she has refused you. You do not know women's hearts; she will not share your attentions to Jessie. Women understand women. I understand her: she has refused you out of pique, and you have engaged yourself to Jessie for the same reason. I ferreted out her letter that I might be able to advise—to help you. I will not rise till you say, "I forgive you; your zeal has impelled you to deceit, but still I forgive you."'

'Forgive you!' Roland certainly blubbered outright. 'God help us both to forgive and forget! Who am I to withhold forgiveness from anybody, much less you? Oh! do get up; you are breaking my heart!'

She rose; her eyes were bloodshot, and fixed in fear on his countenance, so swollen with grief and so trembling at the lips; she put out both hands to him, and he took them and led her gently to a chair, wondering at her docility, for her caprice had never taken such a turn as this.

'Consider this subject closed for to-day at least,' he urged; 'we have had enough of it.'

'No—no; it is not closed yet,' she said, with a little gasp. 'I want you to think over all I have said. You must not risk your future happiness. You must marry Una because she loves you and you love her.'

He stood by her chair now.

'Has she told you so?' he muttered, with a twitching mouth.

'Not with her tongue, but with her eyes, her actions. I have seen it as I have seen you changed since that Saturday afternoon some months ago when she was here. She must have refused you then, because she is a girl who will not be satisfied with half your devotion.'

'She is a girl,' he replied, 'who is not capable of the meanness you would impute to her, too noble for petty jealousy, too true a friend to Jessie to begrudge her what you call my attentions, too unselfish not to rejoice in her happiness and show a pure sisterly affection. I have told you that Jessie has considered me her future husband all along; but for a time that belief was shaken, and it fretted her enough to cause illness. It was for me to undo the mischief. I have undone it, and Una does not love me with the love that both you and I only fancied she did.'

'She does—I swear she does!' Mrs. Goldwin's voice, pitched high, yet seemingly smothered, cried out like one in a nightmare. She tottered to her feet. 'You must give her up; she is no wife for you; you are all wrong. She is——'

'To be my wife,' said Roland, with severe emphasis.

Mrs. Goldwin's face, white and drawn, was full of terror as she prophesied, like Cassandra, to incredulous ears:

'Never! never! never!'

And with that she alarmed him considerably by dropping into her chair; for now something took place that had no precedent in her life: Isabella Goldwin was in a swoon.

CHAPTER XII.

A BULWARK OF STRAW.

THEODORE LOCKSTUD sat in his library awaiting a visitor, for whom he had been prepared by a note received but a couple of hours previously. Roland was coming, and the herald announcing that fact was in his hand now as he read it for the second time. It was between seven and eight on the night of the day of Mrs. Goldwin's swoon; and he, with knitted brows and moustache ends caught between his teeth, re-read her hurried lines.

The gaslight flaming high over his head cast a sickly glare on his face, which within the last few weeks had become hollow-cheeked.

The sound of approaching footsteps ascending the staircase made him nervously ribbon the note; but as if not satisfied with that, he threw it on to an ash-plate, lit a match and consumed it.

When Roland entered the library, Lockstud presented the aspect of luxurious and contented indolence, in his dressing-gown and slippers, and reclining in an easy-swinging chair, with a cigar in his mouth and a newspaper in his lap; but the smell of burned paper greeted Roland's nostrils as he opened the door after a gentle rap at it, and Lockstud's 'Come in.'

'Ah! you're to time; how do you do?' he said, without rising, as he shook hands with Roland, who noticed that his hand was clammy cold and disagreeable, while his manner was a little over-airy, and in contradiction to his habitual reserve.

'You find me indulging. I always do at this hour. Will you have a cigar?'

Roland declined with thanks, and eager to open the business which had brought him there, said:

'You expected me, I know.'

'Yes. Your mother was good enough to send me a few lines. Sit down, and let us talk it over.'

His manner set Roland more at ease than he otherwise would have been. He took his seat exactly opposite the bank manager, and asked openly:

'What did she tell you?' His mother's note had rushed him rather in proposing to Lockstud for his daughter; for, with her determination to let Jessie's father know what had happened as soon as possible, she made hesitation impossible on the part of Roland by writing that afternoon of her agitating interview, when she felt sufficiently recovered to do so But as yet he was to learn whether Lockstud would show an unreasonable obstinacy or not, whether his mother had referred to her own objections to his suit, so he inquired, 'What did she tell you?'

'That you are in a hurry to fetter yourself with incumbrances, and don't know when you are well off. She said much more that was wise and to the purpose, but that wouldn't interest you, I'm sure.'

Roland began to flick at his legs with his handkerchief, not conscious of what he was doing. Lockstud had waved a straw in his face to show which way the wind blew, and he thought his mother responsible for the opposing breath. He resolved to let no opposition stand in his way; he had promised to marry Jessie, and marry her he would.

'I presume from your concurrence in her wisdom that you are not inclined to favour me,' he said quietly.

'Perhaps so.'

Lockstud puffed a cloud of smoke into the air; his back was turned to the light, so that his face was in shade.

'Why?' Roland flushed up with some just indignation.

'My age, my position, can be no obstacles, or do you think I am neither mentally nor physically qualified to undertake the duties of married life? I might have spoken to you before, but thought it premature, and best to wait till I was of age. Mid—Jessie and I have known each other since we were children—babies; we ask your consent to our union. If you give her to me, I will do my utmost to be worthy of her.'

He would not bring forward as an argument in his favour that he would be able to gladden her with unlimited luxuries, that he would make a handsome settlement on her, for he thought Mr. Lockstud should accept him at once, without such a reminder.

Had any other but Roland so pleaded—that other being a millionaire and of unquestionable integrity—Lockstud would have been dazzled at the mere thought of such an alliance for his daughter; but this was one of the tantalizing ways of a contrary world; for Roland happened to be the wrong man, and Lockstud was anxious to impress this upon him. His answer made Roland flush again.

'Now, look here, my good lad—you are only a lad—be guided by me. You are rash to ask for one girl when you are in love with another.'

Lockstud puffed another cloud; he had never discussed a matter before with this lad, who was as a son of the house, with such easy familiarity. His apparent indifference to Roland's proposal was discomfiting, but his latter remark was more than that to a heart sensitive as a woman's; it was humiliating.

Roland jumped up from his chair excitedly.

'I see my mother has acquainted you with something else that should interest me.'

'Don't blame her,' Lockstud said quickly, suddenly reverting to his natural self, and tilting himself forward in his chair, letting the paper fall to the ground; 'she is acting for the best in trusting me. You have never known a father, and she has always consulted me in regard to your interests.' His eyes rested kindly on this undesirable suitor as they were raised to the flushed face, and all his assumed nonchalance fell from manner and words alike. 'I am seemingly cold,' he added, with a decided tenderness, 'but I have enough warmth in

me to excite a real friendship for you and a desire to take that father's place. I have felt so for years. Now sit down again, and don't lose your temper.'

Lockstud held his cigar in his fingers, and forgot to return it to his mouth. Roland, reseated by request, stared at him with an expression of mingled curiosity and hostility, scarcely grateful for his avowed friendship.

'And you laugh at me for a son-in-law?'

'You misunderstand me. You think, perhaps, because I say so little generally, that my observation is scanty, like my words; if you do you are wrong. It is because my observation is keen that I say to you, without hints from anybody, go to that other girl and ask her to be your wife, if you will rush into matrimony; but most young men—of your position, especially—would not be in such haste, would like to try their wings and be free for a few years before settling down.'

'And supposing, I say,' Roland reasoned, 'that the other young lady is not for me even for the asking, that she has no desire to marry—probably from not yet having met her ideal—that next to her I do love Jessie dearly, and have asked her to be my wife, that she shall not pine, thinking that love for her less intense than hers for me? I will be a true husband to her, and all my study shall be her happiness. If you part us, you will break her heart.'

'But not yours,' was the quick rejoinder. Cool as Lockstud had been, he was now rising in temperature, and beads of perspiration had to be wiped from his face and lips. 'Roland, you are a clever fellow,' he said in his own dictatorial way, but not harshly, 'yet with all your cleverness you are bordering on imbecility. You want to run your head into a noose that won't strangle you right out, but will keep you in a life-long coil, and I don't want you to do it. My regard for you would be poor indeed did I allow that imbecility to run riot without some effort to check it.' Lockstud coughed, cleared his throat, and dabbed his moustache with his handkerchief, then went on with much earnestness: 'You are of age, certainly; still, you are a lad in ideas—a mere girl as far as a knowledge of the world is concerned. You have not arrived at years of discretion: go and travel; taste the joys of a life abroad with a bachelor's fling—with no wife and baggage; mix more with men,

and you will come back a man. You will have changed your mind, and be ready to thank me for my counsel.'

'No.' Roland tossed his head proudly; his clear eyes flashed out a defiance. 'You are mistaken in me. I have given my word; it is my bond. What I say to you to-night, I shall say a year, two years, ten years hence—that is, if Jessie thinks as she does at present.'

Lockstud knew that well enough, but it did not suit him to outwardly admit it, and he spoke next with all his old acerbity:

'Jessie is a child without a mind of her own. In less than a year, should you go away, she will pine for a lover at her elbow, and be ready to take the first one offered to fill your place and pass the time. Because you have grown up together, and she has, of course, a sisterly fondness for you, she thinks it is love. Bah! electroplate love; it will wear out.'

'You are mistaken in her,' Roland said in that tone of quiet rebuke which is most effective.

Lockstud frowned as he heard, but a moment after his features softened once again, and, unable to sit quietly, he got out of his swinging-chair and began to walk up and down the room as if in thought.

For a little while there was utter silence, then Lockstud stood by Roland, and laid a hand gently on the young man's shoulder.

'Be led by me,' he pleaded.

His voice shook; his attitude was such an expansion of his hitherto concealed nature that Roland, being permitted to witness it, felt nervous and constrained as he heard that 'Be led by me,' uttered so strangely soft that it produced from him a docile 'What would you have me do?'

'I would have you less headstrong, more willing to be guided by one who has had experience. Experience bought is better than experience taught; in one way it is harder to bear, but impressionable. One is burnt into our life; the other is but a temporary coating, easily rubbed off. Bought experience of a hard kind is flame and flood which I would save you from.'

Lockstud lifted his hand and took another turn down the library and back again, to stand still before Roland, who sat bent forward, with his arms resting on his knees, his hands closed together, his eyes on the carpet, and continued:

'That beautiful girl who does not reciprocate your love for

her still exists, remember. Wherever she may be, to whomsoever she may belong, she will still exist for you; living or dead, she will haunt you, she will never be out of your thoughts. Seek her again; make her love you—you can—and marry her. But if you persist in keeping faith with Jessie—though it is noble and has a dash of romance—the fire will burn, the waters will flood you. You say to yourself, I have sworn to love and cherish her. You say it because she comforts you now with a devotion which heals your sore heart in a temporary way; but it will be never healed. There will come a time when the duty will become a yoke, and the wife a burden—an encumbrance. I have forethought, and know you will heap up misery for yourself and her. She is my daughter; I am fond of her, though I may not show it, and in her interests, as well as yours, I say I do not wish to give her to a man who can't offer her a whole heart, and who may in course of years let her see this and make her wretched. I argue the question with you, when I might dismiss you with a peremptory "No," because of my regard for you—because I desire you not to have any ill-will towards me.'

Roland stood up, too, and faced his counsellor, with a second proud toss of his head.

'Mr. Lockstud,' he replied, 'I have listened to you with the respect due to your maturer years, not to your argument. You harp on that other young lady who can never be more to me than a dear friend. If I once thought otherwise, it was owing to my own conceit or blindness. As for suing a second time for a favour, I never did it yet—I never will; and I maintain that where a noble-natured woman gives her whole heart and soul to a man, and he accepts it, that man is no man if by one single action he forfeits her implicit trust, or can ever feel her presence a burden, or his duty to her a yoke. I am prepared to take Jessie, and must resent the word "burden" as a cruel one—one for a coward. You wrong Jessie, you wrong me. She will never change, and in that case neither shall I.'

He would not receive Lockstud's past experience as a future guide. Was he to be measured by the standard of such a husband as Theodore Lockstud, whose marital principles would not bear strong light, and were not pardonable, even supposing them to be the result of disappointment? for he had no doubt

whatever but that Jessie's father had exposed a page of his own early manhood for an example.

The moral force of his character opposed the idea of a possible 'encumbrance' or 'burden' being embodied in Jessie, or any woman that he should once and for all vow to love and cherish. Such a thought was an outrage—a violation of that self-esteem of which he had enough to ensure personal dignity, without an undue prominence over the higher-classed sentiments. He felt that Mr. Lockstud was viewing him as he would a schoolboy, with no settled convictions as yet of right or wrong—chiding him like a child.

In what estimation could he be held that anybody should predict such a vacillation of mind as that, leading to his degeneration into a coward and a rogue? He would prove he was neither; so his answer was given rather pointedly considering the man to whom he gave it.

It was unexpected—more than Lockstud could bear quite patiently, though he did not want to show how much it annoyed, it stung him. Urbanity fled, however, and chilly politeness took its place, while something of that demoniacal expression which his family knew so well as peculiar to him in smothered rage distorted his face now, as he and Roland stood *vis-à-vis*. They were of the one height, these two men, of the same proportions; both handsome; and whether it was the passion in the countenance of the elder reflected on that of the younger man, just in that moment a similarity of distortion appeared in both. Both were angry.

'Am I to understand you will not take "No" for an answer?' said Lockstud, with parched lips, but struggling to be calm and cool, and ignoring Roland's condemnation of his argument.

'You are to understand that I have asked for Jessie in a straightforward way, that I have no intention to admit the possibility of becoming a villain, that I intend to marry her whenever she is ready. I don't know why you and my mother raise objections, for you can produce no just impediment to prevent our marriage, and I can't accept in an amicable spirit a reasoning which to me is sophistry.'

Roland spoke out warmly. Mr. Lockstud abruptly turned his back upon him, and gave him no immediate reply. He strode moodily away as far as the library door, and pausing

there for a couple of minutes, retraced his steps and faced Roland once more.

'You can't marry her without my consent; she is under age. Wait at least till she is twenty-one.'

'This suggestion, if acted upon, would afford a respite,' thought Lockstud.

'I wish to do nothing rash; I merely ask for your sanction to our present betrothal—that is all,' said Roland simply, as if it were the easiest thing for Lockstud to say 'Yes' to his proposal.

Lockstud mused before he made answer, pulled at his moustache, and at length appeared to bend slightly by saying:

'I'll think it over—talk it over with your mother. I'll say no more to-night.'

'When will you say more?'

'Soon; not now—not another word.'

After that there was nothing for Roland to do but to go. As he closed the door behind him, Lockstud threw himself into his swinging-chair, and, being alone, gave way to exhaustion of body, and so groaned aloud as if in writhing pain.

Mrs. Goldwin, obeying the summons sent by wire the following morning from the bank-manager that business imperative demanded her presence at the bank, was ushered into the manager's room as early as eleven o'clock.

Lockstud turned the key in the door as she entered, set a chair for her, and seated himself at his office-table. No salutations were exchanged; the business on hand was serious enough to absorb all their thought, and set aside polite conventionality. They both looked frightened.

'Well, the result is not satisfactory, then?' she queried.

'No.'

Lockstud pressed his head between his hands and leaned forward on his elbows; his aspect was not cheering.

'Has he said nothing to you of our talk last night?'

'Nothing. When I asked him how you had received him, his answer was: "As you no doubt anticipated. I refer you to him," and he looked sulky. I have not seen him since last night. He has thrown off his humility and obedience with his minority; he won't bear the bit in his jaws; he is no longer under my control, and it is not my policy to offend him. I

hope you followed my advice and treated him with exemplary patience.'

''Cilla herself could scarcely have borne a trial with more mildness. I remembered your caution in my maddest moments, when I could have wrung my hands and yelled with frenzy.'

'It was well you did. I know him better since yesterday. You may lead him with tact, but driving will upset everything—he won't be driven; and he is beginning to be suspicious, I know he is. That is why I told you to send for me to come to the bank, as if on business. I don't want you to be coming to the house to hold private consultations. Now go on; tell me, what did you say to him?'

'I reasoned with him,' Lockstud said, with his head up now, and a right hand on the table, nervously clenched. 'He was polite enough to call my reasoning sophistry; he is determined to marry Jessie. Pleasant, isn't it? How will it end? I'm half inclined to make a clean breast to him of the whole concern—in confidence.'

'And then?'

'Tumble accidentally into the bay and stop there, or shoot myself.'

'You are talking nonsense. If anybody should be annihilated, it is the cause of this wretched complication; but as we can't smother her, or lock her up in a lunatic asylum like one of Miss Braddon's heroines, we must try something else as effective if not criminating.'

'I wish she had never been born!'

'So do I; but she was born and lives, and at present claims Roland as her future husband. We have to deal with what is ——' She tapped her foot impatiently. 'Your courage is turning white.'

'I confess it to be weaker than yours.'

'Well, I quailed yesterday, for all that. Did you ever know me to faint? He took such a firm stand, and, besides, he looked so—*so like his father*, that he terrified me. We dare not raise the devil in him (for he can get angry like you or me), for then the likeness comes to the surface—only then—a shadowy likeness, but to be avoided if possible; otherwise it might be dangerous.'

'Oh, why did you forge such a handcuff for yourself and for me? why did I listen to you?' Lockstud's head went down on his hands. 'It is killing me!'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'You said it was an atonement, I remember; but you were as anxious as I was to defeat Paul Pry, though you wouldn't admit it. And it was not for atonement.'

'I am to see him again,' cried Lockstud, in a tone of despair, and apparently unheeding her remarks. 'And what in the name of heaven am I to say—to do? Shall I refuse him once and for all, or allow him to kiss and caress her with the privilege of a lover?'

'Do the last—make a show of acceptance—if you don't you will drive him to immediate opposition. Get the girl back under your own eye—prevail upon him to go abroad. Only get him away for a year or more, perhaps, and before he comes back let Jessie console herself with Lannager, or make her—that is better. She shall meet him again as Mrs. Lannager, or my name is anything but what it is. We must not let trifles stand in our way.

'You think it can be managed?'

'It *must* be managed—it is our last resource. I will tell him to see you again to-night, and then you are to accept him conditionally—that is, if he chooses to please you by going away for a year or two. Say one year, it sounds lighter; say it is necessary to prove his fidelity by absence—it will satisfy you.' Mrs. Goldwin ceased for a second, and then, with a new idea just conceived, she added: 'Stop, we will have no more interviews with him; you might forget yourself. I won't trust you with him. Write, and at once, and I'll give him the letter with the meekness of a mouse. If I ever cared for him at all, I did so yesterday. I hate men without a spirit. I did something else yesterday that you will never guess. Did Isabella Goldwin ever go down on her knees before to a living creature? Well, I did that, too. I knew my hold was gone on him for the theft of that letter, and I tried to win it back, and did soften him. In my eagerness I failed; stealing a love-letter and reading it was a mistake, for he did not mean to keep me in ignorance as I thought, and his words and manner since are stiff and cool.'

'A mistake—a crime from beginning to end, to hunt us to shame and misery,' muttered Lockstud, not caring to conceal his fears, his useless regret, at which she scoffed with a hard laugh.

'You are a craven; you fear detection, not the action,' she said; and then peremptorily: 'Write!'

Without further speech he drew paper before him, and wrote almost as she dictated.

She carried the letter away with her, and the writer, as soon as he was alone, scowled and cursed her below his breath.

'She has revenged herself on me!' he groaned, 'and I am helpless in her toils.'

Mrs. Goldwin determined to carry out all her designs, and, more hopeful with the prospect of success, met an evidence of the vanity of human wishes immediately on her return to Goolgun.

In her own room she found a note from Roland to tell her that he had left Phillipia for a short time to have a run up to Wondoo.

'Perhaps,' he wrote, 'Mr. Lockstud, by the time I return, will have his answer ready when you and he shall have "talked it over."'

She had counted upon seeing him at once, and noting the effect of Lockstud's conditional acceptance; now she had to sit down and wait. Wondoo was only eighty miles away, certainly; but for her, when eager for the advance of her plans, it might have been as far as England at that moment. Besides, the Lannagers were at Wondoo, and she considered it most unfortunate that they should see Roland and Jessie together, who might betray by some sign their relations; Jessie would, if he did not. She ground her teeth and compressed her lips. 'How like him to run away without ever hinting his intention of doing so!' she thought. There was nothing to be done but to forward Lockstud's letter to Wondoo; it might put Roland in a better temper, and mollify his disposition towards her.

While at her desk in the act of enclosing it in another envelope, there came a knock at the door, and, without waiting for permission to enter, the person knocking walked in. It was Mrs. Dripper—Mrs. Dripper, a weak combination of housekeeper, companion, and factotum, but strong in neither.

She always wore black and a matronly muslin cap, and was thin, spare, and wiry, nervous in her ways, but quiet, and most desirous to appear genteel. She was kind to those under her in Mrs. Goldwin's employ, and ready to befriend them even with a liberal dip in her purse, which was supposed to be pleasantly heavy, owing to her receipt of a fair salary.

Her daughter was comfortably married, and a goodly portion of her savings were, by the advice of Mr. Lockstud—who treated her with the respect and consideration due to the old servant of an old friend—invested in the Nabob Mine, which was expected to return tenfold to her, as it was to her mistress, in course of time. But whether it was the privilege of long service, or an assumption of equality with her mistress, Mrs. Dripper was often guilty of provoking slips in that deference to Mrs. Goldwin which, as a generous mistress, was her right. She was guilty at the present moment.

Mrs. Goldwin looked up from her desk, and, strange to say, did not resent the intrusion.

'What do you want of me?' she meekly asked, as Mrs. Dripper approached her.

'Where has Master Roland gone?'

'To Wondoo for a few days.'

'I did his packing for him in ten minutes, and he said he was going to have a holiday; but he didn't tell me everything; there is something the matter. What is it?'

'I can't see anything serious in a young man taking a holiday if he feels inclined.' Mrs. Goldwin wrote as she spoke, and tried to laugh easily.

Mrs. Dripper drew nearer, and overlooked as Roland's address was completed on the envelope.

'No,' she said; 'but there's something serious to make you swoon; I never knew you to do that. People don't swoon for nothing. And he wouldn't stop for breakfast this morning. And you were not up for it, yet you were out when I took you the note at eleven, the time he told me to give it you, telling me not to disturb you before; and you never told me anything about it. And yesterday I heard him sobbing—yes, sobbing—and I could have taken him in my arms, as I did when he was a baby, to hush him on my breast. I love every bone in his body, every hair on his head; I'd lay down my life for him, I would; he is dearer than my own child; I feel for him as you never felt, and never will, and I won't stand by and see harm come to him, if you are plotting harm now that you don't want him any longer! So you'd better tell me all about it—why you swooned, why he sobbed, why you went out to-day, when you were better fit to be at home.'

Mrs. Goldwin listened quietly with her lips set like steel, and her eyes glittering with a wild light.

'I have done him a service,' she said. 'Why should you think I want to harm him? Mr. Lockstud and I are plotting for him now for good; but it is hard work. If you must know, he has engaged himself to Jessie Lockstud. Now do you understand?'

Mrs. Dripper's eyes started as she heard; her lips bleached; the fingers of both her hands struggled together as if to knot right to left, and she exclaimed:

'Good Lord! what can you do—tell him?'

'No; we will get out of the difficulty. I will tell you when all is arranged.'

Mrs. Dripper wrung her hands and moaned; then, without another word, she escaped from the room.

Mrs. Goldwin shivered as she watched her.

'I declare I've caught Theo's white liver. I begin to tremble at everything. I fear that woman; she will meddle, and perhaps muddle, and I had to tell her. I wish she hadn't been spying. Is everything turning upside down?' She stamped her foot. 'It shall not!'

Then she went to a cabinet, and from it helped herself to some sal volatile, and set her teeth against the shadows. She laughed at them.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. DRIPPER WITH A WHISPER FIRES THE BULWARK.

Was Socrates the serene-tempered benedict he is represented to be, think you? Not he! Xantippe was chosen as an escort that she might serve for a practical infallible illustration of the

power of mind over matter, its combat and prevail. Probably when she raged, he calmly smiled; when she stamped and gnashed, he hummed a tune; when she burst into tears with aggravation, he gave the soft answer that 'turneth away wrath'; not because of an inborn tranquillity of temperament, for the flame of passion leaped at his heart, but because of his resolution to quench that flame, to gain that ascendancy over self which the inspired father of philosophy hath said is greater than the victory of him who storms and conquers a city.

Sweetness of temper is a passive quality, for it exists without an effort of our own, but the power to subjugate a fiery one must be the greater endowment. Socrates, with the lion within him crouching before the iron rod of Will, presented example in preference to precept; it was part of his doctrinal wisdom.

Perhaps there was much of Socrates in our hero, Roland Goldwin, compelling him to behave as he had to one who was of the Xantippe order of women; but since that scene with her in his study, her confession of theft, her duplicity, her stern and—as it seemed to him—unreasonable antagonism to his engagement to Jessie, though he was ready to forgive her unjust accusations and that trickery which she had called 'zeal,' he could not reconcile himself just yet to meeting her on the same footing as hitherto—could not address her with the same studied respect. Owing to this he decided to quit Goolgun for a few days, but, to avoid the possible veto from his mother to do so, went without previous intimation to her of this intention. His plan was to recruit himself at Wondoo, to give ample time to Mr. Lockstud to come to a decision upon the momentous question, and to shape his future definitely accordingly, for at present it depended upon that decision.

At Wondoo his depression seemed to vanish; its freedom from city crush, its verdure, its rustic aspects, gardens, berry hedges, and the purity of its air, wooed him for peace; and then, Jessie's endearing, clinging ways were to him sweeter than before. Her mother's welcome to him, her gentle voice, and maternal-like glances of happy satisfaction and trust—all unknown at Goolgun—were balsam to his wounds.

The undisguised devotion of these two women to his interests and pleasures was so much lotus fruit—so acceptable to his palate, so delicious in its results. Even that love which Lockstud had maintained would haunt him was temporarily torpid in their comforting presence, so that he was thoroughly grateful, and gratitude and friendship coloured his words and actions so highly that they seemed to have all the ardency of tender passion.

Lockstud's letter reached him, and was discussed with all its pros and cons. Mrs. Lockstud alluded to it as a concession, considering the obstinacy of the individual conceding; Jessie protested, and said it was positively absurd, an exaction; but Roland was not entirely dissatisfied, though Mrs. Lockstud's view of 'concession' and her husband's tardiness even in this advance towards him were not complimentary, and did pique him to a certain extent, yet, turning the matter over in his own mind, he was not so ready to condemn Mr. Lockstud as he had been. After all, when a father wishes to put a would-be son-in-law to a test of his fidelity, believing he has not fully recovered from his position of a rejected suitor elsewhere, and, moreover, that his affections are far from free, the would-be son-in-law has no right to make objections. Of course, Roland could not produce this reasoning to Jessie or her mother to palliate the father's seeming inflexibility of disposition; he could not say: 'Mr. Lockstud believes my love for Jessie too shallow, too weak to support the vow I have made to be true to her, and knows my first love is not yet entirely put away.' What he did say was: 'Don't judge him rashly, Mid; he is not so indifferent to your happiness as you imagine. He spoke of you to me with such tenderness that I am assured he could never be tyrannical, even if exacting, as in this case. You know we always esteem most the things that are dearly purchased, and he thinks to enhance your value in my eyes by raising obstacles. He holds you worth waiting for. Laban was unkinder to Jacob.'

Jessie was not so easily reconciled. The prospect of a whole year's separation filled her heart with dismay and her eyes with tears. If she had but read his mind aright, she would have known that he was longing to be up and away, that he might the better fight down the old love, and give her a free and full affection.

The hope of doing this lightened his spirit; for a time he was the hearty, cheery Roland once more, planning picnic

parties and drives, and a whole day at the wonderful Karwoi Falls, to fill up his few days' holiday at Wondoo. But holiday and pleasure-seeking were nipped in the bud, for the day after his arrival Mrs. Lockstud received such a letter from her husband that she smiled and cried over it, and treasured it like a rare gem. It begged of her to return to him without delay, as the house was so lonely, and he could stand it no longer; her absence was oppressive.

Lockstud never indulged in sentiment—seldom displayed tenderness; no wonder his wife was touched, and prepared eagerly for departure. A peremptory summons would have recalled her quickly, and without any attempt to show reluctance; but a tender word such as here conveyed lent wings, in a sense, to her desire to obey him. Her daughter rebelled slightly at being taken from Wondoo just the week of Roland's coming, but gave in at length with that virtue born of necessity.

Roland returned with them to Phillipia in the full belief that his destiny was fixed, and feeling more settled than he had done for some time. To say he was not entirely dissatisfied with the thought of a year's travelling scarcely conveys the feeling that predominated with him in viewing this coming episode in his life. One time he had anticipated a voyage, with Una by his side, to Knutsford, and thence to Europe and America. Now, a change coming over the spirit of his dream, he was anxious to avoid Una, and he was honest enough to tell himself that he hailed one year's absence from home and surroundings with a content that was but the outcome of this weakness.

The long talks and walks with her which had been his delight were of the past, while a certain constraint had arisen between them which made their inevitable meetings at Cecillambda and elsewhere not all pleasant to him, the reserve being far more on his side than hers. Jessie's society (fond of her as he was, and grateful, too, for that woman's worship, which must be as sacred as incense to the reverential man) did not suffice him, was not such an opposing force as it should have been were her influence stronger; and again he was forced to admit, after a faithful self-analysis, that he was not above the foibles of his brethren; and it was Mountfu who prompted the analysis.

He looked upon him as a successful rival, and at present experienced the grip of the 'green-eyed monster' whenever he saw him hovering about Una, or heard him singing with her. Reason how he would that this was wrong, the sensation of bitterness remained. 'Absence will surely cure me,' he confidently decided.

However, there is no sequel to show that this theory was ever substantiated in his case, since that 'destiny which controls our ends' was working up slowly and surely to a crisis about him, while he in his present mood was passive with the blindness of the undeveloped bird in the shell—a shell which by a series of desperate pecks he was doomed to crack and pierce very soon that he might emerge to the light.

There were two people yet to be told of his engagement; first and foremost Mrs. Calliport, who, of course, had a right to know of all the inner and outer currents which affected her nephew's family for better or for worse; next, Mrs. Dripper, for whom both Roland and Jessie entertained some affection and much respect, won by her fondness for her foster-son. Through their desire to take Mrs. Dripper into confidence, Roland broke the shell and fainted before the light.

With Mrs. Calliport all was so sunny that there seemed no prospect of a leaden cloud, which, 'no bigger than a man's hand,' was all the same ascending to wax great and descend.

She received Jessie and Roland only the evening of their return from Wondoo—received them with delight, though she knew nothing of their betrothal, for naturally she had missed Jessie greatly, and her kindly old face had welcome written upon it in every line, and beaming in her keen but tender eyes.

To see Roland with Jessie told her nothing, for it was no new thing for them to visit her together; but to see Jessie's features not drawn as she had seen them last—to see her healthy, rosy and round—was such a joy and surprise that she at once associated the change, not with Wondoo, but with the young man at her side. She not only stood up as they entered her room, but advanced to meet them, and then, with a welcoming hand given to each, she cast a quick glance of inquiry, first on Jessie, and next on Roland. Jessie, thoroughly understanding and in the fulness of her ecstasy, cried out:

'Yes, yes, auntie dear, it is quite true; we are engaged.' Her cheeks dimpled in smiles, and her eyes sent out a saucy flash, which said: 'You see how mistaken you were; he does love me, after all.'

Aunt Jessie's arms immediately encircled her beloved niece, and her voice, tender and shaking, breathed lowly an emphatic—

'My darling! my darling!'

Next she turned to Roland, and, too overcome for reserve, she kissed him gently on the forehead, and said:

'You are worthy of each other.'

Here was one, at any rate, thought Roland, ready to smile on their union.

But Mrs. Calliport was not so ready to smile when they told her that, saving for a few, the betrothal was to remain under the rose for a year, and would separate the lovers.

'Depend upon it,' she said, in answer to Jessie's pouting protest, 'your father has some excellent motive for keeping it private.'

But in her own mind she thought it unnecessary, and went back to her conversation with Theo and his anxiety that Roland should travel. Now that Roland had declared his love for their Jessie, why should he be banished? She was to know in time.

In the meanwhile Jessie, confident in the permanency of her happiness, felt that much remained to be thankful for, and half wept, half cried, in her excitement that happy hour with Aunt Jessie; she could not help contrasting it with that morning some months ago when, in this very room, and while at her aunt's knee, her love's young dream had been rudely scared away. Poor Jessie! poor faithful heart! Later on, and in accordance with pre-arrangement, Roland knocked at Mrs. Dripper's door for admission, and Jessie, in her own room, was saying to herself:

'He is going to Mrs. Dripper now—the dear old thing! how she will cry over him and bless him. I think she has always liked me.'

Mrs. Dripper had her suite of rooms—in truth, she had everything her heart could desire but the one thing needful to sweeten possession, and that was a peaceful conscience. But

for this startling defect in her life she could have been thoroughly happy instead of being tormented: for, like a female Damocles, she always saw a sword hanging above her head, and now more than ever dreaded its fall, since Mrs. Goldwin had told her of her foster-son's engagement.

Roland occasionally paid her a visit, but not often; yet he liked to do her honour, and she, if expecting him, would give her little sitting-room a few extra touches for his reception. It was adorned with many trifles, too, of his own donation, and here, when her duties as housekeeper were over for the day, she sat at her sewing or reading. She did not expect him this night, and it was almost late enough for her to think of retiring, yet she remained at a square centre-table, where some work was lying neglected side by side with a late novel. Evidently she had tried to occupy herself with both in turn, but had failed. She sat with her elbows on the table, and her thin hands locked, while unheeded tears slowly chased each other down her worn cheeks.

Roland's tap at the door and accompanying words, 'Any admission?' made her rise hastily and clear the mist from her sight. It startled her that he should come just that minute, for his image was in her mind's eye, and for him she had been weeping. To see him standing before her in the flesh was not to soothe her distress.

'You're welcome, sir; come in,' she said, trying to look unconcerned, but failing.

'It is rather late,' began Roland, 'but I won't keep you long.' He did not sit down, but stood with his hands in his pockets as he faced her. 'It is only fair to tell you what has taken place. Behold me, bridegroom-elect!'

Mrs. Dripper turned her head away; she did more than that—she slipped back on to her chair, by which she had been standing, and bent herself forward on the table as if in pain, and with her hands over her face.

Roland was all sympathy immediately.

'What is it? You are ill. Shall I get you something?'

Mrs. Dripper, incapable of will-power ever, at this sobbed audibly behind her hands:

'No—no, Master Roland! I'm well enough, but don't mind me!'

'Then you must be in trouble,' he persisted.

'Yes, in trouble.' Then she thought to satisfy him with a reason, and said: 'You—you are going away from us.'

'Ah! mother has told you—forestalled me. But why tears? I am coming back again, I hope.'

Mrs. Dripper struggled for composure; she ventured to look up into the dear, honest eyes, bent kindly upon her. One of his hands rested on the table now, quite near her, and she put out one of her own and covered it.

'I can't help it,' she said; 'it is dreadful to think of you going so far away.'

She spoke as if in apology.

'Then you know why I am going, of course,' said Roland, half sitting on the table and beginning to swing a hanging leg.

'Yes, yes; I know.'

Mrs. Dripper's voice was sepulchral, her aspect all dejection.

'You are not hurt with me for not telling you before, are you? because I couldn't very well. The engagement has only been looked upon as a settled thing since I went to Wondoo, and——'

'Hurt with you, Master Roland! Lord love you! you never said one word or did one thing in your whole blessed life to hurt me,' she quite vehemently interrupted, with choking accents.

'You're a good soul, or you wouldn't say that after all the trouble I must have cost you. But I was going to say the engagement is only to be known amongst ourselves—that is all. Dear little Mid and I will be married in one year hence, and then there will be an end to secrecy.'

Mrs. Dripper covered her eyes again, and said nothing. Roland, with his leg dangling, looked upon his foster-mother's acceptance of the fact of his engagement as peculiar, if not annoying.

'Surely,' he thought, 'she is not going to moan over my choice like my mother?'

'You know Mid as well as I do,' he began as a test, 'and will accord her the praise she deserves.'

'I shall always be fond of her, Master Roland; but——'

'Well,' he said, with rising impatience, 'go on.'

'I'd lay down my life this minute to know you were not wishing to marry her. I can't help saying it; don't be angry with me.'

He was angry; he frowned and rose from the table.

'Good-night,' he said loftily, and making for the door.

'Oh, stop, Master Roland!' she cried out in alarm, 'and shake hands with me.'

He walked back to her, and bent over her chair-back.

'Are you against me, too, like my mother?' he asked, 'like Mr. Lockstud? They have both done their best to make me break faith with Jessie, and have failed. Do you think you, as my mother's tool, will succeed?'

'Ah, dear Master Roland!' pleaded the poor woman, 'they are your friends; be advised by them. I know more than you do—I who, loving you so, should advise you, too, but must not speak.' She rose and faced him as she said this, with her woe-begone countenance, and with trembling hands on his arm. 'They have been treating you harsh; your mother don't tell me everything as she should. I want to move you by love alone—you, the child I have nursed! It ain't for me to advise you, perhaps; but I've seen you grow up from the day you came to these arms, a wee, helpless thing, and I only want to serve you. Oh! why are you not engaged to the dear young lady we always thought you sweet on?' Mrs. Dripper, in her earnestness and grief, said more than she had intended, and repented. 'Forgive me, sir! I meant no harm,' she added quickly, seeing Roland's annoyance.

'I infer from your words that you have been told a great deal more than was necessary!' he answered hotly, fully believing his mother had even informed her of Una's rejection.

'Only of your engagement to Miss Lockstud,' she affirmed, with her hands still on him—'your intention to marry her.'

'And of her unreasonable aversion to one of the most womanly of women,' he added. 'You speak the words she has put into your mouth. I will not blame you now, but I will if, after what I have said, you persist in taking up the croak. I will have my own way in this matter, understand.'

He spoke with such a quiet determination that Mrs. Dripper's face became rigid; she dropped her hold on him, and reseated

herself at the table, with palms at her aching head, and her thin fingers arched and clutching at her hair as though they were talons ready to tear it from the roots. She was convinced now that he was passionately in love with Miss Lockstud, that she had erred in thinking him attached to somebody else. Such opposition as this could only come from a man who loved the girl he sought with all the strength of a man's first ardour. She could not bear it; it maddened her to know he was to be sent away that he might be fooled and crushed when he should return. Why should he not be told at once that such a marriage would be impossible, and then let him go and wear off his pain and disappointment? Why should Miss Lockstud be allowed to consider herself his future wife? Mrs. Goldwin had not told her of the Lannager card she meant to play as a trump.

'Lord! Lord!' she cried in her heart, 'make him listen to me—turn him from this girl!'

Her attitude of misery and evident bitterness of spirit sank deeper than her words in their effect on her foster-son. He had counted upon her appreciation of his suit, on seeing her eyes light up and hearing a blessing murmured. Seeing her thus recalled his mother's vehement 'Never! never! never!' when he spoke of his future alliance to Jessie, her swoon, and subsequently Lockstud's unwillingness to give way to acceptance. Mrs. Dripper's reception of his stern assertion of will threw a sickly dim light on the united action of those two, revealing no details, yet something hobgoblin in shape—something to be attacked, thrown down, exposed; something he was resolved to fight. He put his hand on her shoulder, and said earnestly:

'Tell me—you desire to befriend me, I know—tell me what you know, for you certainly must have some reason for behaving in this incomprehensible way. I ask for joy-bells, and you ring a death-toll over me. For heaven's sake, what have you to say against a young lady whom you have professed to like?'

'Nothing, sir—nothing. I am fond of her'—Mrs. Dripper lifted her head for a second—'I would spare her trouble, and you; for that I say, Go away and forget her, and let her forget you—it is the only way, Master Roland; don't come back after your travels and find you've been gulled. She can never be your wife, so help me, God!'

Her head went down on her hands again, and she shook from head to foot. She had said it.

He lifted his hand from her shoulder, and turned the colour of death.

'What mystery lies here?' he inquired, moved to an agitation almost equal with her own. 'There is a meaning in your words to which I am blind, but shall not be so long. I desire you to make it plain. Speak!'

Hamlet himself could not have uttered that 'Speak!' with more pathos, more entreaty, when his father's ghost confronted him and promised 'a tale to unfold.' 'Speak!'

Mrs. Dripper did not speak in the way he wished. She clutched at her hair again.

'I have told you all I can; don't ask me for more. You will kill me! Go now, Master Roland—be satisfied.'

Roland had so much intention of obeying that he took a seat exactly opposite to her, and, leaning forward, said:

'Do you think I am a fool? Do you understand that my word is pledged to Jessie Lockstud? that were I to break that word, through being frightened into it, she would be the worst sufferer of all? You want me to break her heart between you. You, whose tenderness I expected—you, for whom I have planned a corner and an easy-chair at my hearth, whom my children—should they ever come—shall honour ever as their father's faithful nurse and friend.'

Mrs. Dripper tried to look at him, but the tears now came thick and strong to stream down her cheeks. She could not utter a word.

'Do you think after what you have said,' he continued, 'that I shall submit quietly to the imposition her father would put upon me? Certainly his ways are dark. I never understood him, and never shall; but he shall understand that I am not a piece of clay in his hands.'

'There's a lot we can't understand,' sobbed Mrs. Dripper, longing to escape from his questioning, 'best not understood. It is best you should know no more—best even to break that poor girl's heart; but worst—worst for me to trouble you with reasons. You were always a good, obedient lad, Master Roland; for the love of heaven, for the love of peace, and if you love me, don't—*don't* ask me to tell you more!'

Roland, mystified, wretched, for a moment debated whether obedience was discretion, whether he should cease to trouble the miserable woman before him, or worm the truth from his mother. Only for a moment. The thought of the fool's paradise that was being created for the poor girl, whom he was so anxious to protect, urged him to a diplomatic move.

'I promise you, if you tell me all, nobody shall know the name of my informant,' he said.

Mrs. Dripper, drooping her head, shook it sadly and obstinately.

'Very well,' he went on, assuming offence, and rising as if to leave her, 'I will not trouble you any more; but I must tell you before I go that, as I have quite made up my mind to find out everything, I shall tell my mother you have told me everything.'

He scarcely anticipated such a sharp and immediate effect to follow his ruse.

She turned upon him suddenly in anger, and, with eyes expressing fear and defiance:

'You will tell a lie! I've been worked up to say more than I ought, and you take advantage of me! I ask you to let this engagement go—ask it for your own sake—for the love I bear you, and you will have me murdered by Mrs. Goldwin because you are not satisfied. She *will* murder me if she knows I have said as much as I have!' She began to rock herself in agony, and gasped: 'You are worse than Eve with wanting what isn't good for you! You will bring down misery upon yourself and everybody. You will tell a lie!'

He stood over her chair and looked down upon her bent grizzled head, her thin veiny hands clasped in despair, her rocking body, with an infinite compassion which his manner belied.

'I am in a network of lies; foster-mother, there can be no sin in resorting to a single one to cut through the net; but the lie will be yours as much as mine, for you can save me from the sin of it, if you will. Any way, I shall know everything sooner or later.'

'O Lord! dear Lord!' The rocking was wilder—'I am undone—undone! My sin has found me out in my old age.'

The unhappy Mrs. Dripper now fell on her knees and prayed

in dumb anguish; her wan face uplifted, her hands locked. She was at bay.

Roland turned away, unwilling to witness her abject despair, to disturb her appeal; but, burning to know the meaning of it all, the poor fellow, worked with conflicting sentiments—amongst which a hot indignation against his mother and Lockstud was paramount—walked away to the end of the room, folded his arms over a heart that was beating wildly, and tried to think what he should say next to induce Mrs. Dripper to be done with mystery.

She saved him that much exertion of thought, for before he was aware of it she stood at his elbow; she had caught at his arm; she was saying something in his ear that fell there like molten lead, that paralyzed his senses, made the room swim, and brought a transient oblivion of all things.

'For God's sake, for yours, for mine, don't let on to Miss Jessie,' she whispered, 'to Mrs. Goldwin, or Mr. Lockstud, that I have told you—that you know! You are'—she paused, she gulped, she trembled—'YOU ARE A LOCKSTUD!'

CHAPTER XIV.

CECIL LOCKSTUD.

'YOU ARE A LOCKSTUD!'

The terrible whisper, like a hissing tongue of flame, just touched Roland's brain—only touched it as yet; for, unable to realize the full sense of Mrs. Dripper's words, he recoiled from her hold on him, and said severely:

'Woman, you are mad to tell me this! You must be mad!'

Nevertheless, the phantom, the hobgoblin, the something intangible that he had determined to fight, was assuming a ghastly aspect, formidable proportions, and was approaching him as a ruthless gaunt glacier, not to be attacked, but attacking.

The woman fell on her knees for the second time, but now

as if in appeal to him, and not to a higher tribunal. She crouched at his feet and hid her face.

'Oh, dear Master Roland, forgive me! I have done a wrong, I have sinned, but be merciful to me! I speak God's truth: You are—yes, you *are* a Lockstud!'

He looked down upon the crouching figure in speechless agony; a choking, swelling sensation at his throat made him clutch at his collar and tie to loosen both; the veins corded about his temples with the rush of blood there, which, suddenly retreating, left his face with the petrified look of the statue—marble white and rigid.

'Not—not the child of Jeremiah Goldwin?' he managed to articulate, but so strangely that Mrs. Dripper, with a new terror, started to her feet and grasped at his hands, hanging helplessly at his sides, as she exclaimed:

'For God's sake, don't look like that, sir!'

'Answer,' he said, just in the same way.

And Mrs. Dripper, still holding his two hands in hers, replied:

'Not the child of Jeremiah Goldwin, but a Lockstud!'

Then followed from him a swift, wild interrogation in but two words:

'My mother?'

'Oh, don't be thinking *that*, sir! Don't make bad worse,' she cried out at once, understanding him, and beginning to rub his hands between her own to coax them to natural warmth, as she had often done when he, an infant, had lain in her arms. 'Don't be making bad worse. Your mother is one of God's sweetest, best creatures. You are a lawful-born Lockstud—Cecil Lockstud, her first-born—and not a Goldwin at all!'

'And not a Goldwin at all!' he repeated, like a child imitates its teacher and tries to fix a line in its mind without full comprehension of the meaning.

He allowed her to rub his hands, not knowing what she was doing, and would have fallen but that she was near, and half dragged, half pushed him on to a sofa. Then came kindly oblivion. His eyes closed, his head went back, and darkness fell upon him for a time.

A pungent scent at his nostrils, water trickling over his face, and even escaping in ticklish drops down his neck, his head

pillowed on Mrs. Dripper's arm, he struggled back to life and misery, to see her bending over him, to feel her hot breath on his face, as she gave quick gasps.

Not fully conscious, he moved his head wearily, and asked, 'What has happened?' and next tried to rise, but experiencing a sensation of giddiness so new to him, he was glad to obey Mrs. Dripper's order:

'Please keep quiet, sir. You will be better presently, dear. Keep quiet, now, do.'

'But what has happened?' he asked again, now querulously.

'You've been scared,' said Mrs. Dripper, crooning over him; 'poor boy, poor boy! haven't I been nigh fainting myself? You forced it from me. Lord have mercy on us! But there's no call to fret now, sir; nobody need ever know that you know—that I have told you—not even Mr. Lockstud or your mother—that is, Mrs. Goldwin, I mean. Everything can go on just the same as before, for, of course, you are still Roland Goldwin, you know. You're to forget everything I've told you, and what harm can touch you then? Only, dearie, you see now why you must not be Miss Jessie's lover, don't you?'

This latter sentence rang like a keynote in his ear; the missing chord, jangling, discordant, was touched, the sluggish intellect cleared, as memory came back with a rush that sickened and made him shudder. Suddenly he started to a sitting position, and sat upright on the sofa, unheeding his foster-mother's 'Ah, keep quiet, sir—keep quiet,' for he then and there sternly demanded the whole story.

'I am better,' he insisted. 'I *must* hear all—I will hear all.'

'Not to-night, Master Roland; spare yourself, spare me!' urged Mrs. Dripper.

'Now—now at once!' This peremptorily. 'I am better, I tell you.'

In proof of which assertion he rose to his feet and walked away a few paces, not with his usual steady carriage, but with a desperate resolution not to give way again, and a face so ghost-like that it alarmed Mrs. Dripper, as he stood opposite to her, and leaned on a chair-back for support, having retraced his steps and but poorly proved his words.

His voice was sharp, his manner authoritative, and he fixed his eyes, now fierce and bloodshot, upon her till she writhed.

'Go on, I say; tell me everything you know!' he commanded.

Mrs. Dripper wrung her hands and wept again.

'Come, come!' Roland cried impatiently, too sore with the weight of his present misery to be affected by such a thing as a mere woman's weeping, which at any other time would have overpowered him; 'if tears can wash out the wrong, weep; but they won't. I insist on hearing the whole truth. What is my mother—I mean, what is Mrs. Goldwin to me?'

Mrs. Dripper's hands went out to him in supplication.

'Call her "mother" still, sir. Oh, don't forget that!'

'What is she to me? I ask!'

'Nothing by blood; everything by—by policy, I suppose; that's the word I've often heard her use.'

'What policy?' Roland shifted from the chair-back to the front, and from sheer weakness was compelled to sit down again, 'I don't understand; why have I been reared to call her "mother"?'

'The will, Master Roland—the will has done it all!'

Mrs. Dripper was sitting on the sofa and nervously screwing her apron corners, with her eyes cast down, unwilling—afraid to meet his.

'The money is at the bottom of it all, and I wouldn't have breathed a word to you, but you made me. I only wanted to put you off from playing lover in the wrong way. I couldn't bear to think of you and Miss Jessie spooning like lovers, as God knows is wicked and ought to be stopped, and so I tried to set things right, and never thought you'd know more, and now you do. You've made me betray those who trusted me, and so you ought to keep quiet about it. You have only to give that young lady up; but, of course, you are still Mr. Roland Kovodel Goldwin—still the millionaire.'

Her eyes were never raised, while his were fixed upon her. He was too dazed to view all the intricacies of the position at one comprehensive sweep. His brain was all absorbed in extricating himself from a maze—in trying to conceive the certainty of his relationship to the Lockstuds. He knew the contents of Jeremiah Goldwin's will. Captain Pennacove had once given them to him second-hand at his own request, and he had read them since. But even by the light of this much knowledge

he could not yet see the drift of the action which had secured him for its victim.

'Go on,' he said quietly, as Mrs. Dripper paused to draw a deep breath and wipe her red eyes with the crumpled apron-corners; 'go on.'

'Well, sir, Mr. Goldwin did make a most peculiar will. They say he was jealous of his wife; you see, she was very young and very beautiful. If she married again she wasn't to get a penny, and if the child died she was only to get a hundred a year—to lose Goolgun and everything. Well, her baby sickened and did die, and the only way to keep her hold on the will was to keep it alive. She couldn't do that, so she fastened on you instead, and——'

She ceased abruptly, for Roland vented an exclamation of wrath and pain. His hand pressed his throbbing head, his face was ash-coloured and convulsed, but he was not going to faint again. When his exclamation interrupted Mrs. Dripper it was because a full revelation of the crime had swiftly taken possession of him—because he was beginning to understand much that had once been an enigma to him.

His pupils dilated as he heard, his pulse leaped, his tongue seemed to cleave to his throat, words would not come at his bidding: he could only bow his head in token of his recognition of the sense of what his foster-mother was telling him. And so she continued, now with her head lifted, and showing more composure. She felt sure that the worst was over for him, that her dear boy would rally out of his misery, that all would be as it had been, saving for his broken plight.

'I tried to do my duty, Master Roland—believe me, I did! I was a poor widow with two children—destitute, sir, quite destitute, but for dear Mrs. Calliport—and then my baby died, and I was appointed to nurse Mrs. Goldwin's baby; and when Mrs. Lockstud's baby was born I thought I was hardy enough to nurse it, too. I had a child to support, remember, and money was tempting. You were two of the sweetest little creatures that ever was, and, what was most strange, were as like as two peas in a pod. I might have been puzzled over you a bit myself, only you were double-jointed; but not puzzled for long, for the other little fellow began to pine—perhaps the poor old father nearly hugged him to death. Any way, he began to pule, and his

mother sent for a specialist—not her own doctor—and he shook his head grave as a judge over the child, and looked very solemn and he stroked his chin and cleared his throat when she asked him if it was serious. He said it *was* serious, very serious; and told her what was the matter; but we couldn't understand all his Latin names—we only knew the child would surely die. And it was then Mrs. Goldwin said to me, "He shall *not* die!" She was very anxious and fidgety about him. I believe she was fond of him; she used to kiss and cry over him very often when she thought nobody was looking. Mr. Lockstud often used to come to see his boy—*you*, sir—and one day I heard him and her talking in the room next to the nursery after the doctor had seen the baby. She was talking shrilly and loud enough for me to overhear, and I can never forget it, Master Roland. "No, I won't be ousted by anybody, or crowed over by anybody!" I heard her say. Then Mr. Lockstud said something so low I couldn't hear it, and she called out, "Let her hear! what odds? She'll have to be called in to help." I couldn't make it out then, but did afterwards. Oh, do remember, sir, I was a poor woman, and money is so tempting to the poor. Mrs. Goldwin began the scheme by letting Mrs. Calliport and Mrs. Glade—that was Mrs. Lockstud's mother, dead long ago—know the child was delicate, and advising another nurse to be procured for it. Oh dear! how angry the ladies were with me for trying to nurse two babies at once! They blamed me for everything, and yet I was well able to do it; it wasn't my fault, I'm sure. But the upshot of it was that the sick child was sent out of the house. Did I tell you, sir, that Mrs. Lockstud was like to die when you were born, and you had to be nursed from home to keep the house quiet? Well, that was the beginning of it, you see; and though you were about six weeks younger than the Goldwin baby, you were quite as big as it at this time, because it was sickly; but you weren't too strong-looking, either, so that you were like a pair of twins. Nobody knew the difference, or which was which, so the game was just in her own hands, and the child she sent to Mrs. Lockstud was her own—sent it from her to die in another woman's arms, though she loved it; but she loved the money more. And they bribed me with promises of future comfort—I mean Mr. Lockstud and Mrs. Goldwin—told me I was helping them to do a good action, for the child she kept

would be handsomely provided for, and she would be saved from ruin. Mrs. Lockstud would have more children to comfort her, but Mrs. Goldwin never. Would I stand by and see her reduced to poverty, she asked, when I could help to befriend her? It did not seem so very wicked then to me, but it does now, since you have been wanting to marry where you shouldn't; and, of course, it has made me wretched to think of it, and you allowed to think of it for a year. This is a secret now between us, Master Roland, only forgive me for giving you so much pain, for you see I couldn't help it, and you know I would save you from that.'

Roland made no answer; he was sitting sideways in his chair, with an arm curled on its back, and his face hidden there. He saw the girl-mother with arms outstretched yearning to clasp her firstborn—saw her smiles, embraces, and fervent kisses spent on a child of no kith or kin, on the child of one who hesitated not to rob her of the joys of motherhood. He saw her again weeping, as mothers do weep over the frail, flower-like forms about to be plucked from their breast.

Oh, cruel, bitter wrong! Never to have known her as the mother craved for in all these years—to have given his fidelity and obedience to a vile woman—to lose the father he revered, and gain one to be despised—to be reared in falsehood—to bring shame and desolation to the heart of sweet, innocent Jessie.

Mrs. Dripper went over to his chair; she laid a hand on his shoulder, and, affected by his grief, began to tremble again, as she said in a choking voice:

'Oh, dear Master Roland, look up and say you forgive me! I know I was all wrong. Forgive me! Give me one kind word and look! Don't, don't fret, sir!'

He threw her hand from his shoulder and stood up. His eyes were hot and dry and tearless, and he averted them as if disinclined to rest them upon her.

'The serpent did tempt me and I did eat!' he muttered, in deep but audible accents. 'Let me get out in the air. I shall choke in this house.'

Mrs. Dripper would not let him go yet; she hung on to his arm and cried out:

'Not till you say you forgive me—you, the child I nursed

and fed! You will soon be stronger and better, able to keep things just as they were with all excepting Miss Jessie. You will see I've only been trying to serve you in all this. Say you forgive me!'

According to Mrs. Dripper's way of thinking, 'things' (by which she meant his position as Jeremiah Goldwin's son and heir) were to be maintained as if he were still in ignorance of his birth. His silence, she believed, was secured; she would be protected from the law which would surely pursue her, in company with the lady and gentleman who had prevailed upon her to become an accessory to their plot, if that plot should be exposed; a condition which was not to be conceived in her mind. It was hard enough for her to have to stand before him self-confessed and abashed because of the part she had accepted in the conspiracy; but the pain of it was not so much due to her view of the enormity of the crime as to the fact of its being known to him, and having to explain it with her own lips, compelled by his will to reveal all. He was the soul of honour, and had believed in her own goodness; it was no light thing for her to be forced to unveil this putrid spot on her life to one whom she loved so dearly, whose estimation she valued. But she had not told him everything—had said not a word as to Lockstud's reasons for sharing in the scheme, though she knew quite well.

She had convinced him that Lockstud was his father, and no more was necessary. She only wished him to be spared the disgrace of looking upon Jessie Lockstud as his future wife, and this she had done, though in a far more decisive way than she had anticipated or desired, through that terrible threat of his to worm the truth from his mother.

The fear of the result of that truth to himself made her go down on her knees and sue for heaven's mercy; the fear of forfeiting his good opinion and incurring his displeasure made her kneel to him—made her catch at that rag of defence, her widowhood, poverty and her orphan child impelling her to stoop to bribe; the fear of it now kept her clinging to his arm and pleading for forgiveness.

But Roland's heart was too wildly beating, too bruised, too angry, to admit softness or pardon.

Without word or look he thrust her from him and staggered

out of the room, leaving her to her prayers, lamentations, and futile repentance.

Too weak to rush from the house as he heartily wished, he was fain to throw himself upon his bed, dressed even to his boots, and there lay face downwards, prostrated, too stunned for the relief of tears, too bewildered yet to think or reason, with a brain on fire, and wild bitter thoughts surging at his heart, mocking his misery.

'Ho, ho!' they cried, 'so your father is not the good man lying in his grave, but the vile one living, the father of the girl you wanted to marry—the girl who will die, whose life is blasted! Oh, see the blot on the escutcheon! You, reared by a felon! What becomes of all your pet plans—all the acres you will portion out to the hungry men, their anxious wives and helpless little ones? How will you live?—how hold up your head? One word and you will sweep everything from you. Silence, fool! What matter? Silence, and you are still the millionaire.'

Here Mrs. Dripper's words began to leap, to sting, to yell in his giddy brain, beyond his control to repel or consider:

'You are a Lockstud, but still Roland Kovodel Goldwin, the millionaire. Let this be a secret between us. Everything can go on just the same as before. Nobody need know that you know.'

Oh, how they maddened him! how they screamed like devils! how his soul darkened and fell in that hour! Yet how it struggled again, and tried to escape the evil clutch, the wily serpent—how a wild, heart-broken petition slackened the bond, pierced the darkness, as it broke forth in anguish, 'God in heaven, I am mad! Help! help! help!'

And all this time Mrs. Goldwin was sleeping sweetly, undisturbed by dream or presentiment.

Roland was of age, and would be done with. Jessie, she decided, was to be Mrs. Frank Lannager, and she herself would not depend upon the generosity of her supposed son. Had she not turned her pickings from the estate over in the wonderful Nabob gold mine, through the hands of the manager of the Civic Bank, whose business acumen was reliable, who had suggested the investment? Could she not have disposed of those shares long ago at an enormous profit and reaped her

thousands, but for her long-headed adviser assuring her they would go up higher, and with a run?

She was waiting confidently for this run; she was a young woman yet, and perhaps happier days were in store for her when she would cease to be Mrs. Goldwin. She hated the name associated so long with strategy and anxiety; she did not love the young man who bore it. The one affection of her life she had tampered with, and when she thought of him who had won it she told herself it had turned sour—that she sometimes hated him. But at this juncture, satisfied that her designs would advance successfully and end suspense, she was happier than she had been for years, and decided to go abroad at no distant date, and to forget Lockstud if she could. A rich, handsome widow in her prime would have no difficulty in losing the name she loathed.

It did not startle her when Roland failed to appear at the breakfast-table the next morning. Of late his habits had lost their method, his manner to her its customary deference. She was better pleased to be rid of his presence; but she was not to enjoy this sweet content for long, and Jack Lockstud it was who led the way to her disturbance. His sister Jessie, who was constantly despatching tender little billets-doux by post or otherwise to Roland, had begged him to be her postman before he went to the bank: said she had forgotten to tell Roland something the night previous through being at Aunt Jessie's, and had written it that morning. So Jack, ready to tease and ready to please her, bore the letter away and entered Goolgun.

Mrs. Goldwin was surprised when he was ushered into the breakfast parlour at that hour.

'Anything wrong at home, Jack?'

'Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Goldwin,' he laughed. 'Nobody's born, dead, or married. Only Jessie discovered this morning that she hadn't time to tell Roland all she had to tell last night. I have the important sequel here;' he slapped his breast-pocket.

'Oh, is that all?' Mrs. Goldwin was relieved at once.

'Where's Rol, the lazy fellow?' asked Jack, concluding that he had not yet risen.

'Somewhere in the house, I suppose,' she replied. 'Millionaires have a license. Possibly he has ordered his breakfast in bed, possibly he has overslept himself'—she shrugged her shoulders. 'I never trouble him with questions; he is his own master now.'

'Living on love,' said Jack, who had been told of the secret betrothal.

'Perhaps so.' Mrs. Goldwin smiled strangely. 'Have you breakfasted? Come and join me; see how lonely I am.'

'Can't put away two breakfasts within an hour,' said the lad, with a laugh. 'Wish I could, to oblige you; but I must hurry. May I run upstairs and deliver this to Mr. Lazybones?'

'Certainly. I shouldn't wonder but what you'll find him at breakfast too.'

As Jack in his hoydenish youth and with a swinging gait turned from her, and she heard him ascending the staircase three steps at a time, she thought:

'No danger *there* from resemblance; they're so unlike.'

Jack found Roland's door locked when he tried to push it open unceremoniously; so he knocked.

'Who's that?' from within.

'Me,' said Jack, careless of his grammar.

There was a movement, a shuffle, and that thud across the bedroom floor which comes from bootless feet, and then the lock clicked, and Roland, with a dressing-gown folded about him and in stockinged feet, stood spectre-like before his early visitor, who had banter on his tongue and mirth in his eyes until he saw Roland's face.

'Gemini Maria!' he ejaculated; 'what's o'clock? Why, you're ill—I'm blessed if you ain't!'

'Come inside, Jack, and close the door. I—I have had a bad night.'

Roland went back to the chair from whence he had just risen and dropped on to it.

'A bad night—ten bad nights you look like. What shall I tell little Juliet at home of her sick Romeo? I believe you want your breakfast. Oh, come, I say, don't do that!' This latter sentence was tacked on owing to Roland at that moment dropping his face on his hands, to a wild irrepressible sob that went straight to Jack's sympathetic heart. 'Don't do that—don't cave in! How is it you feel? Perhaps it's that confounded typhoid you think you've got; but you haven't, you know. A doctor will settle it.'

Roland raised his head again; there were big tears in his eyes, an invisible clutch at his throat, yet he tried to speak calmly:

'Don't say anything to poor little Mid. I am quite well.'

'Yes, and dancing a jig,' quoth Jack, his boyish face reflecting all the misery of Roland's. 'Anything else?'

'Yes, anything but the truth just yet. Come here, Jack.'

Jack went closer to him, and stood by his chair as if expecting to hear something more.

'Listen,' went on Roland; 'I am *not* ill; you will tell the truth in that—not ill in the way you fear. But I have suffered, and am suffering; yet I shall get through it. But we are made of such poor stuff, Jack, that's all—such poor stuff. I have had a blow, dear old chap; don't ask me now what it is, and tell Mid I am well, and——'

'What about this first?' interrupted Jack, just remembering to give up Jessie's letter, since Roland's apparent distress had nearly made him forget it.

Roland opened the little scented, pale-pink missive, which was only to say that she and mamma were expecting some friends that day, and when she made an appointment to meet him in the gardens with Una that same afternoon, she had quite forgotten this, so would defer it till the next day, much to her own regret and disappointment; and prayed he was well, and remained his fond, devoted, etc. It is unkind to tell all she did say, or to expose the inevitable P.S.—a mere excuse for another love-message. Roland opened it with shaking fingers, and when read, crumpled it up in his palm and let it fall from his hand as though it were a live coal.

'It needs no written answer,' he said, looking up into Jack's face, which was full of pity and wonderment. 'But, like a good fellow'—here he drew a note from his own pocket, sealed and addressed, even stamped—'you will give this to your father for me. I meant to post it, but he will get it sooner through you. It is on important business, and I trust it to your keeping. Now go; you will find me quite well when you see me again.'

'But——'

'You will be late at the bank.'

'I'll be back here as soon as I can,' said Jack, not satisfied.

He went downstairs very differently to the way he had run up, and met Mrs. Goldwin in the hall.

'Well,' she said lightly, 'did you find my lord at his breakfast?'

'He looks as if he was never going to eat anything again. He won't tell me what's the matter. I suppose he hasn't told anybody; but I think you ought to make him swallow something. Good-morning, Mrs. Goldwin.' Jack lifted his hat and was gone.

'Going to be ill, is he?' thought Mrs. Goldwin, not so uneasy about his health now as she had been. 'Pshaw! men are such cowards over the prick of a pin. He is bilious, most likely, but I suppose I must continue the rôle of anxious mother, and ought to go to him.' So debating, she mounted the stairs and stood at his door.

'Can I come in?' she asked; but receiving no answer, pushed open the door, which had not been locked on Jack's exit, and saw Roland just as Jack had left him, with his head bowed on his hands. 'Surely you are not too ill to answer,' she said a little impatiently. 'Jack has gone away thinking you are dying.'

The word 'dying' roused him; he dropped his hands and looked at her. His face was haggard, his eyes bloodshot and sunken, yet full of withering scorn. She was quite as alarmed as Jack, but from a different cause, and in that moment experienced the weird sensation which visits all at odd times, and for which eager penetrating science cannot yet account, and never will. It was the sudden and strange memory of that same scene having passed before her at some previous time of her existence. She started and shivered, and seemed to know exactly what he was going to say—what would happen next. Before she could ask, 'What is the matter?' he took up the word 'dying' like a clue.

'Dying!' he cried, in a hoarse, guttural whisper, but with every word rounded distinct and dangerous as shot. 'Yes, Roland Kovodel Goldwin is dead; he died last night.'

He glared at her, and she stared at him with eyes starting from their sockets. She went up closer to him; her heart stood still with terror; she put out a couple of fingers to lay them on his pulse; she tried to say, 'This is fever—you are delirious!'

but could not. And he, shrinking from contact with her, rose quickly from his chair to fall back out of reach of those fingers, and said:

'Touch me on your peril! Through you I am defiled—through you, a thief and now a beggar—you, who can be nothing but what is vile in my sight—in the sight of CECIL LOCKSTUD!'

She put out both her hands as though suddenly smitten with blindness, as if groping in the dark, tottered forward, vented a stifled moan like the cry of one strangling, and dropped at his feet.

Once again in her life Isabella Goldwin fell before him—fell unconscious.

CHAPTER XV.

FATHER AND SON.

WHILE Mrs. Goldwin was engaged at her breakfast, and unassailed by the shadow which is said to be cast by the coming event, three persons of her acquaintance, not so far away, were occupied with theirs; they were Captain Pennacove, his niece, and his guest, Mr. Larry, who had returned early that morning from his peregrinations.

Washington Larry's face was as radiant as a face of its kind could be; not because he was with his friends again—though that was a pleasure—but because of that happy self-appreciation founded on the expressed appreciation of others.

Una had welcomed him with real gladness, had pressed his old yellow hands in her fair, slender ones, had poured out earnest thanks for his kind remembrance, had lauded his generosity, his excellent taste; and Larry, although he could not honestly accept her praise for 'excellent taste,' as he was indebted to Roland for the selection of books, felt there was something worth living for, since he could contribute in any way to this young lady's happiness, for he looked upon her as distinct from a sex for which he had no respect. But he thought she appeared delicate, and said to himself:

'She's paler and thinner. Too much pianner, or Greek and Latin stuff.'

When the day was a little older he hinted to her this much, and asked if she were feeling well.

'Oh yes, perfectly well,' she replied laughingly; 'only you have seen some rosy-cheeked Hobart girls, and think me pale by contrast. Why should I not be well?'

'Why should I not be well?' she asked her own heart later on, when afternoon had come, and she sat at her books in her room, with a pencil in her fingers, and its point wedged between her white teeth. She sat in thought, not in study, as the pencil pointing its wrong end outward might testify, for she was reflecting upon Larry's question: 'Are you well? You're not so rosy as I left you,' and certain proceedings of the evening previous, when Jessie and Roland had surprised her with a hurried visit before they went to Mrs. Calliport to tell her of their engagement and its secrecy, for Jessie had not found time to write of it, owing to the sudden return to Phillipia, of which Una was only apprised by seeing her that evening.

'Isn't it absurd?' said rebellious Jessie. 'We are engaged and mustn't speak of it, or whisper it, because pa thinks Rol doesn't know his own mind, I suppose, and has such an opinion of me that he believes I might be eclipsed by some other girl. We are both to be put on probation to test our powers of endurance over the contract.'

She tossed her head and displayed unshed tears. Roland, flushing before Una, kept silence for a time and did not follow up this outburst, but turned to the subject of the projected departure, and did not seem bowed down with grief at the thought of the separation; and she, much to her own astonishment, had taken part with ease in the dialogue, and had sent them both away under the impression that she coincided with Mr. Lockstud's views and was far happier than Jessie.

'It is better for him to get away,' she thought, 'and we will both come out of it strong. I shall be well, and an old maid—a Master of Arts, with lore to compensate for love. I shall find a haven.'

Musing thus, and all abstracted, she scarcely heeded certain sounds that floated about her, believing they came from the street, until she was compelled to recognise a stentorian 'Una,

Una girl, come down!' from her uncle. She had left him and Mr. Larry preparing for a *siesta* within cushioned easy-chairs and veiled with handkerchiefs.

'Yes, I'm coming, uncle,' she called out, wondering why she was wanted at that hour, and hastening downstairs. She met her uncle at the foot.

'Go in there and see,' he said in answer to her 'What is it?' and gently pushed her through the dining-room door just at hand.

She entered and saw Roland, who rose and went forward to meet her.

Could it be Roland? Could twenty hours produce such a change? He had left her yesterday with the upright, firm carriage peculiar to him; to-day he was bent, shrunken, broken down, it seemed; his eyes sought hers with a mute appeal in their depths, as if for her protection—her tenderness. Larry was sitting in his easy-chair, eyeing him ruefully and in silence; the Captain was standing near the door, where Una was also standing, with Roland's cold, clammy hand trembling in her own, with her eyes full of pity and distress.

'Here's a nice how-do-you-do!' began the Captain, with his face redder than usual, and his brows bunched severely. 'Get him something to eat, Una; he's starving—that's what's the matter with him. Stir cook up at once, and begin with wine and biscuit. Here, don't stand, boy. Run, Una! Lord bless my girl! fetch him a bite of something.'

'Starving!' exclaimed Una, as her uncle led Roland by the arm back to his seat on the sofa, and she, full of fear and astonishment, hastened to get the needed refreshment.

When about to bring wine and biscuit on a dainty little tray, her uncle came behind her and tapped her on the shoulder.

'Don't bother him with questions when you take him that,' he said. 'He has had a shindy with the old woman.'

'Quarrelled with Mrs. Goldwin, you mean?'

'Something like it. He came in a cab, and walked in here more dead than alive. Larry and me were napping, but his coming in like a broken-masted ship drove the sleep out of us—took the wind out of the canvas. He just sat down on the sofa, and said, with the ghost of a smile: "Captain, take me in tow for awhile! I'm about sinking—I want food and shelter.

I know you'll give me both. Give me food, for not another bite will I take inside Goolgun. I'm hungry and weak. Don't ask me any questions yet, for I can't answer them; only be my friend as ever!" So don't tease the boy with questions. Something has gone wrong with him at home, you may be sure. I'll carry that for you.'

He took the tray up, and he and she went back to the dining-room together to set it before him.

Larry rose and looked at Captain Pennacove so meaningly that the latter followed him outside.

'Leave them alone,' muttered Larry, on the other side of the door. 'Us two old coves will only be in the road. She'll pull him through.'

'Aye, she'll put him in dock for repairs right enough; but what the devil is it all about?'

'It ain't a devil; it's a witch, I'd swear; the yaller-haired witch is at the bottom of it. I know her.'

Roland (as we must still call him from habit) was grateful for the gentle ministering which followed; he was glad to recline full-length on the couch, with soft cushions at his head and shoulders, placed there expressly for him; he sipped the wine and nibbled the biscuit languidly, with every now and again a 'Thank you,' or 'How good you are to me,' and a sorrowful gaze on Una's face, where pity and interrogation were legibly written.

Presently, slightly cheered by the warmth of the wine and few mouthfuls of biscuit, he said:

'You don't ask me why I am here—this way.'

'Because you will tell us of your own accord, I know, when you are stronger.'

'Always thoughtful, Una. Your presence comforts me.'

Una was distressed; his present dependence upon her was rather hazardous to the haven she thought to enter. She stooped as he spoke to pick up something that had fallen behind the couch, so that when she rose, her colour was heightened for a second, but it passed quickly away.

'Does Jessie know you are ill?' she asked naturally, and was surprised that he made no answer; for his head, pressed against the cushion, suddenly turned, giving her a back view of it, and his eyes closed, but his lips never moved.

She did not repeat the question or speak again—not knowing what to do or say—until he faced her, and she saw tears shining in his eyes; then prudence and reserve were considerably weakened. Full of surmise, she was, as a matter of course, far from touching on the truth; she could only fall back on supposition—could only guess that some misfortune had assailed him; and his tears wrung her heart so much that all the hitherto suppressed tenderness burst its bonds and rushed to her lips:

'Oh, Rol—Rol! poor fellow! how can I help you?' Her eyes filled too; her voice quivered.

'By still being the dear friend, the gentle sister of the past days,' he answered, with a pitiful break in his accents, and a hand before his eyes. Then with a strange suddenness, he added, 'I think I could sleep.'

'So you shall,' she said, and immediately proceeded to close the blinds and draw the curtains in the room; then: 'Nobody shall disturb you.'

'Thank you. Oh! thank you; you are so kind! Come back soon; the wine is in my head, I believe.'

And so, with his murmured thanks following her to the door, she passed through with the softest tread and closed it carefully.

And Roland, ashamed of the tears which would flow, thus secured a desired temporary solitude, and next, giving way to drowsiness, was lulled by the sleep denied him the night previous.

He slept so soundly and so long that the appetizing dish ordered for him especially was in danger of being spoiled—that the dining-room was given up to him, and the host and hostess with their friend Larry had dinner laid elsewhere, and allowed him to sleep on undisturbed.

But Roland, unaware that sleep was to overtake him, as the consequence of food and the feeling of content at being with friends, had not told Una that he expected somebody to meet him at Unaville that afternoon or night; and this somebody came, very much to the surprise of the Pennacoves and the wrath of Washington Larry, when they were about finished with dinner in the drawing-room.

It was no other than Theodore Lockstud, and he came

abruptly on them, unaware that he should find them in the drawing-room, being told they were dining, and saying he would wait until they were finished. So he pushed open the door, never heeding the servant's 'Not in there, sir,' and stood before Roland's friends.

He had not met Washington Larry for over twenty years, yet they recognised each other with a malignant scowl; and Larry got up and left the room; but Lockstud, too intent upon another matter, did not give him a second thought as soon as he was out of his sight.

His manner was peculiar. Always courteous, he was now almost rude—boorish; but his appearance proving that he was really ill caused this breach of etiquette to be overlooked.

His hat remained on his head, and he forgot to say 'Good-evening.' What he did say was: 'Is Goldwin here?' when his eyes, having searched the room, failed to light on him.

There was a note in his pocket, which, like a small electric battery, touched all his nerves and kept them leaping and tingling—stripped him, too, of his gallantry and cold studied civility. How could he think of anything else? It was a pistol at his throat—a rope round his neck. What man can think of polite words and every-day courtesy with an invisible noose under his collar dragging him on perhaps to ignominy and destruction? Roland had hurled the lasso, and Jack had helped to fix it when he handed his father that note, which ran:

'Meet me this afternoon or to-night at Unaville. To-day I shall leave Goolgun for ever. I command you to come and hear the reason why. I am ill and dazed.'

It was addressed to Theodore Lockstud, Esq., and signed Roland Goldwin. He scarcely dared to ask himself what it meant, and put off the requested meeting as long as he could fight against the influence impelling him to obey the call.

As soon as he could leave the bank, he went to Goolgun, and asked calmly if he could see Mrs. Goldwin, but was told she had been taken very ill in the morning—that the doctors

had seen her, and given orders to admit no visitors, and had prescribed perfect rest.

'And Mr. Goldwin; I can see him, of course?'

'He was awfully cut up, sir, about the missis, and went out this afternoon for an airing, I suppose; he may be back soon.'

'Well, I would like to see Mrs. Dripper; I have a message to give her particularly.'

'Oh! Mrs. Dripper has left Goolgun for good, sir; and behaved most shameful—just went out of the house as soon as the missis took so bad, and never went near her!'

This from the parlourmaid.

Lockstud's pulse increased; he stood dumb on the Goolgun threshold—opened his mouth to speak, but said nothing; then he turned swiftly on his heel, ran down the stone steps, and left the maid staring after him, not favourably impressed with his good-breeding.

'He might have given a civil thank you,' she thought.

He turned from the Goolgun doors and walked across the terraces till he came to the fountain, and, standing there, knew not that he covered the very self-same spot where Jerry had fallen headlong—had lain a night through to absorb from the dank dew-filled grass his death potion.

Lockstud bared his head and put out his hands to catch the spray and throw it over his head and face; and this being done, his teeth began to chatter, and he cursed himself for a fool. 'Anybody might know the sudden cold would cause a shivering,' he said; while he knew it was not the douche that had done it, and turned from the fountain, where the sunbeams were shining and dancing in dazzling curves of brightness as the glinting willow-like lines of water fell gurgling musically into the basin. He would not go home, and he shirked going to Unaville with the lasso at his throat, yet compelling him to go or be strangled. He sought amusement at the Zoological Gardens, and thought the animals were leering at him; he turned from there and visited the Cyclorama—then on view—representing the battle of Waterloo. The portrayal was perfect—agonizingly perfect to the sensitive spectator, with its smoke and fire and carnage, its faces of the dead and dying, and hard grim realities and terrors of the gory battle-field.

Lockstud sickened at it, and left after a ten minutes' stay;

next he went to his club and tried to read a paper—tried to eat his dinner there. One or two asked him if he had been ill; and he told them he had been having a look at the Cyclorama.

'It is infernally life-like,' he declared with a frown; 'I don't see the use of such harrowing exhibitions.'

He made a pretence of dining, and helped himself rather freely to brandy neat, but he did not stay out all the courses, for his neck seemed to be straining in its yoke; the drag on him was getting stronger, and there was nothing for him but to go quietly away and submit to the attraction he could not resist.

So he stood at last in the house to which he had been commanded to come, and asked:

'Is Goldwin here?'

'Yes,' blurted out the Captain, 'he's here, and all out of gear. What's up? I suppose you know.'

'I don't. Is he ill?'

'Not exactly ill,' said Una, 'but worried over something which he has not told us yet. He is asleep now, and we thought it best not to waken him even for his dinner. Will you join us? We are late, because we waited awhile thinking he might wake.'

Lockstud bowed, and said he had dined, but he was glad to take a chair.

There was an eagerness to hear from him whatever he might know relative to Roland's distress, both on the Captain's and Una's side. Lockstud had never set foot in their house since he had been told of their hospitality to Larry; his very visit at that hour, so unexpected, so brusque—his glance round the room in search of Roland, and his question—his blanched face and drawn features, all seemed to point to him as one who did know something.

'You must know why he is here and not at home: why he looks like a scarecrow,' said the Captain.

'I know no more than you,' answered Lockstud. 'I've been to Goolgun; the servant told me his mother was ill, and that he was not at home. I—I thought to find him at your place, since he was not at ours, and tell him he *ought not* to be out when she is really bad.'

'Well, you're not looking AT yourself,' said Captain Penna-

cove, who, inclined to hostility, was in a relenting mood this minute towards this unwelcome guest, against whom Larry had hardened him. 'Take something.' He pushed the whisky decanter towards him, and then turned to Una. 'Go and have a peep at the boy, Una; he might be awake by this.' And as she went to do his bidding he continued to Lockstud: 'It strikes me there's been a deuce of a row at home, and that's why she's ill and he is upside down.'

Lockstud, having accepted the offer of whisky, had the decanter in his hand over the glass, and it waved in his grasp as if the room were a rolling ship-saloon, so that the liquor ran down the sides of the glass and on to the snow-white cloth.

Captain Pennacove watched him keenly from under his shaggy brows. 'That fellow *does* know something,' he decided in his own mind; but he began to talk of other things, and found converse flag, and that he was getting random replies.

Quite half an hour went by before Una returned to say Roland was awake, and would see Mr. Lockstud, who rose at once and left uncle and niece alone, the former expressing some annoyance at being left so long with 'a fellow like that.'

'I couldn't help it, uncle,' pleaded Una. 'I think Mr. Lockstud knows more than he wishes to tell. Roland was scarcely fit for any exciting interview, so, finding him awake, I got him to eat some dinner first, to get his strength up.'

'Oh, wise little judge!' exclaimed the fond old man, his good humour restored, and with his fingers at her ready ear to pinch. 'You can't spend your wisdom or devotion on a better subject, nor can he think any other devotion so sweet.'

Una reddened painfully and turned away.

He thought the blush a tell-tale, and chuckled at it audibly with a shake of his broad shoulders. He and Larry had married her long ago to Roland over their pipes and the friendly glass.

Then, to put her at her ease again, he asked:

'Did you see how Larry's back was up when Lockstud came in—how he sidled out of the room?'

'I was too much occupied with Mr. Lockstud's looks to notice Mr. Larry, uncle, and thought he had something to tell us to explain this visit of Rol's,' she said.

'The fellow looked ill enough, and I pitied him for it; but I hate him, all the same.'

The hated one was standing at the dining-room door hesitating before he turned the handle.

Daniel never faltered at the mouth of the lions' den as Lockstud faltered now! The Duc d'Enghien never quaked and whitened with qualm when marshalled before the line of soldiery to receive that murderous shower of bullets as Lockstud quaked and whitened now!

With a desperate determination to assume a calm exterior, he at length pushed the door and entered, not forgetting to turn the key in the lock before advancing to meet Roland, who stood with arms folded across his breast awaiting him, and somewhat strengthened for the encounter by the long rest and the food just consumed. Nevertheless, Roland was trembling, but made no pretence of hiding his agitation, as the man who confronted him was struggling to do, yet failing miserably, for his voice shook and his features went awry, as he drew the note from his pocket and tossed it on to the table towards the young man, saying quietly:

'Explain that. Believing you demented, I have come, as you wished, if only to take you back to Goolgun. You have set the Pennacoves' imagination running riot. Now, what does it mean?'

Contempt and compassion were strangely mingled on Roland's countenance. It was pitiable to him to hear the man's assumption of reproach and innocence, and yet to see the fear and wretchedness which could not lie like his words. He could not answer at once, for misery was stifling him. His own father was this, not knowing how much or how little his son knew of their unhappy relations, and sick with suspense so ill-concealed beneath its poor veneer of *sang froid*. He silently scanned him for a few seconds, and then, with a thrilling pathos, replied:

'You ask what it means? Can you not guess? You do guess—nay, guess is not the word—you *know* why I have sent for you! Your face betrays you—belies your words. Why deny it? Why more deceit? Did you think to go down to your grave carrying the secret with you—to leave a foul wrong unrighted? No, you shall not! As there is a just God in

heaven, so shall He mete out justice to His creatures here. It is for *me*, for Cecil Lockstud, your miserable son, to take up the burden of this duty, as He wills it!'

The dart sped and pierced. Lockstud made no movement; he simply stared at the note, unable to look Roland in the face. He was certain, now, that Mrs. Dripper had been playing at Queen's evidence. Why, he knew not. To convict that other woman, Mrs. Goldwin, she being the only one besides in the plot, would be absurd, knowing how much for her depended upon her secrecy. Mrs. Dripper was surely the traitor, and he might have attempted bravado, to swear her statement away, braved much to undo her words, but would not stand deeper polluted before the son who had won his pride and affection.

Love bridled his tongue and preserved his soul from further blackness. It was this well-spring of passionate paternity which, like a strong current, had driven him on, in spite of reluctance, to obey the command in that peremptory note, which had tightened the lasso at his throat, to drag him to his son's feet, to ultimately capitulate. Suspense gone, pretence fled, and Theodore Lockstud, the father—not the man, not the bank manager, the polite friend—stood crestfallen and abashed.

Powerless as an infant to retort or defend, his head dropped till chin lay on breast.

Roland, scarcely prepared for complete surrender and abject remorse, felt in this supreme moment of agony as if his heart would burst. He was disarmed, unmanned, and all the epithets of scorn which were rising to his lips withered there, never finding utterance. In mute misery, like his father's, he turned and laid his head against the wall and on his arm, and then did as Joseph, when he made himself known to his brethren: he 'raised his voice in weeping.' If iron tears ran down Pluto's cheeks, iron tears gathered now in the elder man's eyes, but he dashed his handkerchief across them and strode to Roland's side; he placed a hand on his shoulder, and cried in a hoarse whisper:

'Hush! hush! for God's sake hush! They will hear you.'

'Let all the world hear,' moaned Roland, recklessly impulsive.

'And damn me!' said Lockstud, alive to danger as to pain. 'Calm yourself, and listen to what I have to tell.'

'I am listening.'

'Not like that,' groaned Lockstud. 'How can I speak when you turn from me? How can you heed? Come, let us sit down and have it all out.'

Roland raised a white distorted face, and then, partly led by his father, reached a chair, and with him sat down by the dining-table; but each averted his face from the other, and Roland, elbows on table, held his head in his hands, while Lockstud had thrown himself well back in his chair to aid respiration, which was painful. Then followed a dead silence, and, excepting for the thumping of each man's heart, not a movement for a minute or so, until Lockstud, struggling to master his weakness and bring forward some defence, commanded his voice sufficiently to speak. He began with a question, and but two words:

'Your informant?'

'What matter? I am informed; that's the main point.' Roland spoke bitterly.

'You need not tell me, for I know.' Lockstud clenched his hand; his voice sounded hollow and far away. 'I know the traitor in the camp, where she has thrived and fattened. It is Mrs. Dripper.'

'She was compelled to speak. It is not for you to blame her,' muttered Roland; 'she is no traitor.'

'Then inexorable fate has pursued us all alike,' said Lockstud again, giving forth a hard breath. 'Well, listen, and condemn me if you will. I have been wrong—woefully wrong!'

Roland bowed his head in assent, but kept quiet.

'But the victim of cruel circumstance.'

Roland's mouth here curved slightly with scorn.

'Imagine me a young man—can you?—passionately in love with cruel, selfish Beauty?' continued Lockstud, with a certain passion in his tones as he referred to his past. 'Or bewitched by a Lorelei—a Lorelei to dash me on the rocks, to destroy me in the end!'

'The woman I have called mother?' Roland interpolated.

'Just so,' said Lockstud frowningly. 'And I believe her love for me as pure and deep as mine for her. What fools

men are! It was the old story; her soul cried out for gold before love, and so she tainted mine—she married for gold; I married for consolation, or for pique, or both. What matter now? She wrote to me, saying I was a fool, and had balked her purpose; she said things that would make your hair stand on end; she dared to affirm that for *my* sake she had married, and I swore to myself that some redress should be mine. I allowed myself to be drawn to her side again, and to be kept chained there. She was beautiful—fascinating, and I was ruled by the power of wealth which was hers—which was to aid me. I told you her gold-lust was infectious; it infected me. A man is not a saint, and so the love once strong was wounded to death, and I turned to gold for a salve and a substitution. For a time I had it. All her wiles could not make me forgive or forget, but I deceived her as she deceived me. Her infatuated husband for her sake then gave me a handsome billet, and I was grateful to him—so grateful that I honoured his name, understand, though she held me her slave and adorer. I honoured him—I pitied him in my heart. But some prying wretch made him think of wrongs perhaps that never existed—tried to ruin her and me. You know him well enough; it was Washington Larry.' Lockstud breathed the name from between set teeth. Roland started at the mention of it; it explained at once Mrs. Goldwin's hate. 'Jealous of any creature coming between him and his friend,' went on Lockstud, 'he drove that friend to frenzy, and through him that mad will was drawn—yes, and through him YOU became Roland Goldwin.'

Roland here raised his head and looked at Lockstud, whose eyes were cast on the table; the look did not imply any acceptance of the circumstance as extenuating.

'Go on!' he said, with a slight ring of contempt which did not escape Lockstud.

'Because,' said Lockstud, with a perceptible writhe, 'I think—we thought—he was already magnificently provided for; and the boy's acknowledged death, if you know anything of the will, would have probably enriched him by one-third of the old man's wealth. There certainly was a question of next-of-kin, but it was looked upon as a mere legal phrase, for Jeremiah Goldwin had not a relative in the world, saving his wife and

child. I say again, a man is not a saint, and I was averse to that Paul Pry being one of the heirs. I likewise felt that something was due to the widow, for she had befriended me, and owing to this I helped her to the fraud. She could not deceive me with the exchange of children, so she made me an accomplice. And with her I thought I was insuring something great for your future. I was glad to think you would be a millionaire, and with the possibilities of a crowd of children in time to come to compensate my wife for your loss, the wrong did not seem so terrible. Whereas she, the widow, would be stripped of everything, and, moreover, would see the man who hated her thus enriched. I did hint to her that she might marry again—more money, perhaps—that there was more than one idiot in the world to go mad for her yet. To this she replied that she would go to no man the impoverished relict of a millionaire suffering for her sins—that she would die before Larry should "crow" over her. I gave way. Now you have it. Does it appease you?'

'To know you sold me to a devil?' exclaimed Roland.

'Sold! no, I *gave* you. I gained nothing by the fraud—nothing but sleepless nights. When all was done I suffered remorse, but I could not undo the wrong without implicating her, so had to bear it. My wife's gentleness tortured me; I hated her for it sometimes, and wished she was a virago; but no, she fears me. My children fear me because it is not in me to be gentle or indulgent. My life has been embittered, and all through that woman. Had I never looked upon her face I should have been a better man.'

'You would not have reared me in deceit,' moaned Roland, again bowing his head on his hands. 'You would not have been careless of your sweet wife's heart breaking over the death of her first-born.'

'I did try to make some reparation,' Lockstud said to this, now bending towards the young man, and speaking with a wistful tenderness. 'I bargained that you should be as much under my own roof as possible. I watched you growing with a loving, doting eye, though you may not believe me. I have given you more affection than to all my children put together. My love and pride in you has been a Nemesis, for it is a pain not to be able to tell the world, "This is my son." But now

the revenge is complete with this humiliation of confession. You have your revenge.'

These last words were broken, husky, and the speaker turned abruptly to hide face-contortion.

'Revenge!' cried Roland with dramatic force. 'I want no revenge—only the truth, only justice. I have been an unwitting thief, under the spell of your Lorelei. Are you repentant? Prove it. Help me to return to the estate the cost of my education and maintenance for twenty-one years, and then you will have purged your guilt, and we shall stand together as honest men before God and our fellows.'

He raised his head to search his father's face; his eyes were dry now, and full of fire and purpose.

Lockstud, with eyeballs starting, and a sickly pallor, stared at him.

'Are you mad? You are not going to cut your own throat and mine? You will remain to the world what you have been, and your mother only shall know you for her son. *She* will not betray me. You have not been a profligate with Jerry Goldwin's money. You have strengthened the kindly feeling for his memory. You say you want no revenge, and what is this madness but the direst revenge?'

'Your repentance is a hollow thing, then.' Roland clasped his hands, and turned his eyes heavenwards. 'My God!' he cried in despair, 'am I to seek and find no righteous shred in my father? Shall fire and brimstone rain down upon his soul? Must I fight this battle alone, unaided?'

'Good heaven!' exclaimed the miserable Lockstud, white with fear, and beginning to tremble with a new dread. 'What is it you wish me to do?'

'Make restitution. Have you not the means? And to whom should I apply for help if not to you?'

'You apply,' said Lockstud, with increasing despair, 'to a man of straw. *I* want help. I am steeped in debt. How can I help you?'

'*You* in debt!'

Roland said this with a peculiar inflection of voice that expressed doubt of what he heard.

'In debt,' repeated the other with a groan.

'Then,' said Roland, flashing again, 'I will work the harder

—work unaided. As Cecil Lockstud I am entitled to £500 with accumulated interest; but as Cecil Lockstud the usurper I am entitled to nothing. Not a penny of it will I touch; it must go back to the estate for part payment. For the rest I will work.'

'You will do this deliberately when you need not?' gasped Lockstud, with livid lips and quivering nostrils, and a hand convulsively clenched. 'When it has gone too far to be altered —when those men, the heirs, are already rich and independent? You will rush into poverty and drag down disgrace upon the family? Let two women die in a gaol, perhaps—send *me* to perdition?'

'No, no; how can I do that?' said Roland, with a fresh rush of tears at the misery and unhappy complication. 'The whole world need not know it. I have not spent a sleepless night for nothing. You don't know what I have suffered in thinking it out. For a time I thought as you are tempting me to think now—to let matters rest, to go on as the millionaire, and for the thought I have scourged myself. It must not—cannot be. I know the conditions of the will. The Captain and Mr. Larry are the legal heirs in the event of absence of kin. But it seems they know Jeremiah Goldwin's antecedents so well that they affirm there is no next-of-kin, and this bears out what you yourself just observed. If there were, surely somebody would have turned up long ago to appeal for crumbs from the rich relative's table. Most decidedly, Captain Pennacove and Washington Larry are the legal heirs. This is fortunate, for they are my trusty friends. Again, Tackerline has ever professed goodwill for me, and will help me in shielding disgrace from my people. To these three men, then, I will reveal the fraud, but reveal it only on their word to hide it from the world. Tackerline will conduct the whole matter on the quiet, even to the kin search, if it must be to appease the law. But as *that* will lead to nothing, publicity need not be feared. The business can be wound up in accordance with the will—the world can believe at my desire—and that can wait till the legal claim of Captain Pennacove and Larry shall be fully established, as it must be in the end.'

Lockstud sat bent forward, leaning on the table, and listened, with lowering brow, pallid, parched lips, and features convulsed.

Next came a sardonic laugh—a hollow guttural sound—a death rattle from expiring hope, and he muttered:

'And this is not revenge?'

'You know it is not,' returned Roland. 'Justice—only justice and truth; and it must be borne.'

'Your "trusty" friends may sling their stones at me. Paul Pry may trample, and Mrs. Goldwin may starve and rot.'

'Starve and rot,' repeated Roland, with dull anger in his face, 'when she shall be allowed to escape criminal prosecution? She has infinite resources!'—this with bitterness—'and she must have means. She has excellent investments, which will compensate her for her forfeiture of the annual £100 which would otherwise be her due.'

'My heaven! this is unendurable.' Lockstud rose excitedly, paced the long dining-room twice to and fro, and then reseated himself, to fall wearily back in his chair and groan. 'Investments!' he cried. 'They are moonshine. *I* invested for her—for myself—for Mrs. Dripper, too. They are overboard, I tell you. The Nabob is on the eve of collapse, and she has yet to learn this—she is ruined, and does not stand alone on the wreck.'

'Then,' said Roland solemnly, 'it is her retribution. She must get away; we must raise money somehow and send her away. Here again let the world think the rich Mrs. Goldwin has gone abroad. She must not complain. You must not interpose.'

Lockstud sat all of a heap, limp and wretched. Roland put out his hand, and laid it on his arm.

'Do you suffer alone?' he asked. 'We have both to bear the brunt of the evil—to bear it like men. Trust me to shield you all I can—to dwell on those circumstances that may palliate your offence. Let them see you are eager to redeem the past sin with present courage. Look up and declare yourself ready to do the right, and I will call you "father" in my heart—forget, if I can, the cruel wrong, and accept your bravery as an atonement. The slinging of the stones shall fall harmless.'

The iron tears were once more driven wildly to Lockstud's eyes; his head went down to be cradled in his arms on the table.

'How shall I tell 'Cilla? for she must be told,' he managed to articulate, for the first time fearing his gentle wife.

'*I* will spare you that much pain if you will leave cowardice to knaves and spare me the pain of thinking you will only act on compulsion. I want your free will—your consent to the step I mean to take.' Roland, now excessively agitated, rose and walked a short distance away, saying as he went: 'Oh, think of it—think of it! think of the evil to be undone, the blemish to be wiped away, and then stand clear before heaven! Why fear three men?'

Lockstud looked up, and also rose with a hand stretched out—a magnetic draw for his son—and his face haggard and drawn. Roland, returning, caught at the hand.

'You consent?' he said.

'I consent,' said Lockstud; 'I surrender.'

So Lockstud, with a grace born of necessity, bowed before his son and bit the dust.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

IN KNUTSFORD—OLD NORTH FLINDERSLAND.

THE broad blue Pacific spreads before us, not a dreary, surging, rolling expanse, but a mild, rippling, crinkling blue surface, truthfully reflecting the azure above it, and broken by islands—grass-green islands, with dark cliffs peaked to the clouds, or with undulating hills, wild with foliage and skirted with silvery beach, gently lapped by virescent waves, all picturesque and refreshing to the sea-traveller, whose sight has tired of the monotony of sea and sky, whose heart hungers for a glimpse of the shore, whose feet tingle to tread dear Mother Earth. To the right, to the left, these gladsome land-spots stretch—crag

and reef, not wholly unfraught with danger, where the unskilled seaman is to the fore—so pleasant to look at, yet so perilous to approach.

Through the rippling ocean the *Boolbun* ploughs on her way, with the sunlight dancing on the waves, glinting on her port-holes as she steams beneath an early tropical sun and through tropical waters.

Brawny Jack-tar, bare-footed, bare-armed, bare-chested, with the sweat of honest labour on brow and body, wields the broom over the *Boolbun* decks, deluged from the bucket, her dribbling sides making miniature cascades at her port-holes, tightly closed, to the purgatory of the cabin inmates, who, perhaps, scarcely recovered from a rough, rude shaking of Neptune, are unable to rise, and so lie trifling until the completion of the deck-washing shall allow this one ingress for the pure air from without to be again available.

It was about six o'clock on a summer's morning, and Sol, blinking at Phœbe, *vis-à-vis*, was shooting his fiery arrows far and wide. The sixteen-day-old moon, still aloft, was paling before his ruddy majesty, as his golden glory tinted ocean and earth; she, bleached and fading, apparently abashed, gradually sank lower and lower to dip herself out of sight as he rose higher and higher to begin another day's reign from his red-hot throne.

Saving for one individual, the deck was unoccupied by any of the passengers; its boards were still slippery and wet, while lounges and ship-chairs were huddled on to the skylight. The solitary passenger stood by the bulwarks, heedless of damp boards beneath feet well shod; his arms were folded across his chest; his lengthy, supple limbs were comfortably cased in white jean; his head was covered with a peaked tweed cap, and his eyes were fixed on the lack-lustre moon.

He did not look as one of the eleemosynary kind, yet he was as poor as Job, saving for fifty crisp bank-notes of one pound each reposing in his trunk below. He was Roland Goldwin; with nothing in the world to call his own but his clothes and that present of £50 from one who had determined to befriend him, who looked upon him as a hero and deified him—and that was Mrs. Calliport—one of the depositaries of the secret. She had forbidden her nephew the house, and

would have given lavishly to the son to lighten his poverty. 'The wrong that needs resistance' had been his. He had fought; he had won. The severance from unholy wealth had been to him as the amputation of a diseased limb to save a body—the lopping of a mortifying right hand. The operation was necessary for the welfare of his soul, and with a resolute strength he had torn the offending thing away with his own free will. It drew blood and groans, but it was done. Figuratively his right hand, reddened with plunder, was cast from him, and he was crippled. Crippled, yet victorious, he was greater than Nelson, maimed for glory and lauded by crowd and court.

His triumph, concealed from the outer world, could point to no earthly tribute to come. If a laurel wreathed his brow, it was unseen, unfelt, and not set there by human hands. The compulsion to retain a false name for the honour of the family kept his conscience troubled, but he was powerless to do more than had been done already.

Looking at the moon, now but dimly outlined against the sky like the faintest of etchings, he thought, 'Her brilliance was gone, but her glory has not departed for ever—she will rise again; but I, weighted with contamination, a thief, a usurper, how—how can I surmount this great wrong? Have I done well to refuse the Captain's offer? Shall I, a man with sound body and sound mind, take as a gift what self-respect bids me abjure? No, no!

> '"To thine own self be true
> And it must follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man."'

The blue waves, splashing merrily, gurgled and glittered, as they seemed to respond. 'Go on,' they murmured, 'as the soul within thee guides; consign thyself to that wondrous Hand in the hollow of which we are gathered. We have our mission; take up thine cheerfully.'

'Yes, I will work,' he said, and he meant it. He had a letter of introduction to the overseer of Micola station, in old North Flindersland, now known as Knutsford. This overseer had succeeded Captain Pennacove long ago, when he began the management of the head office of Jeremiah Goldwin at Phillipia (whose estate had considerably increased within the twenty

years), and Micola adjoined Washington, where Larry had elected to live since Jerry's death, and where he reigned.

Roland was just as anxious to quit Phillipia now as Larry had been when he lost his best friend, and was eager to get far away, to live an out-door life, to do bodily work, that the nervous exhaustion experienced and unwholesome inward fermentation might be counteracted, and was prepared to pose as the eccentric young millionaire at Micola, preferring a rough Bush life to the attractions of the city. He had a notion of eventually practising for a legal profession, and soliciting old John Tackerline, hale and hearty still at sixty, to help to this.

He had a second letter, in his breast-pocket, set apart from the first and nestling against his heart, which had served to strengthen and comfort him, and had been received at Millerton (the metropolis of Flindersland) before starting for Knutsford. It acquainted him with events that followed his departure from Phillipia, and will assist you, dear reader, over ground yet to be trodden.

He had read it many times; perhaps its sweet influence had given the waves a voice in words for him. He turned from his musing on the moon and the water, and found a seat on the skylight amidst the huddled chairs, and there drew forth that letter to read again. It was not of love, but was purely platonic, and full of consoling pity and soothing admiration, and was signed 'Una Pennacove.'

'DEAR ROL,' it began,

'To me there is something weirdly strange in having to write to you. I am not writing to Roland Goldwin, and yet this will be addressed to him—to the dead! I deface envelope and letter with a lie, but, like you, neither is responsible for the defilement; unlike you, they are stamped with a permanent falsity. That righteous fire in your soul shall obliterate the stain; it has burned it away even now; it has cleansed you from the slime of the serpent, whose coils have bound you, but could not destroy, for truth has prevailed. We, who know all, recognise the divinity, and gloat over the monster of iniquity, writhing to death under your heel! You are not the merry Rol I have walked and talked with: you are another man, nobler and better, impoverished as you are, than the millionaire

Don't let your poverty be a distress when it is a crown of glory! Anybody can stoop to pick up money; not everybody could resign it as you have done. I don't believe I could say this to your face; I can write it better, for why should we hide what we all think of you when heaven must beam on you? So I say, "Thus shall be done to the man whom the *King* delighteth to honour." Is it Rochefoucauld who says, "Our virtues disappear when put in competition with our interests, as rivers lose themselves in the ocean"? I think it is. He was a student of human nature, but too cynical to admit exceptions to the rule; he seems to sneer at what is best in us, and to found the most prominent virtue on a sneaking vice. No doubt he would call your heroism pride or self-exaltation. Well, no matter what he, or such as he, may think of your present standing, we can recognise its wealth apart from that which is the wealth in gold. Dear Rol, let me comfort you this much, for I know your heart is bowed down. You bade me be your sister; take this balm in Gilead from her.

'Uncle says he was never so miserable. Your trouble is his, and he is vexed because you have refused aid from him. I understand your principle, and can't think you are wrong in this; monetary help from him will make the burden of your self-imposed debt harder to bear and harder to meet, you think.

'I often think of that long talk we once had about the stars, and our probation from one to the other. Do you remember? Perhaps your purification has already begun, and you will go straight to the highest heaven of all, and your present trouble is only that "discord" which is "harmony not understood." It may be as a purification, too, for the unhappy man who has helped to bring this trouble on you.

'Dear little Middie is like a broken-winged dove, and crouches under Mrs. Calliport's wing, away from her father's house, where she will not be pained with the sight of him, and where she can hide herself from all but her family and me. Aunt Jessie has forbidden him her house—she can't forgive him yet, and will not see him—but, for all that, she sent him £100 to help to get rid of Mrs. G——, who, however, has left Goolgun, and gone nobody seems to know where. We have heard that certain investments of hers have failed, and she is positively ruined. Upon this Aunt Jessie promptly acted, desiring him

in a few curt lines not to let it be known that she was the donor "We can't throw her out in the street," she observed to Jessie, with a frown on her face and water in her eyes. Isn't that like good Aunt Jessie? Mrs. Dripper is also reduced to poverty through speculation with her ill-gotten gains, and in order to live has become a nurse at the Debella Hospital. Uncle used his influence in her behalf, for he pities her. I don't know whether he or Mr. Larry raved the most against Mrs. G——, only uncle spent his superfluous wrath in a first flare-up, while Mr. Larry, like a thunder-charged cloud, kept on at a continuous rumbling, sometimes throwing out a dangerous flash. Don't think he has held aloof from you out of any ill-will or unkindness, because I don't believe he bears you any grudge. His manner since the terrible disclosure would certainly lead one to think he did, but I have seen more of him than you. You belong to a family he detests for the sake of its founder with a strong-headed inconsistency, but though almost broken-hearted to know who you really are, he can't help liking you. The disappointment has had a strange effect on his rugged nature, and the fact of no worse punishment to come than what has befallen the two people he despises is a bitterness to him. Yesterday he went off to Millerton by train, and will probably soon be at his station again. As for Mr. Tackerline, he will do anything he possibly can to serve you; and as uncle laughs at the idea of searching for next-of-kin, and calls it a wild-goose chase, and says in a sharp, emphatic way, as if he knew more than he cares to tell: "He will *never* be found," Mr. Tackerline asserts, "So much the better, for while the search goes on things can remain *in statu quo;* concealment will be easy." In order to insure concealment, as he promised you, he has begun to institute inquiries for next-of-kin—not to Jeremiah Goldwin, but to *you*, implying that the heir is desirous to befriend the needy relative, or relatives, of his father. Of course, the search is a mere formality, since it will lead to nothing, and caution will be exercised against the advent of pretenders. Goolgun is shut up, and both uncle and Larry are well pleased to let the claim stand over, since it is painfully forced upon them at your cost. Aunt Jessie intends carrying Middie away to Wondoo again; she is so kind, and I'm sure her heart yearns to the sinning nephew, though she is severe, and rules his wife to be likewise. Is the love for

him frozen since the day she bent over poor Mid's prostrate form and thought the cruel truth had killed her, as it had nigh killed herself the day you told her everything? Then try and revive it, Rol, for he is being driven to do reckless things, we hear, and love and leniency may save him from ruin.'

Thus Una wrote, and if her letter was blotted here and there with the splash of a tear, or damp with the touch of his lips, what wonder? By the time he had finished reading it, the deck was almost dry, and presented something like order, while other passengers began to emerge from the companion. Most of his fellow-travellers knew him by name, and believed they knew much of his antecedents. There was a quickened interest in the glances directed at him, which proved he stood as an interesting curiosity. Australia is not so prolific in millionaires as in rabbits, and it is not every day in the year that one is thrown for a few days with a number of less worldly-favoured individuals to share the pleasures and the perils of the vast deep, or take part in the general accommodation of the saloon as one of themselves. A few were satisfied to look at him, as he was young and comely. Some were inclined to address him; others were intrusive, and talked whether he was disposed to be sociable or not; but he was not so disposed, and had lost that free-and-easy courtesy of manner and ready smile, waving upward to admit a glimpse of ivory behind, which had won him friends everywhere.

One gentleman during the voyage had opened a conversation with him, anxious to make an impression on an apparent stolidity by giving him an invitation to his own house on landing at Etoco, the capital of Knutsford, and one time known as Robsville. He was a small man, with a clean-shaven face, excepting for a very slight moustache of pale umber, and had a prominent chin, a wide mouth, and a head well thrown back, so that his chin sharpened upward, and his whole appearance presented self-importance in its strongest light. He was member for South Etoco, and emphasized this fact by handing his card to Roland, and stating that he would be happy to see him again and take him to Government House. He did not tell him that he possessed a couple of marriageable daughters, which possession had led to his amiability.

'There, sir, keep that by you,' he said, pushing the card into Roland's hand, 'and come and see us *sans cérémonie*, you know, whenever you've nothing better to do.'

Roland, in ignorance of the young ladies in the background, bowed politely and thanked him. But so far had adversity affected him that cynicism sometimes rose to the surface, and he smiled the cynic's smile when he pictured to himself the horror of the honourable member should he know he was dispensing his favours to a poverty-stricken man. The smile struck his would-be friend unpleasantly, and made him think he was toadying to a cad; all the same, the toadying did not abate.

The *Boolbun* was but twelve hours from Etoco when Roland re-read Una's letter. Before the sun fell she dropped anchor in Kennedy Bay, with the Etoco hills rising distinctly in the distance, and a glistening, curving beach opposite. At Etoco Roland was to take train for the interior, and from thence ride to Micola.

All the *Boolbun* saloon passengers now crowded to that side of her facing the city and its encircling green heights, with one great-great-grandfather of a hill, red, rugged, rocky, and wide-stretching, with a turret-like peak towering to the skies and over all from the background. Time was when passengers to Etoco —then Robsville—had to be transmitted to her shores by lighter or tender, sometimes by an open boat if the tide ran low; but this was before North and South Flindersland had separated, before the energetic north had achieved its aim; now, far on in the last decade of this pushing nineteenth century, a lengthy jetty, like a huge elongated tongue, protruded from the city, bearing railway-lines, over which a train thundered from wharf to steamer, from steamer to wharf, bearing freight, human and otherwise.

The *Boolbun* crowd craned its neck and quickened its sight to catch the glimpse of some familar face peeping upward from the cars below or the jetty, ready to smile a welcome. Roland expected nobody, knew nobody, and, while pondering on this unusual experience of being friendless, a young man with whom he had exchanged courtesies during the voyage came and stood alongside of him.

'You're a stranger in these parts, if I remember rightly?' he began. 'You told me so, I think?'

'Yes; and you?' from Roland.

'Well, no. I know it pretty well, and can put you up to a thing or two, if you like.'

Roland, seemingly occupied with watching the city, as it lay opposite, basking in sunlight, gave no answer.

'It hasn't got the Phillipia "go," you see, but it isn't half such a bad place as you might think to find, after your noisy cities, though it'll run ahead of them some day. I'll be able to show you about,' mumbled the officious gentleman, with a cigar in his mouth and his elbows on the bulwarks.

'There will be no time for showing about, thank you,' returned Roland; 'I only stay here over-night.'

'And you don't know an inch of the ground yet?'

'No.'

'And I do. I'm a commercial traveller, you see.' The commercial traveller removed his cigar, and, with fingers straddling it, looked upon this young millionaire with some amusement before he said: 'Why, you've got no end of property here, if your father was the man I've heard about!'

'I beg your pardon,' said Roland loftily, and with colour mounting to his hair-roots. Was he going to be tantalized with impertinent questions already? he thought.

'No offence—no offence,' said the other lightly, noting the flush, 'only I'd like to show you all over the place. Will you come below for a tamberoora?'

'A what?' Roland knew little of colonial bar slang.

'A shout, then—a nip—wet the baby,' laughed the traveller, who could not quite believe in this girlish ignorance. 'Come on.'

'No, thank you, I'd rather not;' and Roland hastily turned on his heel with a 'Good-afternoon; I'm going on shore,' and left him.

'Shabby customer,' said the commercial to himself, who was annoyed at not being accepted as lion-leader. 'Won't even join in a shout. Wish I had a third of his tin; I'd teach him how to spin it.'

Roland, glad to shake off an undesirable companionship, hurried away, and stepping over the bridge from deck to jetty, soon settled himself in a carriage corner, ready to steam on to Etoco. He was surrounded by men, women, and children, yet

he was alone. Those who had been a few days at sea were relieved to be away from the *Boolbun's* monotony; wives chatted volubly to husbands, and babies crowed, and children laughed and clapped their little hands, as they were rushed onward, and saw shimmering water, green hills, and rocky walls fleeing before them.

Roland, absorbed in thought, and still smarting from the intrusive questioning of the commercial traveller, was pondering on his words, 'You've got no end of property here.' Yet as the train steamed over the jetty he was roused to take an interest in his surroundings, the beauties of nature, and found pleasure in watching the dimpled blue bay catching the vivid rays of a tropical sunset, the verdant heights and bold acclivity steeped to the summit in rich sunshine and ruddy as burnished gold.

Huge boulder-like clouds were banked in the far-off western sky, all granite-marked and set against an apparent crimson sea, toned with orange tints sweeping across the background of soft sapphire, slowly fading to the palest heliotrope and flecked with wondrous clouds of beautiful variety: feathery and golden clouds as fronds and ferns delicately traced in sea-green lines; lacy clouds, rainbow-hued, mottled and broken; grotto-mounted clouds, transparent with scarlet flame—the whole a shifting mass of colour, so fired with its dazzling brilliance that the east caught the reflection, and all things within its reach were touched with its glory: even the rocks, rugged and bold in their gaunt nakedness, became radiant before the divine kaleidoscope announcing the decline of another day. A pink haze curtained the horizon, and pinky elves seemingly danced in the wavelets. Roland looked up reverently towards this God-painting in the gallery of heaven, beyond the grasp of art—inimitable here below.

'Pretty sight that, Mr. Goldwin!'

Roland turned sharply from the window to see Mr. Pendell, the member for South Etoco, at his elbow.

'Glorious!' ejaculated Roland, not at all pleased when that gentleman, having left his seat opposite, seated himself again near him and would talk. The spell of the glory was broken with the rasping thin accents dinning in his ear.

'See anything like that down south?' he asked.

'No.'

'How long are you going to remain here?'

'Only over-night. I'm off to the interior in the morning.'

'Greycott?'

'Beyond a bit—Micola.'

'So. Well, it's a good run. I've been there. Gower's a long-headed one—plenty of push in him.'

'I don't know him.'

Roland looked through the window again with annoyance on his features. He objected to an embarrassing inquisitiveness; but the little man was determined to get as much as he could out of the young one, and continued:

'So this is quite a new experience for you? Well, it doesn't do for a man to be tied in one place after a certain age; he gets musty and rusty if he doesn't rub up against the world. Look at me, sir. Knocking about the world has rubbed me up. I came to this place with three coppers in my pocket. I did. But what odds? A butcher shop gave me work. This Etoco was Robsville then, and queer enough it was, with one street not a quarter of a mile long, and all on one side, too, with this very creek—see, we're just entering it now—opposite. It was dust, hills, rocks and mangrove, with a couple of banks, two pubs, and an odd mixture of people and lean, hungry, naked blacks parading the town. Look at it now, sir. Pushing men have done it.' He lifted his chin in the air, and pulled at a hair of his moustache with a complacency that seemed to add, 'And I am one of them; behold me! nothing to pay.'

'No doubt,' answered Roland, 'separation has sent it ahead and to pushing men separation is due.'

'Sent it ahead! it has gone up like a balloon—a rocket! They don't call it "the remote portion of the colony" down south now; they did while their greedy hands hung on to the ropes. Well, they blistered their fingers and had to let go, because we northerners gave a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether, and they miss the "remote portion," and we can laugh at them. Push, sir—push is the sword to fight with. I was a butcher's clerk; that's a long while ago. I pushed on, and got to be a surveyor, and member of the House in the now flourishing capital. I'm proud of it, sir, I am!' Mr. Pendell expected eulogy from his listener, but, not getting it,

he went on to ask further questions. 'Are you going to visit our great mining centre, Carter's Heights?'

'Not just yet.'

'Where are you going to put up?'

'I am not decided yet,' replied Roland, who had no idea whatever, and, with a lack of practicality in worldly things, had not thought of it until this minute.

'Well, take my advice and try the Esplanade. It is just opposite the bay, and cool and comfortable.'

'Thank you, I will.'

Then the train, rushing onward, was gliding through the city, and at last reached the terminus.

'Well, good-bye,' said Mr. Pendell to Roland, with quite an affectionate hold on his hand. 'You'll be coming down this way again, and when you do, don't forget to favour us with a call. You'll like our little humpy, Mr. Goldwin,' he laughed, and accented the word 'humpy' that it might be understood as mansion.

Roland bowed and thanked him, but did not think it necessary to state the visit would not be forthcoming.

The sunset was fading as he emerged from the crowd at the station, followed by a porter bearing his luggage. Knutsford knows no lingering twilight, and over the iridescent clouds there began to creep the misty veil of dusk, to develop soon into night, as he, deposited in a cab with his baggage, was being driven to the hotel recommended, the Esplanade, opposite a well-built structure from which it took its name, running the length of the beach, with an avenue of splendid trees of ponciana, kola-nut, and eucalypti.

Passing rapidly through the principal street, partly serpentine, with other vehicles behind, before, and on each side of him, conveying residents and visitors to their destination, he could take a hurried view of the new capital, with its tall warehouses and pretentious shops; but suddenly curving at a corner, he lost sight of the long street, and left its traffic behind, to be brought face to face with Kennedy Bay, with the ocean line beyond, kissing the sky within purpling vapours. Calm as a lake it lay before him, palled with evening shadows, dotted with shipping, and canopied with a sky softened with pale violet tints in the dusk, and from which a tiny star just peeped. The esplanade came between him and the silvery stretch of beach beyond, and its trees rustled with a musical swish, swish, accompanying the lap of the mild wave opposite.

He was being carried over a clean, broad gravelled road fronting the houses, and saw pretty cottages and homesteads, gardens and churches, flitting by, and enjoyed the present tranquillity, believing he should see no more of the commercial traveller and the member for South Etoco.

Etoco had at one time seemed to him as a cherry ripening to fall into his mouth when he should hold up his head to receive it, and, lo! now it was nothing to him. He could not claim a square inch of it, as he sighed 'Why was I reared to think I should call some of it mine?' Nevertheless, he could not be devoid of interest in a city of such strides. Lolling peacefully against the cushions of the hansom in dreamy idleness, he was sorry when the drive terminated at the hotel door.

CHAPTER II.

BUSH INITIATION.

At this early period of the new colony's existence, that struggle to emulate the rapid advance of the venerable mother colony and her elder daughters was beginning to declare itself even in the back country—on the selection, the farm, the station. Bush homes were undergoing evolution into attractive and commodious residences, and luxurious taste and desire were being developed.

Irrigation, the ensilage scheme and the artesian bore promised prosperity in the very teeth of a drought. Labour-saving machinery, meaning fewer hands and more work done with bigger profits for the pastoral, agricultural, and shepherd kings, frowned on the conservative sons of toil, or, rather, they frowned at it, and a scowl, like the echo, is often but a duplicate expression of our own creation.

Oh! shall we ever touch that 'promised land' of Bellamy's, the land of milk and honey, when all men shall think, speak,

and act in unison, content to be led by guiding-strings, gathered within the grasp of a handful of leaders.

Shall the general interest dovetail like a Chinese puzzle, with its curiously-fitting blocks cut so unlike, yet making under the correct manipulation a wonderfully harmonious whole?

Shall the puzzle ever be solved? Shall it come to pass that men in a world where variety rules in class, colour, and creed, in form and feature, in race, character and attribute, shall dance to the one method of piping, bow at one shrine, freely accept for adoption and without argument that leading principle calculated to force heterogeneous humanity to one mind? Perhaps the Divine organization which has surely planned the one diversity plans the other.

'Man is little lower than the angels.' When he is not a little lower he will know content, but never before; when he is on a level the millennium will have arrived.

Well, it was not the year 2,000, and every man studied his own interests first; and there were men to swear by the new patents and modern ideas, filing off labour and piling on capital as a natural sequence, and men to swear against them for exactly the same reason. Of course, they decried them, and being thrown out from the labour handed down perhaps from their fathers, who can fail to pity them or give a kind word to urge them on to woo fortune in another way? Not I—not you.

Alexander Gower, successor to Captain Pennacove as manager of the Micola run, was one of the many to embrace every means that might ameliorate the condition of the station. He was a hard-headed, wiry-framed Scotchman, with grizzled tawny hair and a beard to match flowing to his waist, with high cheek-bones and red-brown face, with a huge fist that for hair might have matched Esau's. He was near fifty years old, but only within the last year had taken unto himself a wife. Not so long ago he had dwelt in the primitive hut of two rooms which had once served Captain Pennacove for a residence.

Gower had been content with bachelor habits, and his own culinary marvels in the way of Johnny cakes and damper. Asking himself whether marriage was a failure, he decided in the affirmative, and continued to drain his tin billy of tea, and

swallow salt junk with stolid satisfaction. But there came a time of doubt, and then a revolution of ideas on the pros and cons of marital life.

There happened to be a station a few miles ahead of Micola to which Gower had *carte blanche* to visit at his pleasure, where he might spend a happy hour or so with the worthy squatter who lived there in the bosom of his family.

Will Gratrak rejoiced in the possession of a wife and three little daughters, for whom a governess was provided. It was at Gratrak's hearth that Gower's heart began to yield to the influence of 'lovely woman.'

There gastronomy held such sway that it undermined former opinions. Seed-cake and jam-tarts, home-brewed ale and home-made bread, savoury sandwiches and the wholesome varied board of the thrifty wife, made his stomach revolt at a continuance of damper and junk for the rest of his life, for at Micola he resolved to live and die.

It was at Gratrak's that the presence and welcome chatter of ladies opened his eyes to the fact of his having a lonely, unlovely home; that the idea of winning Miss Spriggins, the governess, to create a close copy of the Gratraks' Eden for him, took root, thrived and fructified. Miss Spriggins, like Barkis, was 'willin'.' So his old hut was relegated to the head-stockman, Barney O'Flynn, and a new building sprang up in due time to receive the bride—a palace by contrast to the old hut of gum-tree slabs for walls and bark for roof, and yawning crevices, clogged here and there with clay to exclude the rude breath of piercing winds. It was a weather-board cottage—a comfortably designed habitation, with a couple of rooms to spare for the accommodation of guests, and one apartment, larger than the rest, cosily furnished, and known as the drawing-room.

In winter this latter was glowing with a huge fire—for winter can be biting and bitter in the tropics—of blazing logs, piled within a wide recess in the far-off wall. In the summer the great gap was filled with pretty pot-plants, and hung around with marsupial skins, and a 'brush' or two of the dingo; it was a veritable Australian nook.

Alec Gower was scarcely married twelve months when he received intimation from Captain Pennacove relative to a visit

from Roland Kovodel Goldwin. Gower had never known Jerry, but knew him quite well by repute—so well that he was anxious to do all honour to his son, now the millionaire, as he believed, of course.

Being wanted at Micola, as it was a busy time, he could not get as far as Etoco to receive him as he desired; the only thing he could do was to ride as far as Greycott, the nearest town of the district, where a daily train plied from the capital; and this he did, with Barney O'Flynn, the head-stockman, at his side, leading a third horse—a smooth-coated, mild-eyed mare—girthed and saddled in readiness for the young master to mount. A dog, foxy and mongrel, with a stump of a tail, and a black patch over his eye, which earned him the name of Dick Dead-eye, cantered at the horse's heels all the way to Greycott. Together they stood, men and beasts, at the railway-station, where men, women, and children were gathering, some in knots, some scattered—all on the look-out for the iron horse, the belching of which could be seen in the distance, and which soon, snorting and bustling, fussed into the terminus, with its train of carriages and trucks and hot and weary passengers, while the sun still shone high.

'The young master's comin' for a look round, I suppose?' queried Barney, as he shaded his eyes with a big brown hand the better to see the incoming train.

'I dinna ken much aboot it,' replied Alec. 'The Captain says he's got no notion of hard work, but all the same wants to try on the Jackeroo business; he says he's got a head like a poet's and hands like a lady's. Queer things to bring to work with, eh? And he says he's a braw lad, too. I never saw him more than you, so we'll just have to spot the first callant as he jumps on the platform, and so find the right mon.'

'If you don't disremember the old man, it might be a bit of a guide,' suggested Barney.

'Weel, seeing that I never saw the father either, and set foot in the colony just as he took up his last station at Gobong, down there in Phillipia, that won't help. Here she comes.'

Roland's eyes were busy at his vantage-pane from within the carriage; with the gradual cessation of motion he rose to his feet, stretched himself wearily, and next slipped his head and part of his shoulders through the window. All he saw had

novelty as he gazed upon the Bush township. Selector, squatter, storekeeper, were each fairly represented on the platform. Tradesmen and loafers and Mongolians were all there, and all alike coatless, vestless, with their clay pipes shooting from their lips, or hanging from the mouth-corner, or in hand for a second as they discharged the tobacco foulness from their palates with guttural noises on all sides or anywhere, or puffed their smoke in the faces of the bystanders.

There were but three of the aboriginal class, and they belonged to a station—two of the three employed as drawer of water and hewer of wood: an original governor of the soil, ebony black, and anointed with grease that made his face shine; and his gin in scarlet petticoat, clinging to lean, shapeless limbs with a cast-off black jersey on her body, and a piccaninny astride her neck. They jabbered from their own vocabulary, and the jabbering mingled with the yaw-yaw-yong of the Chinamen, to fall on Roland's ears as a confused medley of harsh sounds.

Some few horsemen appeared in the background; two were standing by their horses and watching eagerly the exit of the passengers from the carriages. One in particular arrested Roland's attention, with bridle over his arm and Bush dress. His long legs were encased in riding-breeches, strapped to the knee with brown-leather leggings, and held by a belt, adorned with pouch and sheath-knife hanging at his side; with a cabbage-tree hat perched on tawny, grizzled locks, a stout riding-whip in his left hand, spurs on heels, and a scarlet silk handkerchief wound about his throat to fall as a tie over a Crimean shirt—to peep through a rift here and there in the breastplate of tawny beard; and withal the short clay pipe in his mouth, while a dog close by yelped at everybody, and sniffed around alternately.

'I wonder if that fellow is from Micola, or if he could give me a few useful hints about getting there?' thought Roland.

'Now, I wonder if that young chap could tell me if young Mr. Goldwin come along with him in the train?' thought Alec, who had seen half a dozen 'braw' lads step from carriage to platform, and began to feel as confused as Roland was helpless, and both were consequently propelled towards each other. Alec, walking his horse, came up to Roland as Roland approached Alec.

'Guid e'en to you, young sir,' said the latter, 'but has a Mr. Goldwin come on in your train or been in your company?'

Had this question been put to Roland but a month before he must needs have met it with a jocular reply, and one of his winning smiles; but as matters stood the very utterance of the name he falsely held was a sharp reminder to his sensitive mind, and grated on his ears. Grave in his demeanour, dusty, heated, he stood before Alec, and simply said:

'*I* am called Mr. Goldwin.'

Alec Gower, somewhat chilled at the manner of the announcement, which to his quick penetration betokened an irritation at the question, nevertheless extended his Esau-like hand and exclaimed:

'Weel a weel, then, that's a goodish bit of luck for me, for I am called Alec Gower by most folk, and ha' been making my eyes sore trying to set them on the right mon and gie him weelcom to Micola—so weelcom is the word, sir.'

The gravity was swept from Roland's features for a moment as he clasped the big hand.

'So you are Alec Gower, are you?' he began. 'I ought to have recognised you from Captain Pennacove's description, and did not, and Larry's, too. I've often heard him speak of you. Some instinct alone impelled us to inquire of each other, I suppose. You seem to me quite an old friend.'

Alec, not a little pleased at the change in his young master's tones from frigidity to heartiness, ejaculated between closed lips the sing-song 'H'm, h'm' of the 'land o' cakes,' which is equivalent to the English 'Yes,' and which is as impossible to reproduce by pen as it is to grasp an echo with the hand or clutch at the sunbeam.

Then followed a renewal of handshaking and an introduction to Barney, who, having noted from his distant stand the familiarity between the overseer and the new arrival, conjectured rightly that the 'braw' boy had been found, so he leaped on his own horse and led Roland's mount towards him. He was inexpressibly touched when Roland pressed his hand, too, and made some kindly speech. Roland's fingers were crushed within a fierce grip, which was meant to atone for lack of words, of which Barney was not a master, and in his heart he there and then summed up a verdict in the young man's favour.

'A born gentleman he is,' he mumbled quietly. 'None o' the dude about him.'

'Well, sir, here's your mount,' said Alec, ready for a swing on to his own saddle, and stroking the neck of the mare awaiting Roland. 'She's a fairy, and we called her Dame Trot in the old time; but my missis has christened her again—she's Titania now. A great one for the books, sir, is my missis. Jump up, Mr. Goldwin, and try her a wee bit. She'll go like a hansom cab—she's an easy-chair, the pick of our run; and, as you must be dry after the journey, and we give a run round to the pubs when we come down, p'raps you'll join us at the Greycott Arms, Mr. Goldwin, in a drink, if it's all the same to you. We'll get it over in a cat-loup and start freshened. The train gets in earlier now, so we'll get through an hour's riding before the sun falls, and it'll be hot. We'll send for your traps to-morrow, when the cart goes in for supplies. All labelled?'

'Yes; and there's not too much.'

'Vera guid, sir. Now, will you jump?'

Roland eyed Titania doubtfully; his equestrian experience hitherto had been but meagre, and then of the mild canter type; but seeing what was expected of him, he made no hesitation, but cheerfully set his foot in the stirrup and bounded on Titania's back. The trial-trip was not a lengthy one, for in less than ten minutes the three halted at the Greycott Arms, to give, as Alec said, 'Crook his turn.'

They all entered the bar together, with Dick Dead-eye at their heels.

Gower was anxious to introduce Roland, as his father's son should be introduced, to the whole district, if possible, where the name of Goldwin was so well known, and always associated with vast wealth, and liberality in proportion. To do this he began with the usual preliminary 'shout' all round

Roland looked about him curiously, and noted the bar to be but a rough imitation of the ordinary city haunts where one class of men imbibe slow poison as nectar, and laugh at the blue ribbon. It was full of men, new-comers and constant-comers, who all seemed to know Alec and Barney, to whom they gave a side-nod or some sort of greeting.

A barmaid, inclined to a rough sort of prettiness and dash of speech, stood in attendance. She was smartly attired,

decked with jaunty ribbons and bangled wrists, and hair tumbling almost on to her nose, freed from its curling-papers, and presenting a faithful copy of aboriginal wool.

When Roland, in response to her 'What will you have, sir?' chose a mild beverage in the shape of a glass of ginger-ale, she observed him with some curiosity and a bold stare, letting her eyebrows swiftly fly upwards in surprise, till they disappeared in the wool, as she said, with a scoffing merriment, 'Does yer mother know yer out?' At which all but Roland and his two new-found friends laughed a loud guffaw.

Gower and Barney were vexed, and Roland, not ignoring the drift of the question, vouchsafed no reply, but waited in dignified silence to be served as he desired, while the men who knew him not understood that he was not a target for jest, and eyed him furtively, and Crook, mine host, dug a forefinger in Alec's breast, as he asked:

'Where, now, did you pick that new chum up? He's a rum customer to call for stuff like that.'

'That gentleman,' flatly answered Gower, with a stress on the second word, 'is Lucky Jerry's lad, and you had better tell Miss Saucebox over there to mind what she is about, or you won't see him here in a hurry again.' And next, raising his voice and tossing a note on the bar-counter, he said: 'Mr. Goldwin will take ginger-ale. Fetch us two brandies and one ginger-ale.'

This announcement of the young millionaire's presence caused a visible effect on all present. Miss Saucebox coloured up, and drew her lips in for a noiseless whistle; the strange men began to whisper among themselves, and look longer on the son of the man of whom they all had heard at one time or another, the man whose wealth had tripled itself since he had left it behind.

Crook strode at once to Roland's side to make an awkward obeisance and say:

'You're welcome to Greycott, Mr. Goldwin.'

Roland's expression was not an amiable one, as he gave a solemn 'Thank you,' bowed stiffly to Crook, and then turned his back on him, to stand by the counter and wait for his ginger-ale.

Gower, having asked each man what drink he preferred, did

not get much change out of his pound-note when the glasses were drained and set down.

Goldwin was expected to 'shout' next, but, having soothed his parched throat with the harmless drink, he walked quickly out of the bar and remounted Titania, in waiting for Gower and Barney. He was sickened and irritated; it was not this foretaste of the life he had elected to lead for a little while that made his heart sink, but the name of Goldwin fitted to him still, which was as a hair-shirt, the more stinging for pressure. Here even in the Bush the misery of it all would not be softened, as he had hoped, but was aggravated; so he strode gloomily from the bar, intending never to enter it again.

Alec and Barney, having swallowed their draught, soon followed him, but not before the former had offered a defence for his guest's conduct.

'Ye had no call to raise a laugh agen him.' Miss Saucebox, catching his eye fixed on her, only tossed her head, and he continued: 'He's a gentleman born and reared, and dinna understand our rough Bush ways.'

'And,' put in Barney, 'I'm thinkin' the green 'll wear off by-and-by. He ain't a dude, that's the truth.'

'He ain't a chip of the block, anyhow,' remarked Crook, when Gower and O'Flynn were at their horses again. 'The old man would ha' laughed along with us; he wouldn't ha' stalked out like a prince, as if we was dirt, with never a civil good-bye.'

Mr. Crook was disappointed. He quite expected that Jerry's son would have done the shouting, and that with a big cheque without calling for change. He had heard of the early Crœsus diggers of the southern colonies who, to convince others of the superfluity of their gold, were reputed to have made sandwiches of their five-pound notes for their own consumption, or to have converted them into pipe-spills. That young Goldwin had failed to do this, or even to leave a heavy cheque, as his father was always said to have done when he visited Crook-like establishments, was certainly a bad mark set against him, and made Crook say to all present:

'He ain't a chip of the block, anyhow. What's a fiver to him? And then to go strutting off like that, after a sixpenny drink, too, and that out of Gower's pocket! It's a dirty trick!

He ain't like the Jerry I've heerd on. He's a bloomin' swell, and got no go in him. Kep' too long at his books. I've heerd say he's a university man. I never did stick up for too much eddication out 'ere.'

Alec and Barney rejoined Roland, swung themselves on to their saddles, and the three turned their faces towards Micola, maintaining silence for several minutes, since the young master seemed put out and little inclined to talk; but each was busy thinking.

Alec was wondering how best to initiate Jerry's son, how to break him in to Bush ways, and make a 'mon' of him, if he meant to make a long stay. He knew he had made a bad impression at the Greycott Arms, and wished to protect him from future condemnation, but meant to do the breaking-in gently.

Barney, voting him a 'brick,' doubled up a fist mechanically, ready to knock down the first one who might dare to contradict the assertion. On their way they trotted, with the evening sun blazing in their faces, and with Dick Dead-eye galloping after his master. The gum-trees towered on all sides, some with scanty foliage, some gaunt and leafless, forming with their crooked naked boughs a broken network against the far-off mountains, smoky-blue, and undulating, touching the clouds; sundried water-holes yawned here and there, and parched grass, fevered with drought, crackled where the weight of hoofs fell.

Dick Dead-eye, with his tail erect and ears stiffened, yelped at a flock of magpies screaming their evening song as they soared overhead, a mottled patch before the sky.

He thought he saw those feathered myrmidons of the Bush at which he was wont to bark, so drilled by Barney. He halted, with his muzzle upturned, and gave forth a succession of snaps and growls till they disappeared, and then, with lolling tongue and wagging stump, renewed his run after the horsemen until his sharp eye noted an opossum on the bough of a tree, half dormant, and he barked again, with a leap at the trunk. The opossum, aroused, scudded away higher, and then, as if in defiance, hung, head foremost, by its tail ringed securely to one of the tallest branches, blinking his soft black eyes at the mongrel foiled and snapping. But, instinctively knowing the prey to be beyond his reach, the dog did as his betters, and

turned scornfully from 'sour grapes,' yet with a drooping stump now, and a half-hearted trot onward; while Roland, taking his maiden Bush-ride on a summer's afternoon in the tropics, with the sun gradually sinking, yet flashing in his eyes, and an hour from complete decline, was realizing this fiery king's power in Knutsford.

The heat-drops stood on his face and neck; the mare—for all Alec's eulogy—was rough in her shamble to a city-bred lad, unaccustomed to horse exercise; and no matter how he tried to accommodate himself to her paces, he was painfully conscious of a looseness in his joints and a shifting seat.

Alec, always keen of observation, noted the discomfort signalled on the young man's face, and thereupon suggested a halt.

'Hot work, sir, for you, I dare say,' he said, not without a slight twinkle of fun in his expression. 'We'll bide a wee bit, eh?'

'Hot!' replied Roland, 'rather say roasting.'

Glad to halt, he drew rein, and pulled out his handkerchief to mop his head, face, neck and hands.

'You've got too much to carry, faith!' said Barney. 'Throw off your coat, sir, and I'll chuck it over my saddle.'

Roland, glad to be relieved in any way, improved upon this advice, and stripped himself of vest as well as coat, to give them into Barney's custody. In his white linen shirt, white trousers, and a broad-brimmed white straw hat (clothing recommended by Captain Pennacove), he contrasted strangely with his companions in their corduroy breeches, Crimean shirts, and cabbage-tree head-gear.

It did not strike him as ludicrous, but merely emphasized a starting-point in the casting off of old habits.

'What would they say at Phillipia if they saw me now?' he smilingly asked himself.

Gower noted the smile, and translated it as relief.

'Ah, coom, that looks more like business,' quoth he, as Roland rested and took a quick survey of the country, with his hat, like Gower's and Barney's tilted forward to protect his eyes from the glare. 'We won't have that fire-ball for long noo; then we'll no' be in a hurry over it, but ride quiet like, and gie the moon a chance to see us on to the run.'

Roland scarcely heeded this, his attention being attracted by numerous mounds—baby pyramids—scattered far and wide and studding the stretch of country around and before him, which to his fancy presented a rough semblance to a camping-ground dotted with mud huts instead of tents.

'What are those?' he asked, pointing with his whip from right to left. 'Huts, or what?'

'Ant-hills,' said Barney.

'Clever little creatures,' said Alec. 'Some day you shall see one of their castles, with halls and rooms, and with more honest work in them than in many of our tumble-down houses.'

'They have been at work since the creation, I dare say,' Roland asserted, with a slow movement of his head, as he glanced all around him with a fresh interest. 'I have read something of their habits, and Solomon must have studied them, since he quotes them as an example of industry.'

Alec gave out another 'H'm—h'm,' and lifted his hat as if in a church porch.

'"Go to the ant, thou sluggard," and do likewise,' he said, with all the reverence of his nation for the spirit and text of the Eternal Book. 'There ain't any reading going to equal that Book, sir,' he added. 'It won't be kept down under a heap of new-fangled notions, as folks would like to keep it, but can't, because it's got a soul and must rise. It won't—it can't die.'

'Shall we get along?' asked Barney stolidly, and indifferent to the subject.

'No hurry, mon,' returned Gower; 'we'll leave it to Mr. Goldwin.'

'Oh, I'm ready,' said Roland, uttering a pious fraud in his desire not to detain them.

All agreed, they renewed their trot, with but a temporary interruption through a mother kangaroo, who, munching at the hillside, sitting upright, tripod-wise, supported by legs and tail, and bearing in her pouch two tiny duplicates of herself, with ears, eyes, and nose peeping therefrom, had all her inborn timidity aroused with the clatter of the horse-hoofs, and went madly leaping across the track of the horses, to startle them as she had been startled from her arbour.

Titania, under a strange hand, reared slightly, but, steadied

by Barney's well-known voice, and a quick grip at her rein, relapsed into the trot which Alec called easy and poor Roland thought purgatory, and never slackened it until she landed him at Micola.

On foot again, and now under star and moonshine, he, weary, hot, and with leaping nerves and aching muscles, walked a little way with Gower towards his home, while Barney led the horses off to the paddock.

Alec's heavy boots echoed through a long passage (which Mrs. Gower called the hall), and Roland, having crossed the threshold with him, kept at his side under escort to the room which had been specially prepared for Jerry Goldwin's son.

'Here it is, sir,' said Alec; 'not like what you've been used to, but our best.'

'I could be content with less,' replied Roland, with a quick glance at the surroundings. 'This is quite cosy, and you are very kind.'

'Honoured, sir, honoured, if you please. And if you dinna mind taking a change of claithing till your traps coom, I'll git them from somewhere.'

Roland was anxious for such a change, and said so.

'If they're not a pretty fit they'll be fresh,' said Alec; 'and take your ain time to dress, sir. The missis is in the kitchen, and she'll feed you on summat better than junk and damper.'

Then he left Roland to his ablutions, and went clanking back again through the passage to find what he had offered.

CHAPTER III.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RUN.

Roland, having been provided with the desired change of clothing, and put in possession of his coat and vest again, stood attired in his Crimean shirt and moleskins—or, rather, Gower's, which certainly were not a 'pretty fit'—and surveyed himself with a peculiar smile before a twelve-inch square mirror hanging on the wall.

'A little less baggy,' he mused, 'I might call them swaddling clothes to begin Micola with.'

And then, remembering he was yet to be presented to Mrs. Gower, he slipped his coat over the Bush swaddling to hide its inelegance as much as possible, and gave many additional little touches to his toilette, of which he might have been careless had no lady ruled at the Micola homestead. But the coat, setting well to his figure, and being of a smart patrol cut, gave him a piebald appearance—city and country unevenly marked—in the dining-room, where Alec stood ready to introduce him to Mrs. Gower, who was already seated at the head of the long dining-table, from which hot savoury odours were rising to fill the room and pleasantly assail Roland's olfactory sense, and accentuate that sinking within him till it was sharply revealed as hunger, and hailed as a friend from whom he had been some time parted.

In addition to Mrs. Gower, he met two young men who had preceded him by a year on the station, and who hitherto had been strangers to each other; each the younger son of a wealthy father, a consignment from England, and a fully initiated Jackeroo.

Mrs. Gower was a tall, bony lady, with angular shoulders, pasty complexion, and reddish-brown hair loosely coiled, from which a few stray wisps were supposed to form a curl, allowed to dangle on each side of a long neck from behind her ears; the style suggested freedom of habit, but did not counteract a prim and discreet manner. Her features were homely, but not unpleasant, for she was one kindly disposed, and her face declared it more often than not, and so she had won her husband's homage to herself and her servants' fealty.

But the stock of white servants in the Bush is mostly scanty, and calls for the sometimes rough and untrained help of the dark children of the soil. Micola could only boast of two of the former, a married couple, with a gin and two or three black boys under them for the heaviest work, and Mrs. Gower over all as chief.

Mrs. Gower could achieve marvellous things by her industry at the culinary workshop; she could outdo Mrs. Beeton, and had been somewhat flurried this day in her anxiety to excel

herself that she might serve a dinner to young Mr. Goldwin at which Epicurus himself could not complain.

She had imagined him to be a spoiled child of fortune, always to be humoured; but as soon as she saw him, bowing, and courteous as he could be, he gave one of his winning smiles again, in a moment of happy oblivion, which advanced for him at once a successful suit for her favour and gained another friend. But there followed a more powerful appeal still than a whole army of graces and gallant attributes, and that was his evident satisfaction with the fare provided, for he ate and drank like a hungry hearty man, as he had not done since misfortune had nigh crushed him.

Dyspepsia had held him for its own—wrested from him a naturally healthy appetite, to give him in its stead what Carlyle in the dyspeptic grip has referred to as an 'infernal apparatus.'

A dusty, tedious train journey, and a long trot through the Bush, with only a light sandwich or so to keep him from absolute fasting on the way, had restored to Roland a wholesome craving for food; the restoration exorcised for the nonce not only the incidents of the Greycott Arms, but all the effects of Titania's liveliness, and the difficulty of his own changed position.

Comparatively he was happy, then; superlatively Mrs. Gower was entranced, and needed no outspoken praise, which was not unusual from her husband and the young men present, for the manner in which the fatted calf had been prepared.

Heroes are but human, and this fact is proclaimed to the reader now as Roland revels in the consciousness of a sound digestion again—a rare appetite and the wherewithal to appease it.

Stimulated with food and generally pleased and grateful, his tongue loosened, and he did something else besides eat and drink: he began to talk in his own old bright way, and kept his companions interested in all things that he touched upon.

'He is a grand young fellow—a gentleman if you like.' It was Mrs. Gower who made this declaration, later on, to her lord, when Roland, tired and sleepy, was already far away in the land of dreams, and they were retiring. 'Talk about your English lads, indeed, after him!'

'H'm, h'm,' said Alec, with a polite acquiescence merely,

and no enthusiasm. 'He is guid eno' to look at and listen to, but I can't quite make him out. He is close with his bawbees a wee bit; but maybe he'll ken better soon what's expected of a weel-to-do mon in these parts.' Alec was thinking of the sixpenny drink at the Greycott Arms, which he had paid for; he had not grudged it, but he would rather, for the credit of the station, that Goldwin had repressed the evident repugnance which Crook and Miss Saucebox had evoked, and been more politic in the matter of doing as Rome did, he being in Rome, and, moreover, with a heavy purse, which should have opened wide instead of being closely buttoned up under his city-cut coat, as it was supposed to be. 'He's just come in for his own,' continued Gower; 'but you'd think he was as straitened as a mon steeped in debt; and then, agen, he has coom to do the Jackeroo business, he says, and what for? I'd like to know what for, when he's no' made for the like, and can't sit Titania better than a bairn in petticoats. If it wasn't for all his clever talk I'd say——' Alec hesitated as he noted something aggressive in his wife's manner.

'Well?' she said.

'He was a bit daft.' Alec finished his remark with an accompanying illustration by touching his forehead significantly with his fingers.

'It's a shame for you to think or say such a thing of a fine noble lad like that. Daft because he is pleased to amuse himself at playing Bushman? And as for "being close with his bawbees," I don't see that you've had time to judge yet'—Mrs. Gower knew nothing of the sixpenny drink—'and if he is, the more honour to him, perhaps. A gentleman doesn't fling his money on all sides of him to flaunt his position in everybody's eyes and advertise his wealth. That's my opinion.'

Thus Mrs. Gower, as she held her brush aloft, suspended in its action of brushing up her hair for the night, to dwindle to a tight little knot on the top of her head.

'Weel a weel,' responded Gower, who seldom cared to differ from his wife, whose opinions he respected as he did her domestic ability, 'dinna be fashed aboot it. The Captain says he is a braw boy, so we'll abide by the Captain.' But Alec was not fully satisfied for all that, and said to himself, 'Time will tell.'

Time was not long in telling him that there was a method in the young millionaire's madness. Gower was a shrewd man, but, shrewd as he was, he could never have had by simple close observation the remotest idea of the actual facts upon which the method was based. It was arranged that he should show Roland the next morning around, and make him acquainted with the run, the yards, and the men. But Roland was not up with the sun, for when the breakfast-bell rang at eight o'clock he was still stretched in slumber, and Mrs. Gower took care that he should have his breakfast like a lord, quite a couple of hours later, when all station-hands were out and at work.

Her kindness and hospitality were not lost upon him; nevertheless, the sweetness of both was somewhat neutralized with a touch of gall.

It was, perhaps, a natural thing that one so ultra-sensitive should at the slightest attention received over and above the ordinary demand on courtesy flinch as though a raw wound, bandaged and hidden, had been inadvertently set bleeding afresh by too active a physical demonstration of friendship.

The night previous, the sense of comfort brought by the kindly genial faces met, and the welcome board and bed, had stilled for a time the throbbing of that wound, had exorcised the skeleton which he could never shut away in the cupboard, but which persisted in standing continuously behind his shoulder, always to cast its shadow about him more or less, but never so heavy as when the glare of millionaire homage seemed to be strongest.

Mrs. Gower's ministrations were made to the man, not to the millionaire; for Roland's attractions did not entirely depend upon his position; his athletic, graceful figure, his manliness, contradicting the effeminate softness of a boyish, hairless face; his gentleness, his talk, his chivalry, and, above all, his capacity for doing justice to her culinary ability, had won her heart; yet unknown to herself, it is just possible that the millionaire glory intensified the attractions of the man. Such a ruddy background of a literally golden light, the blaze of sovereigns piled, built up like a throne on a daïs for a handsome young man to recline upon, must work its influence upon the human mind. And Mrs. Gower was human; the glint of the gold touching

her guest became a nimbus, in which the skeleton, all unseen, mocked and grinned.

It was this skeleton which urged Roland to put forth a strange request to Alec Gower when they were together, the lordly breakfast having been disposed of, and on their way to the paddocks afoot.

'Ask fifty, sir,' said Alec, in response to Roland's 'I have a favour to ask.

'I need not test your goodwill with fifty of them,' replied Roland, with a settled gravity on his features; 'I shall ask but one. I want you to understand that I am here to work, if I can. I want no distinction between me and the two young fellows I met at your table. They eat there—so shall I; but they sleep elsewhere, and so shall I. You call them Smithson and Johndel, I think; call me Rol. You don't know how much it would please me if you would all call me Rol, and leave "Mr. Goldwin" and "sir" alone. I am here as a sort of station-hand to do honest Bush-work or station-work, or whatever I can, for a time, and it doesn't fit in with the "sir" and the distinction you and your good wife desire to show.'

He spoke with a nervous rapidity, which sometimes tripped him up in his words and forced a stutter. He was longing to forget the name of Goldwin if he could, and sink his false personality in an easy familiarity and the outdoor labour of which he knew nothing.

'Your wish shall be law, sir—I beg pardon—Rol. You see, it fashes one a bit at the first, but we'll drop doon to it, no fear aboot that.'

Alec said this with respectful obedience to one upon whom he looked as his master, but could not resist a halt for a second to fix a searching eye upon the young man's countenance, with his words to his wife suddenly recurring to his mind:

'I'd say he was a bit daft.'

Roland, unequal to dissimulation, coloured under the scrutiny, which was irritating, and walked on. When he spoke again it was to touch upon matters quite apart from himself.

'Shall we see the ensilage pits to-day?' he asked.

'Not much to see,' answered Alec; 'but if rain don't coom soon, ye'll see the jewel we get from them. Jest jewel-boxes they are: big, tight, dry wells—dry as a bone, packed with the fodder and corn. There it is, sweet and fresh as the day it was put in. The poor beasts need no' tremble for drought. We'll cut across to Barney's hut directly, and we'll get the horses looked up; it'll be a quicker way to do the overlooking to-day, Mr. Goldwin—Rol, I mean. Darn me! but it's as slippery to catch hold on as a drap of quicksiller. I think I'd run a wild bull into the yard by mysel' better.'

He cast another queer look at his companion, which was unseen.

'Mr. Larry has told me a great deal about the success of the pits,' said Roland.

'Ay; he goes in for them himsel'.'

'Who is his manager?'

'He's been his own manager for twenty year—or thinks he has been. All the same, he relies upon an overseer. The Washington run is only second to Micola. Your father called it after the old chap, and Larry bought it in later years. What do ye think of him? If he thinks as much aboot your father's son as he did of your father, ye've got a friend stanch as steel.'

Roland evaded a reply to this remark by putting an irrelevant question:

'When do you shear?'

'Soon. Seen the machines ever?'

'No; but I've read of them.'

'Weel, they'll be a curiosity for such as ye. We country folks are getting used to 'em, though they're not in use all round, but will be by-and-by. A mon with an ounce of brains will have the machine before the old shears. When ye see for yoursel', ye'll jest think the same. Snip, snip, snip, over, under, and everywhere in a cat-loup, and the creature stands stripped of its fleece as clean as a banana nicely peeled, and a'most as quick done too. If the sheep weren't such idiots, they'd show surprise.'

'And what about the men thrown out of employment by the machine, for, of course, you don't need so many hands?'

'Weel, they get odd jobs aboot, if they're willing to work. I gie them a chance when I can, but they do a power of grumbling all the same. They'd hang on to the old slow-going business, and put a spoke in the squatter's wheel if they could. They hate him, and hate the machines that wise heads

have invented for his prosperity. They'd strike at the root of them.'

'We can scarcely blame them,' said Roland, ready to sympathize with the side of labour. 'Remember that too often invention strikes at the root of labour's calling. It has been proved—well proved—that the swifter the science of machinery advances, the stronger the grip of poverty fastens on the toiler, who finds his occupation swept away by the advance. The world is none the happier for the genius that works to enrich the few and starve the many: it is not unlike a torpedo thrown to catch fish, regardless of the destruction of hundreds for the sake of a desired haul of luscious food.'

'H'm, h'm,' said Alec. 'Vera guid, sir—Rol, I mean—but you haven't seen much of the world yet. It's a mighty race-course, and the "battle is not to the swift, nor the race to the strong, but time and chance doth happen to them all." A guid mon said that who knew summat of human nature, too; and there were rich and poor in his days, and there's rich and poor noo; and there'll be rich and poor always, invention or no invention. One mon is bound to push on, and another gets trampled on—that's the way of it. Advance there must be.'

'Advance by all means, if we can do it *without* the trampling—if redress can be made to those left behind hungry and wretched.'

'Weel, Mr. Gol——, er——' Alec hesitated at the forbidden name, and, with another tentative glance at Roland, said: 'A millionaire can put straight much that is crooked; he can lift up the trampled.'

Roland flushed painfully. That crown of prosperity, glittering for him as it had been in the distance before he attained his majority, he had promised himself should not overweight his brain, but be relieved of its superfluous gems for the benefit of a class. He had looked upon his wealth much in the same way as a devoted mother delights in that sustenance which is hers only to sustain. Now his resignation of the crown, for honour's sake, yet made head and heart ache when he missed its weight. Alec's remark sent a quiver of pain through him, but saving for a flush he made no sign, and said with a certain pathos:

'I would not hamper worthy ambition, but yet I sigh for the old time when luxury was not necessity, and the fig-tree stood ready for the man to sit beneath and smoke his pipe of peace, if he chose to remain there and let others battle for progress.'

'Bah!' cried Gower impatiently, 'the old time had its fermentation, for all its fig-trees. The women worried over their gew-gaws to outdo each other then as noo, I don't doot, and the mon who had one fig-tree envied his neighbour who had two or three of them. No, no; mon is a restless animal; he ain't satisfied with his limbs given; he'd like wings, and some day science 'll gie them to him, and then he'll be fashed because he can't get as far as the moon with a pick and a shovel to prospect there for gold. But here we are at Barney's. I s'pose he's off with the lads, but you shall have a peep.'

Alec, unceremoniously entering, bade Roland follow, and both men passed the threshold of what had once been the manager's own quarters, and with which he had learned to be discontented.

'My drawing-room,' he said by way of introduction, and waving one of his big hairy hands, 'and kitchen in one. Noo it is Barney's.'

The 'drawing-room' floor was of ant-bed, which, when crushed to powder and mixed with water, hardens like cement; the walls were papered at intervals with woodcuts from illustrated periodicals and some painted almanacs, which served to partly conceal the ungainly fissures of the slabs and curtain their ugliness. Opposite the doorway just passed there was a huge fireplace, backed and flanked with rusty tin, where logs smouldered beneath their débris of cinders, and an improvised crane protruded with a hanging kettle; an empty billy-can, rolled on its side, reposed perilously near the logs; and suspended from the bark roof were a couple of smoked hams—a present to Barney from Mrs. Gower—and a big dilly-bag—an elongated basket of plaited rushes of aboriginal manufacture—filled with onions. A carbine stood upright in one corner, and in another was built a three-cornered cupboard—a diminutive store-house for the stowing away of tea, sugar, flour, matches, and an odd bottle of draught-whiskey, with a few tins of jam and potted fish; on the top of the cupboard was a litter—a metal

candlestick, holding half a candle, with stalactitic grease drooping about it and caked on the metal; an empty salmon-tin converted into a tobacco-jar, an open jack-knife, and a couple of pipes, well stained with use, and evidently carelessly tossed there to lie grovelling within a hillock of dirty-white ash tumbled from the bowls.

In the centre of the ant-bed floor there stood a table of planks on four squat-like studdings acting as legs, while by the fire, which still gave heat, there lay something curled, having no shape in particular, but a decided odour, mingling with the faint exhalation of the hams and strong scent of onions, to breed a peculiar atmosphere, which Gower anathematized and Roland shrank from.

'You black villain with lazy bluid, clear out o' this!' said Alec, addressing the 'curled something' with a raised voice and a slight application of his right foot, which had the effect of a sudden uncurling of the 'villain,' a little wriggle, and then a leap, to reveal the full figure of a half-clad black boy, dazed with heavy sleep, and staring stupidly at the two white men, with his hands at his mop of wiry black hair, and ten scratching fingers running through it. His teeth, even and white—whiter by contrast with their ebony framing—suddenly gleamed with the rolling back of his thick lips as sleepiness was driven away and he recognised the overseer, of whom he did not seem afraid, for he grinned as he stood before him, with his naked feet and lean calves protruding from a cast-off pair of riding-breeches, and with a soiled guernsey, gaping at the chest, for body covering.

'Sprightly plenty work along a mornin', masser; me plenty tired,' he began by way of apology.

'Baal too much work,' replied Gower. 'You too much lazy. Murry mickey, noo, and catch yarraman for two feller masser; this is another feller masser'—here Gower pointed to Roland, whose face was full of interest—'he want to mell mell all aboot; murry mickey, noo.'

Alec's mixture of broad Scotch and black's dialect first provoked a smile from Roland, and next irresistibly a hearty laugh, which Sprightly was quick to echo with a yawning mouth and a second free display of ivory. He evidently was accustomed to gentle kicks and high words, which he knew

meant no harm. As a proof of his trust in the good fellowship of the overseer, he deliberately asked for 'bacca,' whereupon the latter drew a tobacco-fig from his pouch and a knife from his pocket, cut off an inch or so of the fig, tossed it to the petitioner, who caught it as a monkey would a nut, and again bade him 'murry mickey,' meaning make haste.

'Is he one of the station hands?' inquired Roland as he watched the retreating figure of the black boy, now agile enough with its supple, lean limbs, as he went on his mission to catch the horses.

'Of a sort,' replied Alec. 'We call him Barney's man—he brought him up from a bairn; and we also call him Sprightly, jist because he isn't sprightly, and will sleep like a dormouse. But he's a splendid tracker for the stray cattle, and he's a faithful cub. They make pretty good servants if trained weel, the niggers, and treated weel; gie them enough to eat—plenty tucker, or "parter," as they call it—a bit o' tobacco, a red handkerchief, or a shirt, and some o' them'll work like troopers.'

'And is there no trace of cannibalism?'

'Not in our lot; they're mild as sheep, the poor deevils, if they're only let alone, and don't bear us a grudge because we've taken their country from them to help push on the world. If your father, and others like him, Mr. Gol——I beg your pardon, Rol—had been content to sit under one fig-tree, North Flindersland would no' be Knutsford noo, and going on its own hook. You see, we had to trample on the road; it's part and parcel of the programme. To reach a certain point we have to jostle and be jostled; those who can't steer themsel' ought no' to complain of those who can, even if they do go to the wall. I've had plenty hard knocks in my time, but if we want to get on we must put up with that.'

Roland said nothing to this; he was thinking of his own 'hard knock,' and whether he would be compelled to jostle others, in order to reach the goal he desired.

'And noo,' added Gower, pointing to a doorway in the side-wall, where a shabby piece of cretonne (relegated to Barney from the Gower cottage) dangled and flapped as substitute for a door, 'in there's Barney's bedroom—once mine—and I don't think there is much to see in it but untidiness; and while

we're waiting for Sprightly, I'll show you to the station-house, where the boys sleep, and where you can sleep, too, if you don't care aboot putting up at the home; but, mind, if it should no' be to your liking, coom back to us—the guid wife will keep the room for ye.'

So saying, he turned from Barney's cabin to lead Roland towards the old station-house, which was a long, narrow building, with roughly-constructed verandas back and front, and with quite a suite of rooms. Here the Jackeroos slept, and Gower proceeded to point out one room in particular, which should be portioned to Roland if he persisted in sleeping there too. From this he drew him to a long, low scullery-like room, whose scent proclaimed its dedication to harness and leather appurtenances generally, without the full display of saddles, whips, bridles, and girths.

Here Alec Gower commenced to select saddles, etc., for the equipment of the horses when Sprightly should bring them, and Roland, anxious to begin doing something, helped him unasked. But when they were on their horses there was little time but for a superficial inspection of the many things Roland had been desirous to give close observation to—the pits and the shearing-machines, the cattle-yards and slaughter-pens, the shepherds' huts, and the storehouse.

Alec gave up his time entirely to him this first day, which was filled in till sundown with a swift survey and much explanation.

Roland's keen interest, and his apparent eagerness to set to work with those taper-fingered, filbert-nailed white hands of his, went far to win Alec's esteem and incline him to overlook the parsimony which he had condemned to his wife.

And Roland enjoyed that night another hearty meal, and was not disposed to quarrel with the place, which to him was as a city of refuge.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOLD-STREAKS IN THE ORE.

THE third night after Roland's coming to Micola he was in his own room of the old station-house, where he chose to sleep, and was busy at his desk, set on a spindle-shanked deal table with no covering but a scattering of loose writing-paper, and where a strong light fell from the kerosene lamp suspended immediately above his head, to glint on the ripples of his hair, on his young face, now indented with thought, as he bent forward, pen in hand, and commenced a letter beginning with 'Dear Una, dearest friend,' the completion of which was about to be deferred through an unexpected interruption.

He was unaware that he was not alone, that a pair of eyes sunken in their bilious caverns and framed in a network of wrinkles were fixed upon him, filled with pain, yet misty, and gleaming in tenderness and reverence—that an old white-haired man was standing in the doorway leaning on a heavy stick, as if for support to a nervous body, shaking not alone with age, for agitation shook his limbs, and his lips quivered, as he announced himself with a deep-toned melancholy 'Ah!'

Roland, in spite of Una's defence, was immediately alive to an unwelcome presence, and faced the intruder with sternness, biting at his lip to arrest the bitter greeting that would assuredly have gone forth but for the bent white head and evident infirmity appealing to respect. He felt that Washington Larry's gaze was a burning-glass to consume, red-hot with the hatred and contempt ever nursed for anyone of the Lockstud blood. His behaviour, as Una had observed in her letter, was calculated to favour the impression that a boasted friendship, founded upon a supposed relationship to the beloved Jerry, had fallen through on the removal of that basis; for since learning the full truth from the lawyer, who before disclosure had exacted a promise of secrecy, he had held himself distantly, and seemingly proved his aversion. The Captain, all sympathy and earnestness, had come forward to press immediate aid and show irritation because it was refused. But Larry had avoided touching the hand of the lad, for whom he had professed a personal fond-

ness—had never offered one word of pity. Full of loathing and revenge, he had even growled out his regret that his word had been passed to maintain silence, and he muttered something like a threat to break it, that he might give publicity to the crime revealed in a whisper, to work it up to a roar for the outside world, and see the two people he had hunted down in the past safe in the hands of justice and steeped in disgrace. Yet Roland was in error, and Una the clearer-sighted, and the melancholy 'Ah!' vibrated with a pathos of its own, carried quaveringly into his opening speech:

'Drop that look, youngster. It ain't that way you have always greeted the old man.'

Roland, frigid, found voice and said:

'You surely have made a mistake in coming here. This is not the manager's residence.'

'Hang the manager!' snapped Larry, with a thump of his stick on the floor. 'I've not come out of my way to see him. I only want to see you, and Barney directed me here.' He stepped up to the deal table and put out his hand. 'Come, give us your fist, boy.'

As this was quite an unexpected advance from one supposed to be hating him heartily, and ready to avoid him, Roland, slightly relaxing, could scarcely be churlish enough to resent it.

'That's right,' continued Larry, with Roland's fingers, not yet responsive, gripped in a steel-like clasp. 'You're not goin' to send me off to Gower with that 'igh and mighty hoity toity, that don't belong to you no more than—no more than——'

Here, floundering for a comparison, Roland interjected, with a touch of sarcasm:

'Than the name I go by does, perhaps you would say.'

'No, I wasn't goin' to say it; but, as you've said it, let it stand. I wasn't goin' to throw that in your teeth.'

'No?' said Roland, now thawing fast, and feeling self-rebuked. 'Well, sit down.' He placed the one chair of the room at his visitor's disposal, and waited till he was seated, with his thick stick upright between his knees, upon which he steadied both his hands, holding on as if it were a hauling-rope. Roland carefully shut to the door and began to walk up and down the little room before he continued. 'Tell me,' he asked, 'why you have behaved so strangely—why you come now

to see a creature who has unfortunately fallen in your esteem, but through no fault of his own?'

Larry looked as if he were on the point of crying, but he did not show tears, and Roland went on:

'You have shunned me like a pestilence—a walking pestilence!—because I am befouled with the pitch of the pit in which I have been reared. Or is it because I, of the family of the man you detest, am still compelled, for the honour of an innocent, unoffending woman, with children around her, to retain a false name, one to which I have no claim whatever—one that you love? I would save *her* the disgrace, but the bearing of that name is a constant torture to me. I call for pity, not contempt.'

A lean yellow hand went up from the stick, as if to entreat for mercy.

'No, you're not Jerry's son,' said the old man, in a muffled tone, as though something was sticking in his throat, 'else you'd know me better. You'd know I've just been mad, upside-down, flabbergasted, but not with you. I kep' a tight 'old on myself *not* to see you till I got my senses back, for I knew it was not your fault, and I was afeard I should burst—split—after givin' my word that I'd keep mum. But who would ha' guessed what it was that old Tackerline and Pennacove had to tell? I got away somewhere, and shut myself up to curse and swear hard and fast. To be told you was somebody else, with *his* blood in your veins, and not Jerry's at all, struck me all of a 'eap, and to think that I hadn't moved heaven and earth to stop his marrying that yaller-haired witch—to think how she had been gulling us all, and been cheatin' him in his grave, too! I felt like poisonin' myself to get the mad feeling done with; and yet with it all I never split. Do you know why?'

'Because you had given your word to keep quiet.'

'No. I'd ha' broke my word, and thought it no harm, neither, to bring a pair of evil birds down to the dust. I kep' quiet because of *you*—because, Jerry's boy or not Jerry's boy, you made me cotton to you the first time I clapped eyes on you—because it was over Jerry's grave we first shook hands: I can't forget that—because you paid him a son's duty and gave him a son's love: I can't forget that—and I can't forget as how you've willin'ly beggared yourself to do the square thing by

me and the Captain. You're a plucky youngster, and, thunder! I'm proud of you, I am, in spite of the blood in your veins, which strikes me has been well filtered somehow, and—hold 'ard awhile, youngster'—this was interpolated to prevent Roland's interruption, for, halting in his walk, he opened his lips to speak. 'Hold 'ard, I've got more to say. I've been dazed, and not able to sleep a wink or enjoy a bite. To see *him* and *her* yoked in a prison van, bound for quod, would have seemed like their real deserts, and I'd ha' danced after the van; but you wouldn't let me—it was you held me back, and it's you that has brought me 'ere to-night.' Larry rose rather feebly, and took a step or two forward, dropped his stick, and laid both his hands on Roland's breast, peering into his face as he had at Jerry's grave, as he went on solemnly: 'Jerry's spirit is in you. I see him last night as I see him last, hugging his own baby when he was on his death-bed, only he wasn't hugging nobody; he was standing upright in the room at Bachelor's Nest, just like old times, and his right hand pointed to a sort of cloud that stood on a level with his shoulder, and then rose above him like a mist, and slowly cleared away to show what it hid, for with the lifting of the mist I see the face and figure of a young man, at first like a shadow, and then all clear. It was *you!* and Jerry, pointing, spoke. "Wash," he said, just in the old way, "this boy is my heir, and no other." There! I see it all as certain as I'm a livin' man this night. Now, I'm not a sooperstitious man, but that wasn't no dream, youngster, but a vision like Adam had when angels climbed the ladder. It was a warning; it brought me to my senses; it said: "Wash, touch a penny of that money and be cursed; it belongs to that lad who has been called by my name all these years, and who has earned it." Now you see why the money worrits me, don't you? The next-of-kin business is all humbug. *I* know, and the Captain knows, there ain't likely to be found next-of-kin—never mind why. Very well, in that case the money, two-thirds of it—and it's a big property now, let me tell you—will be his and mine. Well, I don't want mine; it must be yours, or Jerry won't rest in his grave. I've got enough, and more than enough, and Jerry knows it. I'm an old feller now, nigh seventy year; what do *I* want of more money?'

His hands, palsied with emotion, went from their resting-place up to the shoulders of the lad whom he was desirous to befriend at the instigation of a dream, and who was so overcome that for a moment reply was denied to him. Roland caught at the wrinkled, withered hands, bearing upon him to draw them down for a fierce, impassioned clasp within his own, while a spasm passed over his features to sweep all colour away and leave his face white and troubled. Conscience-stricken for having harboured anything like vindictive feeling against one whose whole aim was to be his benefactor, and to hide the benefaction behind a mere dream—the confused result of day-thought, perhaps—he was compelled to realize the truth of the text: 'For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.' The coals blazed now, and a knot of pain at his throat was forced from its hold there that he might speak, though with difficulty.

'I don't deserve this. I have maligned you in my heart. Misfortune is no misfortune if it can bring a man the friends I have found. Pray forgive me! I don't deserve it—I don't deserve such friendship as this from you.'

'Bah!' came a guttural interjection, meant to be passionate, but so choked as to be muffled. Larry was fain to wrench one of his hands from Roland's to search for a red handkerchief, which, after diligently applying to his nostrils to disperse breath-obstruction, he drew across his eyes before he continued: 'Don't be a child; what have I got to forgive, unless you worrit me with strong-headedness? Promise to take the thing and make no bones about it.'

'Then I must ask your forgiveness again,' returned Roland sadly, 'for I must not—cannot take it! Don't tempt me.'

Larry pulled his remaining hand away impatiently, and Roland stooped to restore him his stick, which once again became a prop as the old man, standing, leaned forward on it and showed a face clouded with disappointment.

'Why?' he began reproachfully. 'I know why. You won't be beholden to a stale old fungus; you are too proud to take anything from such as me.'

'No—no.' Roland folded his arms across his chest and resumed his walk to and fro. 'You must not be hurt with me because my principles recoil from an acceptance of ease and

plenty under existing circumstances. Can't you understand that I feel it a positive duty to wipe out the sin that has been forced upon me—the sin of a man for whom I am filled with pity and shame? My future action must atone for past wrongs. Your generosity and the Captain's seem to increase the debt still on your books against me, must increase my gratitude, my determination not to impose on you. Every honest man likes to pay his debts. Would you deprive me of the satisfaction in attempting to do this now by carving out a new line for myself? I will work and win a name for myself—not on the station; I am here for physical work, to kill mental strain, to recruit exhausted energy. When I am steadier nerved and well recruited, I intend to try the law for a profession, and then I shall feel on the way to paying off every farthing I owe to the estate, and not till then shall I be happy.'

Larry, unable to answer this, turned away to his chair again, there, with his forehead on his stick, to ponder for a few seconds. Presently he lifted his white head, and said with renewed eagerness:

'You're not proud; you're strong-headed—you ought to be Jerry's boy for that. How are you going to get into the law without money? You can't see ahead a bit, so you're not his boy. You can't stir a peg anywheres without money.'

'Then you shall help me in my own way.' Roland said this as if with sudden inspiration. He was anxious to pacify Larry, and to show him he was not too proud to accept his aid. 'You have offered to give up everything of your bequest to enrich me. It is impossible to tell you how it has moved me, how unworthy I feel of the kindness, how grateful I shall ever be. It is painful to think that you should misunderstand at all my reasons for refusing such munificence; let us compromise the matter. I will ask of you a loan to help me on—only a loan, to be repaid when I get a sure footing.'

'Let it be that,' responded Larry, suddenly brightening up, with a grim smile playing under his jungle of beard. He was thinking it probable that he should have 'a sure footing' in the grave before the loan could be wiped off, and that death would make his wish imperative, and this boy, who clung to honour so persistently, a rich man, if not a millionaire. 'Let it be that if you won't take it as a gift.'

'The loan itself will demand more than repayment in money; it will demand a life-long gratitude,' said Roland, with much earnestness. 'Did you know that Captain Pennacove was likewise anxious to aid me? He wanted me to remain in Phillipia—to be his guest, his adopted son—wanted me to accept a princely present from him. Well, I refused him as I have refused you.'

'I didn't know then. I only know we was both grumpy alike over the whole business, and almost wished you hadn't found it out. Only *she's* turned off from Goolgun, and *he's* known for what he is by you; that's a sort o' comfortin'. And I know you're as blind as any old owl.'

'Woefully blind,' Roland at once admitted.

'Blind!' went on Larry. 'Can't you see what the old chap's driving at? It's all as straight as a big A B C. There's a young woman that'll have you for the asking. Why don't you fix it up between you? She'll get the Captain's share and all that comes at the back of it, and you get *her*. There! don't you see? Things might go on jest as before, only with the riddance of the yaller-haired witch.'

Larry was still under the impression that Una's affection was centred where he would have it centred, and it seemed to him that Roland only wanted a nudge or two to urge him on to this inviting outlet from a sore dilemma.

But Roland, having been told by Una to woo another, could not believe it possible that she loved him. Even if he had so believed, he would not have dared to seek her as his wife now that his position was so marvellously, painfully changed. She was still his dear friend—sister, counsellor, with no hope of ever being nearer and dearer.

He made no answer. To argue the subject with anybody who could think him capable of rushing into matrimony as an easy means of accepting what he deemed a charity, and soothing the pride that forbade him taking it any other way, was repugnant; and he felt that Larry could not understand his scruples, so he passed over his well-meant advice, and only sighed as his eyes fell on his desk and the letter just begun with 'My dear Una.' Strange to say, Larry also looked in the direction of the desk with a new interest. Having dropped his hints, he allowed them to sink like seed in the earth, convinced

they would rise in leaf and flower in time, and expected no immediate budding. But he watched the young man's set face, and heard him sigh, and he followed his eyes to the table and letter, which recalled to him that he had another topic to touch upon.

'There's something else I have to say,' he began again, the first to break the pause. 'I've got a desk at home; I never use it but for cheque-books and odd bills.'

'Yes,' said Roland, glad to speak of other things.

'Yes, and there's somethin' in it that's a puzzle.'

'A secret drawer?'

'No, a secret packet. I've had it over twenty year.'

'And still a secret?'

'That's just it. That's what took me to Phillipia. Your majority done it. I knew I wasn't far out, so I went down to be with you and see what you was made of, and to give it you just as Jerry wished.'

'Give it to me! What have I to do with it?'

'Everything or nothing,' answered Larry mysteriously; 'and that has helped to worrit me, for it is addressed to "Roland Kovodel Goldwin, my son;" and Jerry it was that writ it, and put it into my hands the week he died, to give his boy when he was twenty-one years and two months old; and I went down to Phillipia to give it, and couldn't, because——'

'That boy died.' Roland finished the sentence, as Larry stumbled in shaping his thoughts.

'That boy died; yes,' repeated the old man; 'and that's why it worrits me. Will you read it?'

'I? By what right?'

'Of circumstances, maybe. You've been a kind of adopted son, after all, and who knows that he looked to his boy to do something else with his money when a growed-up man?' He looked anxiously up in Roland's face, and said again, in an appealing way: 'Will *you* take it and read it?'

'It is rather a difficult request to meet.' Roland's features seemed to reflect the trouble on Larry's. 'This packet may contain something he did not wish any but his own to know.'

'He would treat you as his own if he could rise this minute,' urged Larry. 'And there *is* something in it not meant for everybody to know. There was a secret in his life, and he writ it down, he told me, for his boy to read; but there might be something else, too, for all we know.'

'Keep it a little longer, and we will consult Tackerline. I certainly will not read it on my own responsibility.'

'I thought of him, but wanted to see you first. I'm an old feller; I might kick the bucket any day, and the packet will go to Tackerline then. "You keep it," said Jerry to me, "but if anything happens give it over to John Tackerline—not unless." So I'm livin' yet, and I've kep' it, but don't want to keep it longer. The boy died, so it's no more use to him than to me—to the lawyer, I mean. It will be thrown in the fire unread, and that worrits me, too. I'm afeared he might wish something done. Do me this favour, youngster: ride with me to Washington, and take it in your own hands; it is safer with you than me. I ain't goin' to ask you to read it if it goes against your grain, but jest to take it from me and lock it in that desk of yourn until you or me can see Tackerline, or both of us.'

'If it will relieve you, the least I can do is to take it into custody. If Tackerline thinks it an unlawful proceeding, why, we can only burn it, especially as it contains a family secret.'

'I don't like to think of its burning; if he thinks it unlawful, it shall be buried with me, as the secret of his life has been. He done a lot of good, and many a man has done worse things than that one slip of his. He told me all about it, and there was no call for him to tell it. The Captain knowed everything, and was a friend to him, too; that's why he never forgot the Captain. But Jerry and me was close as brothers; he never had a livin' creature to love him as I loved him, and he knowed it, he knowed it—poor old Jerry!'

Larry shook his white head mournfully, and then rose heavily from his chair, emitting a slight grunt with the effort, as he bent on his stick, for recent illness had told upon his constitution, and he had suffered much over the peculiar turn of Roland's life and the escape of Lockstud and Mrs. Goldwin from justice.

But he looked happier now that Roland had made two concessions.

He put out his hand to say good-bye, and added:

'You've done me a lot of good, lad. Thunder! I've had a big shakin' with it all; only I'm tougher than I look, it would ha' done for me. But you've promised to take help from me, and that packet, and now I feel better. I'll see you to-morrow. I'm going to get a shake-down at Barney's.'

'Not Gower's?' asked Roland in surprise.

'No. Barney's is good enough for me, and there ain't any Mrs. Barney knockin' about. Gower don't know I'm here yet. I rode to Barney's, and he put up the horse, and expects me back. Good-bye.'

'It is dark; the moon will rise late to-night. I will accompany you across the paddock.'

'No; you go on with your writin'. I know my way blindfolded—better than you. Good-night.'

'Good-night,' returned Roland, as he stood at his door and saw the old man, almost nimble with relief of mind, go out into the darkness and disappear.

'How the true metal glints now that the earth is sifted!' murmured Roland, reseated at his desk. But though ready to eulogize the higher nature just presented to him—the fine vein of gold embedded in the rough ore, the magnanimity anxious to overlook his kinship to the man loathed for years, and, not without reason, the benevolence that intensified the magnanimity—he was not so ready to be reconciled to the cause that compelled him to seek or take monetary help. Hitherto the dispenser of benefits, he was thenceforth to be the recipient.

His breast heaved with its maelstrom of emotion; pride grappled with gratitude and rebellion with submission, as he bowed his head over the letter, destined to remain unfinished that night, and sobbed out again the anguish of his spirit.

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD SHEPHERD'S REMINISCENCE, AND 'A PLAIN, UNVARNISHED TALE.'

ROLAND had an unrefreshing sleep that night of Larry's visit which had compelled him to defer the continuation of his letter to Una. She had hinted that Lockstud was perhaps in need of his family's toleration or leniency, that he was being 'driven to do reckless things.' The word 'driven' was significant, and had set Roland pondering deeply when solitude was his. 'He must not be driven down, but uphill, if driven at all,' he decided; and acting upon this decision, he meant to say in his reply to her that he would try and use his influence in exciting a spirit of forgiveness as a possible means of salvation.

But before he could sit down to his desk again another letter reached him—not from Una, but from Mrs. Lockstud.

'MY POOR DEAR BOY,' it began,

'I am a wretched correspondent, but you asked me to write to you, and what would I not do to please you? Bodily I am recovered; mentally not so. Can it be expected? My writing at all will convince you of the truth of the former, but the way of it the latter. My peace of mind has gone. My life has never been a very happy one, yet it was heaven in comparison with now. You are young and strong, and can better live down your troubles, but I am too feeble to surmount mine. I shall die, I fear, unforgiving, because I can't forget. I am treating HIM so unwifely, and my heart feels hardened with its misery and shame! Nobody suspects that it is breaking, nobody knows of the cruel phantom that divides us, for we maintain a strict civility towards each other in the presence of strangers, and chilly silence when they are absent, and we keep up the play of giving out that Mrs. G—— has gone abroad because of desperate illness, the same having prevented her from visiting old friends or being visited by them, and all the time we know nothing of her movements. And, then, some curiosity is rife about our darling Jessie, who is supposed to

have met with an accident, to be suffering from some internal injury, and to be living at Aunt Jessie's for quiet's sake. The questions are torture, for they drag us into a network of untruths. Who is her doctor? they ask sometimes. We tell them Mrs. Calliport's, but we don't tell them Mrs. Calliport is her own doctor. Jessie doesn't need a doctor, poor child! only time and all our gentleness and love. She is stricken terribly; you would never know her, Rol—you would not indeed! God help her, and help me, too! But for Jack and Una and dear kind Aunt Jessie, I should lose my mind. The aunt is going to take Jessie away to Wondoo and from me, she says, to return her with health improved. Louise is at boarding-school, and knows nothing of our misery. Jack is my principal companion, and the misery seems to have knocked all the boy out of him; he is really growing more and more like you every day—that is, in manner—and is a stronghold for me. As to Una, she is to me what Ruth was to Naomi. She gives me all her spare time, and is goodness itself. She even tries to soften down the glaring sin which touches us all through HIM, and I find it so hard to show mercy, for I have suffered so much. I long to tell the world how blessed I might have been but for a vile woman's work and her accomplice, and I am tongue-tied—hand-tied—I can't even sign myself by the title which is justly mine relative to you, but must be content to give my Christian name only. Oh, dear, dear boy, my heart-strings are wrung! my heart is full of prayer! God watch over you!

'PRISCILLA.'

With the reading of this letter he drank in all the gall there concentrated, and writhed with the loathing renewed, like a man, and not the god to which the women who bewailed his misfortune had transfigured him.

When leaving Phillipia he had shaken Lockstud's hand, desirous to show forbearance, to bury the hatchet which had worked so much harm, but glad to put miles of sea and land between him and his father, and escape from a presence unloved—repellent. The humility and remorse, so palpable and so unexpected, which had met him from the outset of their acknowledged relations, had broken the lash of his just anger in its fall—had kindled something akin to compassion—had extracted the fiery sting from words which, charged with bitterness and wrath and ready to be slung as cutting stones, had become, under his impulsive pity, softened to actual tenderness. But now the dominant passion of sympathy for the mother and sister so dear was peremptorily evoked, to let loose a fresh implacability against the man who shadowed both as the upas and not the natural gourd. Before theirs his own misery paled; his soul darkened with the fierce riot of resentment and virulence, threatening to dethrone that divinity with which he had been credited, while his frame trembled with the quiver of the battle-ground.

'Is it not the *lex talionis* that he should be scorned by his family as he would be by the world were the truth bruited abroad?' he inwardly cried. 'He wears the badge of felony on his flesh; he ought to be breaking stones; he is an eyesore to those that know him for what he is. Let him bow to the sod! let him grovel in the dust!'

But through the storm a still, small voice whispered: 'The deepest-dyed criminals may be led to a lasting repentance.'

'With the dangling rope looming in the distance, the fear of death, the after-penalty we wot not of,' he answered.

'Not so, but with the grace of human love—human charity—with the assurance of our belief in their future expiation,' rang out the voice clearer and stronger.

'Can forgetfulness of irreparable injury be possible to any but fools? To forgive is to forget,' he reasoned.

'To forgive is to remember our own frailties, to soar above them and touch heaven,' said the voice again.

'Then,' moaned Roland, with his face in his hands, 'I cannot soar so high; frailty overpowers me. Who am I—what am I—to preach the beauty of pardon or lenity to two disconsolate women, with my own heart fired with contempt and pitilessness?'

There is a certain little creature which, when irritated, has by provision of nature an obnoxious weapon of defence in the power of emitting a sickening odour capable of polluting atmosphere or food within several yards of its point of attack; so the vicious attributes of man, wilfully vented, spread to contaminate the temple of the soul. Roland's keen sense of the

pure and impure was not slow to recognise this moral fetor as it existed in Mrs. Lockstud and was breathed through her letter to touch him; but, all the same, he was powerless to rid himself of the taint for a time, and until he could do so, desisted from writing to Una or Mrs. Lockstud.

Ultimately, and after calm meditation, he wrote to the latter, and followed it up by a letter to Una, in which he said:

'I have done what you asked me to do—written to the dear little woman, whose name I need not mention, and advised conciliation of a kind. I have put my own feeling through a thorough analysis, and find alloy that makes the test unsatisfactory. Sympathy, excited by *his* evident contrition and self-abasement, impels me in my better moments to leniency, but real purity of sentiment is lacking. I could only propose a practical forbearance, which shall close its eyes to his past sins and her foul wrongs; but exhort her to pardon full and free, pure and simple, I could not. Memory declines to be smothered, and forgiveness, without the necessary tenderness of oblivion, must be but a coldly chiselled imitation of the spirit of charity—a marble Psyche, an imperfect representation of a perfect grace—the asbestos that presumes to glow, yet has no warmth at its heart. Dear friend, know me for what I am: as far as withholding a decided judgment and a punishment of one's own to fall on the culprit, I may be said to forgive, but no more.

'Mid's suffering alone, if nothing else, forbids an impeccability to be pressed upon others when denied to myself. Reflection condemns the stern and silent attitude of his wife and children towards him, and I have begged of her to evict hate if she can, and show gentleness and the mercy that may save a soul tottering on the borders of an unknown abyss.'

He said much more, but upon lighter subjects. He told her of his Bush life; described the Gowers and their home; gave her an outline of Larry's visit, with the additional fact now made known to the reader, that he had ridden with him to Washington Station, and was in possession of the packet, and wrote an exceedingly long letter, which helped to lighten his heart and to gladden hers.

It lightened his heart to pour out its grief and its sentiment to her in the sweet belief of her thorough understanding of both

—to tell her that he had abided by her counsel in his endeavour to impress the necessity of renewed wifely devotion on Mrs. Lockstud. And it was well that he had chosen this free-and-easy outdoor life—the manual work to deaden all the black imps of misery that, like mechanical toys easily wound to activity, leaped to a wild war-dance by the mere touch of the key centred in thought. Rough, boisterous occupation gave no quarter to the brooding tendency, and so far wearied him that night brought desire for early rest, and that dreamless slumber which the too active brain seldom attains. So some few weeks passed and he had ingratiated himself on the Micola run with all the station-hands—had been up with the sun, away to the cattle-yards, the slaughter-pen, the mustering of the beasts, and the draughting in the stock-yard; had even the daring to attempt the subjection of an evil-minded, wicked-heeled buck-jumper, and receive the inevitable thud on the broad of his back as a sequence; and had done other reckless things with an indifference and hardihood that made Mrs. Gower shiver and her husband remonstrate, while Roland himself seemed to care neither for peril nor disaster, but invited both.

His days filled in with station-work, and evenings often spent in Gower's drawing-room, enlivened by music or song, and perhaps a neighbour or two dropping in as guests, shifted for the nonce the weight of the imps, and aroused him to an enjoyment of passing impressions.

One night there gathered quite a little crowd in the Gower drawing-room to circle at the fireplace—the Australian nook already alluded to, with its pot-plants and marsupial draperies.

Folks of the Bush living within some few miles of each other are, by courtesy, neighbours. Of these were Mr. and Mrs. Gratrak and their new governess, Mrs. Gower's successor. And there were Smithson and Johndel, and many station-hands, together with a superannuated shepherd, bowed, bent, shrivelled, and toothless. This last was a pensioner on Larry's station, and, originally employed by Jeremiah Goldwin, was at his death taken up as a *protégé* by Larry, and with or without Larry was ever made welcome at Micola. He was very old indeed, and they called him Jacob. His appearance favoured the name, it being of the patriarchal order, for his snow-white beard fell to

his waist, and a scanty silky fringe of snow-white hair sat like a wreath on an otherwise perfectly bald head, glistening like a polished shell. Having been on the Washington run for years, he knew its every stick, stone, and tree, every sheep, and every man coming and going; and possessing a vigorous memory—which a few feared, for it so happened that he remembered too often what they would have preferred forgotten—he was ready to give a synopsis of the history of any one of his early acquaintance. He had the dates of births, deaths, and marriages at his crooked finger-ends, and nobody ever thought of doubting or contradicting him, for he was considered as much an authority as any Government gazette, and most people liked to listen to reminiscences which dropped glibly from his tongue in long-spun yarns, oft repeated when called upon.

Though relieved from work, and given a home and rations in consideration of past labour faithfully fulfilled, there seemed many years of vitality left in the old shepherd yet; but his age was humoured and honoured, and there was always a comfortable rocking-chair set aside for him at the Gower hearth. And so he sat there now, looking first at one and then at another of the occupants of the room, where lamps, supported by wall-brackets and capped with delicate pink shades, were set around to diffuse a pale rosy light over the floor, uncarpeted, but strewn with rich soft mats of opossum fur—on an 'old man' kangaroo, long departed this life, but stuffed and preserved by the able hands of Jacob himself, a wedding present to the Gowers, and standing upright in a corner—on the stretched wings of a huge hawk—on a brace of aboriginal war implements grouped on the walls—upon fifty other things, including a piano, collected by degrees, and scattered to adorn the cosiest room of rooms to be found in the back country of Knutsford—on the faces, young and old, there assembled—and on his own wrinkled visage, with his thin lips drawn in to rest on toothless gums.

Until this night he had not met Roland, and when somebody addressed the latter as Mr. Goldwin, he pricked up his ears and turned in his rocking-chair to look well at the lad who bore that name.

'Jerry's boy, is it?' he mumbled. 'Well, well, well; and not

a bit like—not a bit——' Then aloud to Roland: 'I'm pleased to see you, sir—proud to see you. I knowed your father for a good friend.'

Roland, who had been conversing with a squatter, wheeled round sharply, coloured, turned pale, and said something conventional to meet this abrupt advance made in all friendliness. But having done this, he turned to renew the subject begun with the squatter, and touching on Knutsford politics, while the old shepherd's yellow eyeballs were constantly shifting in his direction, and his fingers drummed on the arms of his chair as if he were impatient over something, as indeed he was, for the name of Goldwin had stirred his memory, and his tongue was itching to talk to Goldwin's son. There was a hum of voices about him, but biding his time with that tattoo on his chair, he took advantage of the first pause to open his mouth again and draw the young man's attention to himself.

'How do you like the country, sir? Does it go down with you like it done with the good old man?'

Then it seemed that conversation ceased, and each pair of ears awaited Roland's reply, which when it was given, elicited dissatisfaction.

'It is a great deal better than I expected to find it; but of course it is backward yet.'

'Back'ard!' ejaculated Jacob.

'Backward!' echoed Gower and Gratrak.

'Backward!' chimed in quite a chorus of voices filled with protest.

'Why, mon alive, what is it you want?' asked Gower; 'we're going ahead as fast as we can.'

'Back'ard!' repeated Jacob, with his lips tightened and his head nodding with disapproval. 'If you'd been born when *I* was, you wouldn't be callin' things by upside-down names,' he grunted. 'If you'd set foot in this 'ere country when I did you'd say we was mighty for'ard.'

'You have seen us going ahead, haven't you, Jacob,' put in one of the ladies, 'and have seen changes from better to better?'

'Changes,' answered the old man, with a glance round at everybody, as if to ask who should question his experience, and with a lingering look at Roland, in whom he was feeling

disappointed, rumour having declared him to be 'a smart young fellow.' 'Changes!' he went on. 'Ay, it's for an old un like me to say what's back'ard and what's for'ard.'

'Don't misunderstand me,' spoke up Roland, who felt as if he had trodden unwittingly on a hornets' nest. '"Backward" applies to all the world over, and not only to back country stations and budding colonies. We are advancing every day; we all know that; and yet there is so much to be done, so much more to be learned, so much room for improvement in all things as regards the common weal of mankind, that necessarily we still remain backward. I meant no disparagement whatever, especially to this district in its present social and industrial standing, which is to be so highly commended.'

This was propitiatory, though Jacob shook his head as if unable to follow the new idea presented, while Gower aside gave out his 'H'm, h'm.'

'I wonder what John Lemur would say if he could git up now and see it,' said the old man, half in soliloquy.

'Come, Jacob,' requested Mrs. Gower, 'tell us all about John Lemur. Mr. Goldwin has never heard, perhaps.'

'Who is John Lemur?' asked Roland, to whom the name was not familiar.

'A chap that lived seventeen years with the blacks,' volunteered one of the Jackeroo lads, who knew the whole story, and gave his information in a whisper.

'Egg him on, Rol, for a yarn. You've only got to ask to receive. He'll grind out half a dozen, if you like.'

Accordingly Roland added his request to Mrs. Gower's, and Jacob, eyeing him now with fresh favour, smacked his lips as if something appetizing had been set before him, leaned heavily upon the arms of his chair, bent forward, and with ready will prepared to mount his hobby.

He prefaced his story with a question addressed to his host.

'And how long ago is it since I met him?'

'Oh, thirty or forty years, perhaps.'

'Ay, that's so. Somethin' like thirty or forty year.' Here Jacob glanced round again to note how that fact was acknowledged, and went on: 'I knowed him well, John Lemur; he

told me all about hisself, and when a old un like me thinks of how *he* found this 'ere country, and how we sees it now, why, I'm puzzled over your "back'ard." Well, it's this way. I was a-doing' fencin' on the Boongarie run when I first see him, and he skeered me and another man. He was naked as a shorn sheep, and wild-eyed, with skin that wasn't yaller as a Chinaman's, nor black as the blacks', nor white as ourn, but just a first coat like of all three got into one. Wasn't that a sight to skeer a chap?' He gave another look around at his audience, and somebody said:

'Yes, it was; go on.'

'Yes it was,' continued the narrator; 'and the other man shouted out quick to Tom, his mate, "Hallo, there! fetch us a gun; here's a queer bird for ye." But it wasn't no bird; it spoke, it did, and called out, "What cheer, shipmate?" and that's what the sailor fellers say to one another for a polite, "How do ye do?" I was a sailor once, and know that much, and it kind o' soothed me. Then Tom came with a run, shouldering his gun; but he never levelled it, for the poor creature cried out, "I'm a shipwrecked sailor!" and we went up to him and brought him to the hut, and——'

'Hold on, Jacob,' interrupted Gratrak; 'don't leave out a good part. Don't you remember when the poor fellow saw the gun he called out in terror, "Would you shoot a British object?" He meant "subject," but had nigh forgotten his mother tongue.'

'So he did; that's true,' said the old man, in no way put out because his memory had been thus nudged. 'And how many men would remember that much after being seventeen years with the blacks, eh?'

'Seventeen years!' repeated one or two who, like Roland, were now to hear for the first time the tale of John Lemur, the white man who was shipwrecked and isolated from his brethren for that lengthy period. 'Seventeen years!'

'Ay, seventeen years! and this way it was, for didn't he tell it me hisself often? In '46 it was, you see, and his vessel was bound for China from Phillipia; the *Buffalo* she was called, and he was one of the crew, and altogether twenty-two souls was on board of the *Buffalo*. There was the captain and his wife, and another poor woman with children, and as big and

dirty a squall as ever wrecked a honest-built ship broke over 'em, gave 'em bare poles, and sent 'em bang on to a reef, with the women, poor creatures! a-screamin,' the babies jinin' in, and the fellers workin' the skin off their bones to help. But the thing played up high jinks with the *Buffalo* and her boats, too; one was stove in, and the other they tried to rig up sea-tight to get 'em off the wreck, you see, when a big sea came and gulped it down like, draggin' the second mate to Davy Jones's locker. Well, they all set to work next to put a raft together out of the old riggin' and that, and on this twenty-one of 'em was huddled, cold, sick, and tremblin', and off they went, with a cask of water and some tinned soup, that's all! not a bite else to serve their stomachs for the Lord knows how long.'

'Poor things!' said a pity-filled voice; it belonged to the governess. 'And they all died?'

'I'm a-comin' to that, ma'am,' said Jacob, nodding his head mournfully towards the lady. 'Well, yes, they all died but John, and didn't I shiver when he told me they all swore to die of hunger rather than gobble up each other! They swore, they did, and kept the oath, too, glory be to 'em! and they fretted and sickened, and tried to call a passin' brig, that just went on, never sighting the raft, and left 'em sicker and wretcheder, and a-longin' for death then. And they were tossed and blown about on that 'ere raft for I disremember now how many days, and the thing was washed ashore at last, with seven alive out of the twenty-two. One poor chap thought he'd sprung a mine 'cause he came across an old canoe left there by blacks, and he got into the rotten old tub with a bit of hope warmin' at his heart, and went away a-sayin' "Cheer up, all of you! I'm off for fresh food and relief somewheres; who knows?" And the women waved their hands and hugged the babies, thinkin' he'd come back with food; but, lor! he never come back, and the blacks found his body a goodish while after washed ashore; and John turned his head away and drew his shirt-sleeve across his eyes, he did, when he spoke of that chap and his canoe; he said he felt more about him than the rest, 'cause he was so plucky to the last. So, you see, they got down to six now, and they went prying about and found a cave, where they lived for

fourteen days, on never a thing but shellfish, until a crowd of blacks came.'

'Oh!' called out the governess again, anticipating the worst with a shudder and a screwing up of her features, 'and speared them. How dreadful!'

'No, they didn't,' continued the old man. 'The blacks ain't half so bad as the whites make 'em. They ain't got no sense, and doesn't quite know what's good for themselves, that's all. They just came and stared, as you would, miss, at a Robinson Crusoe dropped from the clouds before you. They jabbered at 'em and felt 'em, and got to understand they was half dead, and showed 'em how to get food, and brought it to 'em, too; but John said it was a hard time, and the ladies, delicate reared, livin' in a 'old humpy, and no proper clothes to keep 'em warm, and nothing but hardship, jist picked at the roasted fish, or baked opossum, or bush-rat——'

'Rats! oh, not rats!' interrupted Roland, with a grimace and look of incredulity.

'Ay, rats, my lad, rats!' Jacob answered emphatically. 'The blacks think 'em a treat, and if you was to see one a-grillin', and not know, you'd think it was a chicken, with the white flesh they has.'

'Oh, weel, they're only a distant sort o' cousin to a rabbit, maybe,' remarked Gower, 'and not so bad. Go on, Jacob. The ladies picked at the tit-bits.'

'That they did; but it wasn't the food; it was lots of other things that tried 'em and killed 'em in the end. They all died—died game—died glad, I dessay, till only John was left to camp and eat and drink with the blacks for seventeen years. Sometimes they got cranky, stupid things! when he wanted to learn 'em how to live more comfortable, and wouldn't bide by his talk or camp in the gunyahs he built; but they never thought of *eatin'* him; the gins made a big pet of him, and often saved his life when their banjamens—that's sweethearts—got jealous. Well, John pulled through his seventeen year, any way; but every day he'd say to himself, "What cheer, shipmate?" 'cause he found his language goin' out of his head, you see, and was afeard when he did see a white feller again he wouldn't understand him. Says he, "I used to hang on to shreds of English for fear they'd never take me for a white man,

and I said every night and every mornin', 'What cheer, shipmate?' and never forgot it; it got to be like a prayer." Poor old John!' Here Jacob shook his head again sadly, and paused to draw a deep breath.

'And how did he find the run at last?—Boongarie, I think you said?' asked Roland, who had been an eager listener.

'That come about with kangaroo-huntin',' said Jacob. 'All of 'em together at it—John and the blacks. And they came on a fence, and see a hut with smoke comin' from it. They knowed it was a white man's hut, and so John set to and climbed the fence and skeered us, and we fetched him in. But the blacks didn't like his goin' away, and the gins howled and cut at their bodies with sharp stones, like they do when one of 'em dies, and they hung about him and tried to keep him, jest like any white woman over a brother or 'usband. One old gin thought he was her son from the first, dead and come alive agen, for they has a notion that when they die they'll get up white. So John had hard work to get quit o' the lot, but he did. And him and me got to be great chums; and we see the country when it was mighty back'ard, Mr. Goldwin.'

The old man looked towards Roland with an expression of defiance and triumph as he laid stress on the word 'backward,' as if his foot were set on it.

'Where is he?' asked the governess. 'Alive?'

'Dead years gone,' said Jacob, shutting up his mouth till it hollowed against his gums and made a valley between nose and chin bordered by bleached shaggy bush.

'He didn't live very long after his restoration to his people,' remarked Will Gratrak.

'No; the hard knocks did for him,' put in Alec. 'But he had time to get married.'

'And never see his boy,' mumbled the old man.

'Oh, he had a son?' said Roland.

'Yes; he's living now,' came the answer to this from Gratrak, 'And if you want a proof of the country's progress, ask the value of its land, though I presume you are bound to know that much. When John Lemur was rescued he was overflowing with gratitude, I believe—I didn't know him personally—and as it was near Etoco that relief came to him—that was old Robsville, you know—he called it his country, and at the first

Government land sale he bought a quarter of an acre of ground for just the upset price, and not a man would bid against him because he wanted to hold some earth in *his* country. He got it for a trifle, and, of course, it belongs to his son now, and if it's worth a farthing it's worth £16,000 this day. There, Mr. Goldwin, that's the true story of the man who herded with aboriginals for something like the sixth of a century.'

'And if he was alive to-day,' said Jacob, still anxious to speak, 'he might ha' had a big say in Separation, and had a seat in the new Parlerment.'

'He's better off where he is, then,' laughed Gower. 'Parliament's a whirligig, and he earned his rest.'

'Perhaps,' said Mrs. Gower, 'he will intercede for the poor blacks, who, taking them for what they are, did not behave so badly, after all.'

'Well, perhaps their women kept them in order, since they were attached to John,' said one of the company.

'Or perhaps John was too lean or too tough,' said another.

'I don't think that tribe indulged in cannibalism,' observed Gower. 'The poor deevils, they're not so bad; and the whites have often worried them into viciousness.'

'That's true,' answered Gratrak. 'And, besides, they look upon the white man as an interloper, as we do the Chinamen, only our means of redress is poll-tax and theirs a soul-tax. When they can spear a soul out of their country and the world they don't hesitate about it, if it belongs to a white man and they think him dangerous to their future peace.'

'And this poor fellow—Lemur,' inquired Roland, 'did he not suffer otherwise from their savage associations?'

'Suffer! Of course he did,' answered Gratrak again. 'His subsequent action proves that he must have been conscious of a certain barbarism in himself, for he got baptized again and took to religion.'

'But he couldn't shake off some of their habits, eh, Jacob? He used to amuse himself with two sticks, beating them together as an accompaniment to just the same sing-song tunes as you may have heard from the blacks about here. Jacob says so.'

This from the hostess.

'Ay,' answered Jacob, who grasped at the first chance of

getting in a word—'ay, he'd keep up that blacks' moosic for a hour, he would; and he could fling a boomerang with King Billy himself.'

'I wonder if he ever acquired a taste for grilled rat?' asked a Jackeroo laughingly. 'Did he, Jacob?'

'I disremember,' came the reply, 'though, I tell ye, rats ain't bad. Now, what would you say to a break'ast of alligators' eggs?'

'No, thank you, decidedly,' said the last questioner, with a wry face that set the company laughing.

'Well, young sir, I've had 'em for mine,' Jacob avowed, with a thin smile on his lips at the reminiscence. 'And if the boss hadn't let it out, I'd been none the wiser, there! A lot of us was camped out, and hungry enough to swaller nails, when the boss comes up to us with his hat full of eggs. "Now then," says he, "my boys, here's a find of wild turkey eggs! We'll go in for 'em." Well, we cooked 'em for turkey eggs, we did that, and not a man-jack but swore they was the daintiest thing they'd ever tasted. But the boss said—good-natured like, we thought—he'd not jine in, to leave us all the more; and after break'ast he laughed till his sides ached, and says, says he, "The turkey that laid them eggs is called a alligator up this way; but they're every bit as good." Well, now, up to that time we was jest as happy as rabbits in a cabbage-patch, and got to cracking jokes all round; but when the boss rammed that joke down our throats that way, he might as well poured a billy of what-do-ye-call-'em—ipe—ipekakana; that's it!—down after the eggs. We all got pretty quiet, and thought of our first trip on the sea, and—well, we soon got rid of our break'ast. But, lor bless you! it's all imagination, and them eggs is as good as any other for starving men.'

'Oh come, Jacob!' laughed Mrs. Gower, 'you are giving us an emetic all round, I'm afraid.'

'Weel,' suggested her husband, 'let us ring a change. Coom, strike the light guitar, Bess.'

This was an invitation for Mrs. Gower to open the piano and call upon somebody to sing, so that yarn-spinning closed for a time, and Jacob—who, when he was not talking or feeding, or in any way actively interested, slept—let his chin fall forward on his breast till his shining crown was particularly

assertive, and gave a decided snore to lead off stray followers during the musical portion of the programme, and was only awakened when supper was announced and handed around.

A night such as this spent in a society so fresh, so charming in its novelty and ingenuousness, offered to Roland a draught temporarily Lethean to drug the imps, which were soon, however, to be quickened to a still more painful liveliness than ever.

CHAPTER VI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

'WHAT does he want us to do?' It was Jack Lockstud who put this question to his mother the night of the day that brought Roland's letter to her. 'What does he want us to do? Rol is a philosopher. I dare say he is right; but it is deuced hard for people who are not born philosophers to do what's right under all circumstances. Are we to go up to father and say: "We've no right to be angry with you all this time, because we know you now to be a downright villain, and to have done the most cruel thing man could do—to have robbed——"'

'My dear,' pleaded Mrs. Lockstud, 'don't run on like that. Rol doesn't mean that; he knows all the villainy, but he means our silence and sullenness will make bad worse. You have read his letter, and you, like me, should be ruled by it. It never occurred to me to think your unhappy father would be driven to further mischief, but it appears it is so. Rol would not write that he had heard rumours of his gambling if he thought it idle rumour. Gambling! Jack, fancy that; and me to stand by and let him go on to destruction! No, no; we must try to draw him back, even if he has been—— Oh, Jack! Jack!'—— Suddenly smitten with woeful recollection, she began to cry, or rather continued the crying, which had begun with the perusal of the letter in the morning, and had only been suppressed at intervals. 'To think,' she sobbed quietly, 'that I must talk so of him; that I can no longer hide his faults, as I have ever striven to do.'

Jack's face whitened like his mother's, and all his boyish heart swelled enough to defy speech for some few seconds, and fill his eyes with hot tears. He got up from his chair, and turned his back upon the weeping wife and mother. Presently he made an attempt to speak, but with a suspicious tremble.

'You have done your duty to him and to us; you need not reproach yourself.'

A family sorrow that stirs all the hidden depths of our nature brings to the surface whatever sentimentality lies crusted there—the something strong that an erring, stubborn fancy thinks weak. So Jack, hitherto shy of demonstration in his effort to be manly, suddenly turned, and, going up to Mrs. Lockstud, put his arms about her much as Middie might have done, and, urging her to be comforted, promised to do whatever she and Roland wished.

They were alone, and with closed doors had been discussing Roland's letter; and now Mrs. Lockstud decided that she would make an overture of peace that very night to her husband—that she would sit up for him even if he did not come home till the small hours of the next morning, which was not an unusual thing for him to do—and she meant to speak to him as she had not done since Roland, who had promised to relieve his father of the cruel task, had exposed the crime of which he and she and Jessie had been, and were, the miserable victims.

The determination to do this, after the rupture and following aversion and silence maintained, needed all her courage, and an awakening of whatever slumbering love there might be in her bosom for the man she once had worshipped—who was the father of her children. But somehow Priscilla Lockstud, simple and docile as she was, found it easier to follow the wishes of Roland than be guided by her aunt, Mrs. Calliport, who believed, like Brutus, in enforcing retribution even on her own flesh and blood—in justice at all costs.

Priscilla's letter to Roland caught the complexion of her aunt's stoical resolution to do what she thought was right, but not the spirit of it. Ever ready to give way to the guidance of others, she obeyed and stilled a sensitive conscience which helped to increase her bitterness, and forced her to write to him of a breaking heart, hardened to unforgiveness. She was

compelled to sit up very late, in order to carry out her purpose, but not till the morning; for her husband, letting himself in with a latch-key, returned to his wretched home just before midnight and walked straight to a distant room which he had had fitted up for his own use, and grimly called his 'quarantine ground,' in its total separation from the rest of the household.

He resented his wife's attitude as an impertinence in consideration of her former servility. After all, he reasoned, he had been dragged into wrong-doing, which, but for her encouragement of a boy and girl attachment, founded on nature's law—the bond of fraternity—would never have come to light.

The prospect of future affluence for his first-born had been no poor factor in his allegiance to the plotter, and why should he be altogether blamed because he had done as many more—tried, when opportunity offered, to scheme in the interests of his offspring? The failure was galling, and the disclosure only an overcoming pain, as it affected his standing in the goodwill of the son to whom all his fatherhood yearned, and by whom he had been ruled to a quiet submission to the inevitable restitution. The nobility of the boy he had allowed to be reared in falsity, who, uncontaminated, had escaped from the unholy fire as safely as the bold youths of Scriptural fame, defying the malignant authority of the heathen monarch, and walking through flame unscorched for their hatred of his false gods, had, by its subtle influence for good, conjured up to a strange susceptibility a conscience somewhat lethargic for want of wholesome exercise; but Roland's absence, and his family's contempt, served to numb it again, and to completely sour a nature ever threatening to acidify. Conscious of this, he sought the oblivion which comes with baneful drink, and the gaming-table attraction; so that, having fallen already, he went on falling, the victim of a gravitation of its kind drawing him down to evil centres, but for the interposition which was to come.

He was anxious to isolate himself from wife and children; but for financial difficulties he would have gone abroad, or away somewhere, as Roland had done. As it was, he tried to content himself with setting apart a room especially for his own

use when at Cecillambda, by absenting himself from home as much as he possibly could without exciting comment, and by plunging into dissipation.

Accustomed as he had been to his wife's devotion under all or any circumstances, her shrinking and evident loathing now were not accepted with anything like resignation to the behaviour he merited, but rather aggravated a surly rebellion against what he chose to think an insolent intolerance.

On this night in particular he entered his self-appointed garrison, where a troop of evil humours gathered about him, and shut to the door without locking, for he expected no intruder. He lit the gas, and looked stealthily around the room; next he crossed over to an escritoire, unlocked it, drew from his breast-pockets a couple of small bags, but heavily weighted, deposited them in one of its recesses, and then noiselessly, as if afraid of being overheard, he turned the key in the lock again, tried it, and, lastly, drew it out and slipped it into his pocket.

This much done, he drew a chair opposite the fireplace, where on summer nights plush decoration took the place of glowing coals, and stared at the purple drapery as if he saw written there an outline of his past, present and future life, for him to read and brood over.

Lost in moody reflection, he did not hear the door softly open, nor see a little woman bravely pass through into the 'quarantine' chamber—a little woman dressed in white, with white face, white lips, and even whitened hair.

Velvet-slippered, she shot swiftly over the carpet, and stood behind him, pronouncing his name in a fear-stricken tone.

'Theo!'

He started, began to tremble with some hidden passion, but he did not turn to meet her or alter his position.

'You *here?*' he said with a cynical emphasis.

'Yes, Theo, where I have a right to be.'

'In the leper's cave,' he said with his own sneer.

Unheeding this remark, she spoke again:

'Are you not glad to see me here?'

He was glad; it pleased him to see that his power over her was not all gone; but he only answered:

'I think I have forgotten what it is to be glad.'

'I have not forgotten that you are my husband, the father of my children.'

At this he rose from his chair and faced her for the first time.

'You have not?' he said. The words were interrogative, but their tone, full of meaning, implied a denial to what she had just affirmed as a truth. 'You have not?'

They made her quake more than ever, and begin to feel as if she were the guilty one to plead for pardon.

'No! no!' she cried out like one in pain. 'I have never, never forgotten it one moment! You could scarcely expect me not to feel bitter, not to feel hard, learning what there was to learn.' Here she shuddered perceptibly. 'If I have been wrong to shrink from you as I have, it is the memory of the little dead face that nigh broke my heart—my young heart!—the memory of the little coffin, where I strewed flowers—the memory of the grave where I believed part of myself was lying! It is the sight of our poor girl's sorrow and wretchedness! If I am right in trying to forget and forgive, it is because the child I thought an angel in heaven is restored to me in my old age, an angel on earth—because, dear as all my children are to me, he, my first-born, must be the dearest, the best beloved of all! And if I have been wrong'—she went up closer to him, and lifted her hands till they rested on his shoulders, while his arms hung stiffly unresponsive at his sides, and his features twitched at her allusion to Roland—'if I have wronged you, or been wrong in my hardness, oh, forgive me! Love me as you loved me long ago, and we may yet remember how to be glad together, and, come what may, I shall still be your loyal wife. After all these years of misunderstanding, let us understand each other now; let the memory of that boy's wrongs and his sweetness and goodness this day lead us to peace and farther from the sin that has gone before, and unite us in the love that has never yet been complete. Oh, Theo! Theo!'

Her hands involuntarily relaxed their hold on him, as she staggered, and would have fallen but for his right arm, that quickly lost its rigidity and wound about her. In alluding to Roland thus, she had found a passport to all the heart that was her husband's. She had struck the keynote to the holiest trait in his nature.

His bloodless face, with its drawn lines, drooped near to hers, and his cold lips shaped to imprint a kiss on her forehead. The garrison was taken. Conscience awoke again from its lethargy, fitfully stirred, and contrition and shame sat on his countenance, the reading of which, with the impulsive kiss, created in her a fresh well-spring of love, to send the warm blood as a blush from brow to chin, and make her fling her arms around his neck with an ecstatic tragic delight, as she exclaimed:

'My darling! I could die now—happy!'

That he was impelled to a manifestation so unusual surprised himself; but an indefinable sense, creeping slowly about his heart, deprived him of all control over action in that supreme moment. Was it gratitude, or sluggish affection stimulated to warmth, when he reflected that perhaps it was from her that Roland inherited much of his nobility?

Her simple eloquence, her appeal for his forgiveness—HIS!—were probably as coals of fire to purge the crust from his heart and the film from his mental sight, that had been too weak to search at his soul and compel him to frankly acknowledge its vices, so that the one began to throb with sympathy, and the other, passing, revealed to him the enormity of his crime. Yet his especial individuality still stood firm—obstinately firm—and he would not, could not, bow his head before her and confess his iniquity or his tardy remorse. It was so hard to fall from king to subject—to bend to one over whom he had towered. The lips that can avow, 'I have sinned,' are but the agents of a lofty mind, and this Lockstud did not possess.

But that kiss of peace was in itself a confession, a volume in a mere sound, a mere touch, and, it being given, a vague sense of comfort crept to his bosom, because there remained one creature yet in the world ready to cling to him through shadow as well as sunshine. He was appeased and gratified.

Mrs. Calliport and Jessie were not surprised by a visit from Mrs. Lockstud the next morning, for she came to see her daughter daily; but what she had to communicate was surprising.

She found Jessie reclining on a couch—she was always reclining now—and looking painfully delicate. Her face

seemed shrunken and waxy, her cheeks were hollowed, and dimples and childish gaiety were no more. Mrs. Calliport was sitting near her, with a periodical in her hand, from which she had been extracting anything that was lively and likely to call a smile to the girl's face.

When Priscilla entered, the paper—a comic magazine—was consigned to her lap, and her glasses were removed, and Jessie's reply to an anxious inquiry after her health was, what it always had been since her trouble, 'Tired, that's all.'

Mrs. Lockstud sighed, and Mrs. Calliport took from a table close at hand the homeopathic mixture with which she was trying to give the beloved invalid 'tone,' as she said, and which was swallowed obediently by the patient from a tablespoon at intervals.

'She won't be tired when we can breathe the Wondoo air—will you, dear?'

'No, auntie. I'm sure I shall get better there,' replied Jessie, who, while she thought she must feel better out of Phillipia, knew she never would be well.

'I hope so, Jess,' said Mrs. Lockstud. 'I shall be happy again, knowing that; and'—here she abruptly, and with a little gulp, made her unexpected announcement—'now that your poor father and I are reconciled, the world doesn't look so dark as it did to me.'

'What!' snapped the old lady, 'do you mean to tell me that you have actually taken him by the hand so soon? Ought you? Can you?'

'I have been unwise to defer it, aunt,' said Priscilla quietly.

'I must confess I don't understand you,' said Mrs. Calliport with an offended tone. 'You have mitigated a sentence demanded by justice. Where is the punishment if you stand by him, condone his offence, give him the peace he should never know for months to come? We can't give him over to the legal severity which he would most certainly receive, but we can let him suffer for a time the frowning, the spurning, of the whole family!'

Mrs. Calliport nervously crumpled the magazine in her lap as she spoke—an alliance opposed, for the paper was comedy, and tragedy impelled the working of her fingers.

Jessie heaved a heavy breath, and a tear trickled down her

cheek. There was indeed 'a whirlwind in the sigh,' 'an ocean in the tear.' She looked from her aunt to her mother and back again. Who was right? she wondered, wishing somebody would tell her, for she could not reason it out herself. Her wish was soon realized, for Mrs. Lockstud drew Roland's letter from her pocket, and handed it to her aunt, saying:

'Read that, aunt, please. I received it yesterday, and up to then I was ready to abide by your advice and reasoning.'

'Read it aloud, please, auntie,' begged Jessie wistfully, for she had recognised the writing.

'From Rol!' said Mrs. Calliport, opening the letter and referring at once to the signature, but hesitating about obeying Jessie for fear of distressing her.

'Read it aloud,' said Priscilla, understanding the hesitation; 'there is nothing in it but what is good for us all to hear.'

Had it been from anybody else but Roland, Mrs. Calliport would have said, 'I'll read it to please you, but don't expect me to be guided by it.' But as he was as much a demigod in her sight as his father was an arch-fiend, she handled the letter more reverently than otherwise, prepared to abide by its text, so truly was he deified by her.

So Aunt Jessie reset her pince-nez, cleared her throat, and read from beginning to end, with the words trembling as they fell from twitching lips, and the leaves rustling in her shaking hands.

The first part was descriptive of his present mode of life; it was the conclusion with which Mrs. Lockstud was principally concerned, and upon that alone it is necessary to dwell.

'He has been clawed by the devil in female shape,' read out Mrs. Calliport, and we can guess to whom the 'he' referred. 'Let guardian angels undo her foul work—heal him now, and interpose their wings to bear him aloft. Remember, "oppression may drive a man mad"—may drive him to other devils, to obloquy and disgrace, and farther and farther from the heaven to which the contrite heart is precious. Shall his wife and children do this, and yet hold their heads erect as creatures walking righteously before God? or shall they be steeped in sin likewise for the abuse of a power which is surely theirs? Shall they sink or uphold a guilty soul? If you find it hard to forgive and forget, I cannot blame you; but we can at least be

true to the angel that moves us to compassion and forbearance, and may win him back to repentance.'

Aunt Jessie folded the letter up silently, and tears gathered behind her glasses as she returned it to Priscilla. She felt rebuked.

It was Jessie who brought her to herself.

She had risen, only to fall on her knees before her aunt, to lift her face up to hers, to catch at the shaking hands, and exclaim:

'Oh, auntie! I forgive my father, and I know you forgive him, too, though you pretend you don't—like mamma, when we were little, would tell us she did not love us, because we had been naughty, and she loved us and cried over us all the same. You do forgive him, don't you? I have been dazed, have not been able to think, have listened to you and mamma, have been wicked, revengeful, hateful; but it is all gone now. I see my fault now. Rol always knows what is right, and how to make other people know, too. Let us win papa back to repentance, if we can, and make him a happier, better man.'

'My dear,' said the old lady huskily, 'we have all been wrong but Rol.'

This admission was at once accepted as a truce, and Priscilla told her husband later on that Aunt Jessie was willing to let bygones be bygones.

CHAPTER VII.

THE KISS OF PEACE.

When the awkwardness following the reconciliation between Priscilla and her husband wore off, Lockstud's natural reserve and chilliness still asserted their obstinate strength, and refused to budge; but all his haughty air of assumption vanished. His hair showed streaks of gray, his face furrows; he was no longer a handsome man, but dearer than ever now to the wife who had found so late a semblance of conjugal felicity, if no more.

Yet Theodore was an unhappy man, and all her tenderness could not drive the settled gloom from his brow, or bring him peace.

She thought he was over-burdened with remorse. He was not, for debt and contrition alike weighed upon him, and debt was the heavier of the two.

Two days scarcely elapsed after the midnight meeting in the 'quarantine' chamber, when a note came to him from Mrs. Calliport—a note, or advance, expected since Priscilla had told him amicable relations were to be established again between him and all members of the family—stiff and formal enough, but accepted by him as conciliatory, and perhaps magnanimous. It certainly brought him some hope and solace.

'DEAR THEO,' it ran,

'Jessie and I are going up country, and as she wishes to say good-bye to you, you had better come and see her, to spare her any extra exertion, for which she is totally unfit.

'Come to-night.

'Your affectionate aunt,

'JESSIE CALLIPORT.'

He went the same night.

When he entered Mrs. Calliport's house, it was with a whirligig of thought pounding at his brain, and some new-born emotion in his breast. Probably he was more embarrassed than the prodigal son. He had no expectation of the fatted calf or any warm welcome awaiting him; but, accustomed to hide passing tremors of sentiment or qualms of fear, he spoke with his usual loftiness to the ancient maiden who attended the door, asking a superfluous question:

'Your mistress at home?'

'Yes, sir,' said the woman, an old and privileged retainer, wondering why her mistress's nephew had kept away from the house so long. 'My missus expects you. She and Miss Lockstud are in the big bedroom, sir. She told me to tell you to go there; Miss Jessie isn't very well. Have you not been well, sir?'

'Quite well, thank you,' he answered, with more impatience than courtesy, as he passed her almost with a brush of his shoulder to mount the staircase.

'Then your health is an improvement on your manners,' muttered the woman, 'and both want doctoring, I'm thinking. I wonder what sort of a dose is good for high and mighty folk,' she added, as she looked after him, and he strode the hall to ascend the stairs and disappear from her sight.

Then he stood on the second floor, and, reaching the room as directed, he rapped at the door with his knuckles, and Aunt Jessie's voice gave the 'open sesame' from within; so he appeared again before her.

The first thing he saw immediately opposite was his daughter He had not seen her for some few weeks, and therefore was the terrible change in her more marked for him. Unlike Jephthah's daughter, not for glory was she sacrificed, but for his sin.

The two women—the old and the young Jessie—with their faces turned to meet him, started as he stood in the doorway. His furrowed features and gray-streaked hair smote them with pity and pain.

He had been ageing some time, but looked quite old now. Yet it was not the rather premature decline of his one-time elegance alone that struck them; it was the unfamiliar expression on the familiar countenance, distorting it with agitation and palpable distress.

In that moment he only saw his daughter, with her pallid, attenuated face turned compassionately upon his own, and it chilled his blood and sank his egotism. Never capable of strong and deep affection, he nevertheless had known a natural fondness for his children, which the hardness of his nature reined in with an ugly curb, and his manner ever contradicted; and no bitter human vengeance, no tirade of invective and scorn, could possibly have affected him as much as seeing her thus, a silent reflection of the result of his crime staring at him there, the ghostly spirit of his guilt mocking him in the physical wreck of what was once, and would be now, but for him, the embodiment of laughing, happy girlhood. It was his retribution.

Then, and only then, the invulnerability of the man gave way. He forgot Theodore Lockstud—which was phenomenal—forgot the presence of his aunt—for whom he had prepared a dutiful and propitiatory speech—and walked quickly towards the girl,

who, half in fear of him, and wholly commiserating, had risen to welcome him with filial respect, and took her in his arms all in silence, laid her head upon his breast, where she could hear the beating of his heart with its rapid hammer strokes, where she shed outright tears of pardon and tenderness.

There was no need for words, no need for either to make allusion to the breach or the cause of it.

Who better than he could understand now how the mishap of her strong, pure love had tortured her to sickness? That she would meet her trouble with tears and some heart-burning, he believed, but quite expected that she would rally again, and in time marry and be happy. For this depth of feeling in her he was not prepared, and only understood her character at this hour of misery when forced to realize the mischief he had worked.

'I have cursed her,' he thought, 'and I am cursed.'

With an effort at calmness he spoke at last, still holding her closely in his arms, with his hot lips on her brow.

'You are going away. This is my good-bye to you. You—you must try and get well and strong, for—for my sake as well as your own.'

No word of atonement in this; but Jessie, like her mother, could interpret his kiss, his embrace, his new and strange—sweetly strange—sympathy, the lamentation in action, and mute but eloquent confession of his misery and shame.

She could only cry and cling to him, and suffer for his distress even more than for her own.

'Don't do that—don't cry, child!' he pleaded, wilfully misconstruing her tears. 'You will get well again and be happy; don't distress yourself.'

He knew she was weeping for him, but this he would not admit, afraid of touching on ground that might give way beneath him. He drew her frail form back to the couch till it lay there in repose again, and he shook up the pillows to fix them at her head and shoulders, saying:

'Lie down now and rest; weeping will not give you strength.'

'Thank you, papa,' she murmured, with closed eyes as if from exhaustion, yet with a smile of content that might have been a baby's in sleep.

Seeing this, he turned then to speak to Mrs. Calliport, but found she was no longer there.

He remembered that she had bade him enter, and he had done so forgetting her presence.

'Was she indignant?' he thought, but was too much engrossed with Jessie to care just then.

The truth was that, seeing her nephew overcome by this meeting and reunion with his daughter, she could not stand by unmoved. Moreover, there was a sanctity in it not meant for her intrusive gaze, so she fled to a little room adjoining, which was appropriated by Jessie generally, and there sat herself down to bury her face in her handkerchief and cry as heartily as Jessie had on her father's bosom.

There Theo found her, having unceremoniously sought for her, as was his custom of old, in every room until his search was thus rewarded; and there, without apology or confession, unmindful of his set speech, he opened the interview, anticipated with dread, with a question hoarsely spoken and of three words:

'Is she dying?'

Mrs. Calliport, not aware of his proximity, started to hear his voice so close at her ear; but she did not look up, for she sobbed her reply in her handkerchief.

'No! no! don't say so—don't think so! The country will set her up again—it must!'

'She needs a doctor, and must have one at once.'

Lockstud said this in his own old peremptory way.

'No doctor can prescribe for her.' Aunt Jessie raised her head and spoke as emphatically as her nephew. 'She needs change of air, change of scene; and she, poor child! hates Phillipia. A doctor will worry her into fresh sickness with questions that neither she nor I can answer. You trust her to me.'

Lockstud folded his arms across his chest and, gnawing his moustache, abruptly turned on his heel and began to walk the room. Mrs. Calliport's eyes followed him for a few seconds before she spoke again.

'Come here, Theo, and sit down; I want to speak to you. I can better speak here, away from that poor girl.'

But Theo stood still some few paces off, and said with bitterness:

'What man shall sit before his accuser—his judge?'

'I do not wish to accuse or judge,' she answered with a stifled sob.

'I am already convicted, then. That girl has sentenced me.'

'Oh, come here, do; don't stand there so!' entreated Mrs. Calliport.

He obediently walked up closer to her chair, and stood before her with bent head.

His worn, care-seamed face, his despondent attitude, his bitter repentance, representing to her a phase of his character totally unknown and unexpected, did more to soften her towards him than any set speech could have done; and her maternal affection, so chilled by the blast of all belief in his future redemption, first gently fanned into warmth by Roland's letter, only needed a strong breath such as this to enkindle it; for the love-sparks were by no means dead, but smouldered beneath the ashes his irreparable crime had created — the ashes of withered hope.

'I meant once,' she said, with no rebuke in her accents, 'to forget you had ever been as a son to me, to show you no more pity than you have shown to others; but I did not ask you to come to-night for censure, but for peace. I am not going to touch on what has happened, or add to your distress. I have tried to do a mother's duty to you, and must have failed somehow, else there could not have been so much wrong in your life. I have scolded you, have preached and besought, and with all have done no good. You have often laid your peccadilloes at my door, and perhaps you've been right to do so. But if we have both been in error, 'tis not too late to turn over a new leaf.'

'It is too late to change destiny,' he muttered, with his eyes on the carpet—'too late.'

'I don't believe in a destiny independent of our own creation, that comes to us whether we will it or not; destiny is just what we make it; we can control it for good or for evil—lead up to a rose-garden or a pestilence. Your destiny has been in my hands, and I have not worked it properly, it seems. You see, I am willing now to take some of the blame on my own shoulders; and because of my faulty guardianship we all suffer now—you most of all—yet your suffering shall be your ransom.'

'I suffer more than if I were set to breaking stones,' he

answered gloomily. 'There is death in that girl's face, and so surely as she dies I am her murderer.'

His voice broke, and again he turned and walked away, his arms still folded, his head bowed, a transformed Theodore Lockstud.

'She will not die,' said Mrs. Calliport, with a sudden querulousness, as if impatient with him for hinting at the possibility. 'She is young, and money shall not be spared to buy back her health, her roses and dimples and smiles.'

'You are very good to us all,' he replied, still tramping. He had often made this remark before, but never with the present sincerity that gave the words the true ring.

'I have tried to be, tried to be,' said the old lady, with a shake of her head implying dissatisfaction with the trial. 'But sit down, Theo; there is one thing more I wish to say to you, but your walking irritates me; old women are so easily irritated.'

He drew a chair near her, and at last sat down, ready to listen, and with his long white fingers pulling and twisting at his moustache; his nerves were too unstrung for perfect quiescence of muscles and limbs.

'I just said,' she went on, 'that I am an old woman; well, that's a fact, you know; and that old women have sometimes nervous fancies is another fact. One of mine is that my time has nearly run out. I am going away for our dear Jessie's sake; the effort to leave my shell may do me good or may do me harm. I don't know. Anyway, "Who knows what a day may bring forth?" Therefore it is just as well for me to tell you something to-night, for it is an excellent opportunity. If it should be ordained that we may not speak together again like this, I wish you to open that davenport of mine in the next room. You will find in a drawer there, a little book, a history in your own mother's writing, my dear sister's! It concerns you only, and for that reason I wish no other eye but yours to see it, no other hand to touch it. It has nothing whatever to do with money matters.'

Lockstud looked at her curiously and waited to hear more, but she ceased for a moment, while in the act of drawing from her pocket a bunch of keys, from which she selected one in particular, to be slipped from the steel ring. This being done, she handed it to her nephew, saying:

'Keep it carefully, and if I don't return you'll know what to do with it.'

'But,' he asked, 'what is the history? and in what way does it concern me?'

She put out her hand and laid it on his.

'My dear, you will know all when you read the little book. There are strange coincidences in life, and you will be struck with one shown in this simple little diary. It is a secret now, but to be made known to you after my death.'

'A secret?' Theo thought the one secret of his life had been burdensome enough, and he did not feel the least anxious to have another thrust upon him. But he took the little key and consigned it to his waistcoat pocket, with a shade of his old impatience darkening his face and knitting his brow.

'Yes, a secret,' went on his aunt. 'But after what has happened to you and us, it seems to me the misery of her life was light in comparison. She left it to me to tell you at my own discretion, and now I think the time has come to tell you. That is all. I think we ought to go back to our poor girl.'

They rose together, and he offered her his arm; thus linked they returned to the bedroom, where they found Jessie sleeping calmly, with her soft and lengthy lashes resting on her cheeks and glistening yet with her tears, with her lips partly open, and her hands folded as though she had passed into slumber with prayer.

'Poor child! don't wake her,' whispered Mrs. Calliport, gazing lovingly on the sweet face.

Lockstud did not. His heart sank again, and his bosom heaved, as he stooped and kissed her lightly on the lips with a 'Good-night' and 'good-bye' only mentally uttered.

'We used to kiss—you and I,' observed his aunt, when he held out his hand to her at parting.

'When you had not found me out,' he answered somewhat sullenly.

'No, my dear; but I have found you out to-night, for the first time, to be made of better stuff than I thought. Now, sir, kiss me.'

He bent his head gravely and obeyed her with the first impulse of grateful affection he had ever felt for her, and so the rehabilitation was complete. He went home conquered, a better man, but one of the most miserable men in Phillipia that night. He was a modern Prometheus, with more than one vulture gnawing at his vitals. Debt had been stronger than remorse, but now remorse was more mighty than debt, and God help the man who falls a prey to both together.

But Mrs. Calliport was sensible of more content than she had known for weeks. Would she have been so could she have foreseen that what she wished to be a posthumous disclosure would not be posthumous at all?

CHAPTER VIII.

THEODORE LOCKSTUD SAYS 'FAREWELL.'

YES, Lockstud was in debt. Had he not lost heavily by the collapse of the Nabob? And to recoup had he not dipped recklessly into speculations of divers kinds?

A mirage promising an Eldorado—a tree goodly to all appearance, with clusters of fruit—a river running golden sands: each and all allured him in turn, to drag him out of his depth into a sea of debt, wherein he floundered, catching at straws, but sinking deeper and deeper. The reports which had reached the Pennacoves concerning him were not without truth. As before stated, he had tried to sodden his mind and its wholesale burden of care with drink; but he was one of those who, so indulging, never quite sink the man or raise the brute, but that incarnation of recklessness and excitement which, being neither brute nor human, must be a devil of its kind—a devil daring him to wield the cue, deal the cards, or back a horse, with equal dash and foolhardiness, quite anomalous to a character both shrewd and cautious. Unfortunately he began by winning. Success was the mirage—the Eldorado illusory, the tree bearing Dead Sea fruit, the river of golden sands proving a bog; for he played higher and higher, betted wilder, staked hundreds on Asahel, the supposed winning horse of the Clatterbang Cup, and lost—lost all, more than he had won. So his substance was dragged; so Cecillambda, and whatever property

he possessed besides, became mortgaged ; so the mortgage loan was absorbed ; so his position as bank-manager was held by a mere thread ; and so, lacking the moral courage to correct habits of expenditure, domestic and otherwise, he, goaded to madness, contemplated a dangerous loophole out of the wretched maze.

Things were at such a pass that night when Priscilla sought him and took the garrison. And that morning, when she, having read and re-read Roland's letter, was eager there and then to put forth her hands to snatch the brand from the burning, he was sitting at his desk in the manager's room at the Civic.

There were books before him, the business books of the bank, over which he bent with a chalky face and frowning brows, with the pen between his fingers ; but he did not write. Thrice he dipped it, and hovered over a line or a figure ; thrice the ink dried, wasted on the nib. Ultimately he threw the pen from him with an oath, and, closing the books with a heavy thud, he swore at himself for a coward, and said :

'I'll do it to-morrow. My brain reels, my hand shakes! I'll try again to-morrow.'

Whatever it was he thought to try again on the morrow was never attempted. There are fiery swords nowadays to guard forbidden ground, and one was thrust in the manager's face the next morning.

'Let the memory of his past wrongs and his sweetness and goodness this day lead us to peace and farther from sin,' Priscilla, the night before, had said in reference to their first-born. The words were still ringing in his ears, to conjure up that dagger of wrath, that bulwark of flame, to dance in vivid lights before him, and stay his hand. He did not waste time or ink with a trembling hesitation at the bank-books. But, locking himself in the strong-room, those precious bags, so weighty yet so small, which had been deposited in his escritoire at Cecil-lambda just before Priscilla had surprised him with her overture of peace, were now hurriedly brought forth to light again, gripped with a nervous clutch ; there was a white distorted face, a groan, and they fell from his long lithe fingers back to the receptacle from which they had been drawn not twenty-four hours earlier ; then followed the shutting to of drawers and iron

doors and the fiery sword flashed victorious across the blood-shot eyes of a would-be thief at the threshold of tempting sin.

Next, hurrying to his own office, he turned to the lavatory, there to lave his hands, as if they were blood-stained, and needed the 'nitre' of holy writ, while he said in his heart :

'Poor 'Cilla ! Will she ever know from what she has saved me?'

'Mr. Lockstud,' came a voice from without.

Lockstud, drying his hands on his towel, walked calmly to the door and opened it.

'If you please, sir, you are wanted,' said a clerk.

'Coming,' said Lockstud, who, apparently as cool and dignified as ever, strode from the manager's room, if not an honest man, at least no more dishonest than when he had entered it that morning.

Who says an angel's wings had not interposed between him and further fall?

After this he waited for the olive-branch that Priscilla told him he might expect from Aunt Jessie, an olive-branch that might give him something to cling to as a possible rescue from the debt that submerged him ; and in obeying her call, he resolved to make a full confession of his difficulties—not of the temptation to tamper with bank books and bags.

He could not in reason expect her to replenish his wasted thousands. Yet he looked to her to aid him in some way ; not for his own sake as much as for the credit of the family.

Filled with vain longings and regrets, and with nerves at a high tension, he at length entered her house. But seeing Jessie, as he thought, with death stamped on her young face, his resolution faded away ; he could not touch upon his losses that night.

Up to that time, though moved to contrition, he had yet struggled to subdue and smother an emotion which, in its novelty, was torture, since it tended to crush his self-esteem and turn him stone-deaf to a comfortable sophistry called up for a salve, and becoming an irritant. Now, however, the struggle ceased, and the emotion, no longer fettered, broke from its restraint and mastered him, like the bursting of a man-made dam ; the God-given water forced an outlet, and flooded his soul to pain and purification.

He listened to his aunt speaking of the book in the davenport, showing first a slight curiosity, and then an indifference, for he attached small importance to it.

'Probably,' he told himself, 'it tells of some girl's folly in my mother's early days, which she believed in keeping for my matured worldliness to judge, that it might be accepted with allowances, and not condemned too harshly.'

If the debt that oppressed him as it did became a minor grief in the presence of his daughter, and before the white face that haunted him after, it is small wonder that the existence of his mother's diary should fail to arouse in him a strong interest. So he left his aunt without having said a word in reference to his monetary position; but later on he thought he would see her again to-morrow, and speak of it then, her manner being rather an encouragement for him to confide in her. It never occurred to him to adopt for his own text certain words of hers used that night, 'Who knows what a day may bring forth?' Can it not be well understood now why he was the most miserable man in Phillipia?

He saw death advancing and debt pursuing—demons of his own evoking. His memory was charged with crime—'a hag to ride his dreams'; a spectre with fifty tongues jabbering and jeering eternally, 'Sin, debt, ruin, death'; a peal of infernal, witch-like bells clanging discordantly at his bed, his board, and his desk. Prometheus is a myth. We know it is against all organic laws that a liver should be gnawed at perpetually without decrease or decease. But human law does not forbid the heart to be stretched on a self-constructed rack, to crack and writhe and waste with its agony.

Rewards and punishments are meted out on earth, and whatever awaits us in that wonderful mysterious Future, it shall be some positive of the negative caught here below, in sunshine or shadow, the negative clear or blurred according to the stand we take—the light or the shade—before the abiding, omnipresent, holy camera, reflecting, recording word, deed, and thought for ever and for ever.

Lockstud suffered his sentence. He passed a sleepless night, and rose the next morning more haggard, more gray.

Priscilla's eyes filled when she saw him leave for the bank.

'Poor fellow!' she thought; 'how sorry—how awfully sorry he is! But ought I to wish him to be less so?'

She did not worry him with sighs or tears, but did a score of little services to show her pity and prove her devotion, and only in her solitude cried out her sorrow. She was surprised when he returned about mid-day, for he generally lunched in the city, and never came home till the bank was closed.

'What is the matter? You are ill?' she questioned, dropping hurriedly some needlework as she rose from her chair.

It fell unheeded on the floor.

'Not ill,' he replied, with an attempt at a laugh to reassure her, as much like a smile as a streak of lightning is like a sunbeam—'not ill, but hipped, worried. I couldn't breathe at the bank. I want a spell, and I'm going to have it for a few hours.'

She gazed anxiously up into his face. How very ill he looked! she thought.

'You must rest—you must lie down,' she urged, not knowing that for him to lie down idly would be no rest whatever.

'Lie down?' he repeated. 'No; I'm going first to Aunt Jessie, and to see our Jessie again. Then I may be able to rest.'

Priscilla answered this quickly, and with some surprise:

'You bade them good-bye last night, I thought, and——'

'Yes, yes; I know,' he interrupted. 'But I must see Aunt Jessie on an important business matter that can't wait, won't wait.'

'But, dear, they have gone to Wondoo. Didn't they tell you last night of their intention to start this morning? They were here this morning after you left, on their way to the station, to say good-bye to the children and me.'

She could not understand the expression of dismay that crept over his face, or why he made a gesture of impatience as he walked to a lounge, and there, sitting, bent forward with his elbows on his knees, and nursed his head in his hands, as one meeting with a dire disappointment.

'I never thought to ask, nor she to tell me,' he said moodily.

'Why, Theo, what is wrong?' she asked, going over to him, and taking a place at his side on the lounge.

It was in that little arbour of a room which he, in a tender moment, had called "Cilla's Bower,' before Roland had come to them, and where Aunt Jessie had reproved her for taking

things too easily with her tripping, faulty husband; where the vines were still clinging, and baby roses blossomed, bloomed, and faded, to blossom and bloom again; where caged birds still hopped and chirped, and gold-fish sported in the sun-rays slanting through the trellis, and the breeze freely played and trifled now with the soft loose tendrils of her bleaching hair.

'What is wrong?'

'Much.'

He never raised his head.

Her right hand stole to his neck fondly; she nestled closer to him.

'Don't speak so, Theo; you alarm me. Is it something that will not pass away with time?'

'Yes,' he thought; 'it will pass away like a whirlwind, perhaps, after sweeping all before it.'

It was on his lips to say, 'We are ruined,' but he held his peace, desperately clinging to his aunt as a means of averting catastrophe. He sighed, and shook his head only.

'Can't it wait till she comes back?' queried Priscilla.

'No; I *must* see her at once.'

And then a sudden idea leaped to his brain like a flash to lighten the annoyance of learning she was at present beyond his reach.

He lifted his face, and turned to his wife as if to speak, but hesitated before he gave his resolution words.

'I shall go to her. I shall start by this afternoon's train. It will be the best.'

'Is it so urgent?' she faintly asked, her heart beginning to tremble with a nameless fear.

'Very urgent.'

'And can it be about money?' she asked again.

'About debt,' he replied, forced to say something.

'Debt!' she exclaimed, with a painful start, thinking of what the word implied, and of all Aunt Jessie had already done for them with monetary help. 'Debt! Oh, Theo! is it, can it be for a large amount?'

It occurred to her then that Roland, having alluded to these rumours of her husband's habits, had not been misinformed, but her idea of the debt was wide of the reality, and her simplicity was unable to comprehend the depth to which a gambler may be hurled.

Hitherto avoiding anything like a scrutiny in words, which she knew he would not brook, she now broke forth into overwhelming interrogation in her eagerness to learn the worst, and comfort him if she could.

But he answered her with his wonted imperiousness, 'I can't attend to all your questions,' and rose from the lounge to walk from the room, and escape from what he felt to be Inquisitional torture.

Presently she heard him ordering one of the servants to pack up his dressing-case and a change of linen, and then she listened to his receding footsteps, and felt half dazed with a new terror as they gradually died away, and she guessed he had gone to the far-off room of his one-time exile.

She shivered, and knew not why, while an indefinable longing to accompany him to Wondoo so possessed her that she followed him to propose herself as his companion on the trip. She found him, as she expected, in that same room, but so busy at a small iron box, where letters and business papers were accumulated, that he did not notice her entrance. He was on his knees, fumbling amongst the paper litter, until he came across a letter which evidently concluded his search, for he ceased the fumbling, and commenced to read it, but did not finish, for Priscilla gave a little cough, and immediately the letter was viciously ribboned, and the fragments fell from his fingers, tossed anyhow and anywhere, on to the floor. It was one of the few that had come to him from Isabella Goldwin—only a hurried, business-like letter, but still hers—bearing her signature, and one which he felt impelled to destroy, as if determined to sever all connection with the very name.

He shut-to the box with a sharp click as Priscilla faintly made her proposal, or rather her appeal.

'Theo, I want to go with you to Wondoo. May I?'

'It is best not.' He spoke gently enough, but his negative was painful. He never looked at her, but flicked the dust from the knees of his trousers as he got up from his kneeling. 'The trip will do me good, but there will be too much rushing over it for you. I will be back to-morrow, and at the bank.'

'Ah! do take me with you. I don't mind the rushing.'

She pleaded child-like, yet ready to obey his decision.

He was afraid to consent—afraid of failure with Aunt Jessie, and the consequent desperation in himself that would make him a sorry companion.

'No,' he said, 'I must go alone;' and she turned away, importuning no more, but accepting his veto.

In less than ten minutes he left the house, saying he would be back in time for lunch, and he took a cab to drive as far as the young ladies' college where his second daughter was boarding. He wished to say good-bye to her for some inexplicable reason. As she was absent six days out of every week, only coming home on Sundays, he could have taken a run to Wondoo half a dozen times within the seven days without her being any the wiser; yet he went, and surprised her with his visit and unusual gentleness. He had been so churlish in the matter of his kisses and caresses towards his children that he quite understood her expression of wonderment, but not the transformation in himself which had caused it. Some invisible hand was seemingly urging him, willing him to act as he had never acted before.

Irresistingly, he became the agent of some occult force determining his movements—his very words. The same force sent him driving hurriedly back to the Civic Bank, ostensibly to give his son Jack a message relative to the business of the bank, but in reality to shake hands with him, and surprise him, too.

'Going to Wondoo, is he?' said Jack, with elevated eyebrows and shoulders, as he watched his father return to the cab. 'But why this thusness? I never saw him look so down.'

And Jack looked at his right hand, still warm and tingling with the parting pressure, as if he would like to read there the meaning of it, and then drew it hastily across his eyes, which had suddenly gathered mist.

When the hour came for Lockstud's departure from his home to meet the train, his buggy was kept waiting at the gate, while he kissed his younger children, still in the school-room.

Priscilla looked on, her nerves strained, her heart in her throat. There is something pathetic in seeing the world-hardened man forget his coldness, and stoop to kiss a child with a new-born warmth of sentiment gracing his features and

his action towards it. She felt it so, and when her turn came to say good-bye she could not speak the last word to him then. But she had an unexpected opportunity of trying again; for when he was only five minutes gone, he started as one does with the memory of something important left undone, and with the impelling of that will which did not seem his own, he called aloud to his coachman:

'Drive back; I have forgotten something.'

Right-about-face turned horse and buggy.

Returning, he alighted, and hurried to the 'arbour,' where he had left his wife. She was there still, but on her knees bitterly sobbing. He went over to her and raised her to her feet, and she, never stopping to think why he had come back, was only anxious to apologize for what seemed violent undue grief:

'Oh, Theo! I can't help it. I never felt like this before when you have been going for a holiday. It must be seeing you so unhappy, and my inability to cheer you. It is the debt like lead on your heart and mine.'

He made no allusion to the debt, but held her in his arms as he spoke with difficulty:

'You have cheered me; I—have—come—back to tell you so. I have been a brute to you—no, don't stop me; let me speak while the pride is wrenched away—I have been a brute in some things, have kept you from a worthier husband. 'Cilla—good little woman, faithful and true—forgive me, and—and pray for me; I can't form a prayer for myself. And here, take this'—he drew a little key from his waistcoat-pocket, and put it into her hand—'keep that till I come back. It belongs to Aunt Jessie; I might lose it, and if I don't come back——'

'Oh! what can you mean?' cried out Priscilla.

'Nothing, nothing!' he answered quickly, startled by her look, and rousing himself as if from a dream in which he had spoken aloud. 'Nothing! I don't know what I am saying. Of course I'll be back to-morrow. Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye!'

A burning kiss for each good-bye, hot tears on his face and hers, and he was gone.

She heard the rumbling of the buggy wheels, the wild pit-a-pat of her heart, and rushed to the front veranda to catch a last glimpse of the buggy as it swerved round a corner. And yet

he meant to be home again on the morrow, and parting from him for a few hours like this was no novelty.

But it was not the temporary separation that was oppressing her: it was the manner of it.

Theodore Lockstud was gone!

CHAPTER IX.

A HOPE AND A LIFE DOOMED TO PERISH.

To return to Una: the troubles of her friends had shadowed her. The Goldwin dénouement, the shutting up of Goolgun, Roland's overwhelming trouble, and Jessie's prostration and changed appearance, had inclined her also to much weeping, and even a desire to hide her head from the disgrace that seemed to touch her in sympathy with the friends to whom she was so deeply attached, whose pain was hers. That Jessie was physically as much as mentally affected, she knew; so did Mrs. Calliport and Mrs. Lockstud; but neither woman could note that something flickering on eye and lip which had mocked at Lockstud with a ghastly significance.

The idea of death hovering near was not borne to them, and Mrs. Calliport would not admit the thought suggested by her nephew's abrupt question, 'Is she dying?' She put it away from her, but felt all the more eager to be out of Phillipia that her beloved charge might the sooner breathe the recuperating country air. Accordingly she decided to go on the following morning, avoiding a procrastination which might be serious, and called with Jessie to say good-bye at Cecillambda and Unaville, *en route* to the station. Una, to spare them the exertion of alighting from the cab, went out from the house to meet them.

Though the morning was warm and bright, they were enwrapped in jackets and carried fleecy 'clouds'; and Mrs. Calliport, not to be wrenched entirely from the familiar and pleasant associations of her home, bore away two of her pets representing those associations; for Jumbo, her poodle, lay on the floor of the cab, curled into a brown fluffy ball, with half-shut eyes

watching intently Jenny Lind, the canary, as it hopped or flew from perch to perch in its gilt-wire cage, which was held in place on his mistress's lap.

Another cab followed with bag and baggage. Mrs. Calliport, wheezing a bit, insisted that she felt much better.

'I've been remiss to myself all these years,' she said to Una —'buried in my own house.'

But Una knew there was no 'self' in the movement, and that the old lady's country trip was as much a phenomenon as the effort to take it was meritorious. She would not let the girl go from her sight, and so she went with her to Wondoo.

Jessie was looking a shade brighter as she smiled at Una, holding her hand, and said with a poor imitation of her past vivacity:

'See what a weak little thing such as I can do—draw auntie away and out of Phillipia for miles.'

Then she bent closer and whispered something in Una's ear, which accounted for a transient renewal of the little flush in her cheek, and the feeble smile.

'Papa came to see us last night; we are all friends now, and I think I feel happier.'

'I knew they would be guided by Rol,' Una reflected as she returned to the house. 'Mrs. Calliport was so obstinate when I even hinted at reconciliation, and ruled Middie and Mrs. Lockstud alike. I knew Rol would prevail where I should fail.'

She understood now that her letter to Roland had fulfilled its purpose, and she experienced that happy sense of elation which fills us when satisfied with our own work.

'Uncle,' she announced at lunch-time, 'peace is proclaimed at Cecillambda.'

The Captain set down his knife and fork for a second, looked at his niece across the table, knitted his shaggy white brows, and shrugged his broad shoulders.

'Vagabond!' he cried. 'I'd see him hanged before I'd touch him with a yard-stick. I'd horsewhip him!'

Then he returned to his onslaught on a slice of cold ham, flourishing his knife as if it were a cat-o'-nine tails before it struck at the meat, to illustrate his desire for attack on the man whom he so thoroughly despised and condemned. He was not at all ready to give absolution to the bank-manager.

'Probably,' answered Una quietly, 'you would see him hanged. But if you were his wife you would do just as she has done, or as his aunt and daughter have done—try to save him from the hanging.'

'Lord bless my girl! are you going to plead for him?' Captain Pennacove bristled with wrath. 'He is going to the dogs as fast as he can, and as our tongues are tied and he can't be packed off to his legitimate quarters, the dogs can have him and welcome, if a respectable dog would touch him.'

'For shame, uncle'—Una coloured up and spoke out warmly, too—'to talk like that of any human creature, especially of dear Mrs. Lockstud's husband—of poor Jessie's father! Supposing he does deserve gaol, are his family to send him to worse than gaol, perhaps, for the lack of one kind word? I think he has been desperately wicked, but I can't think he is altogether irreclaimable, or that he ought to be cast adrift by his family and his family's friends.'

'Confound it, then!' exclaimed the Captain, with less show of belligerence, however, and a dropping of his voice. 'I can't help hating the fellow, and if Larry was wretched because friendship interfered with justice, why, so am I. We would both send him where he ought to be.'

'Uncle, I don't believe you mean that; and if he has been wicked, I think it is likewise wicked for people who go to church and pretend to be guided by its doctrines of brotherly love and charity to accept them as a mere sentiment without any practical application. We might as well try to palm off false notes in exchange for our daily needs as try to satisfy the soul with the signs of a creed, or empty words which shall never purchase our own future salvation.'

The girl, flushing, spoke with a vehemence which now amused her uncle, for, laughing and stretching forth his hand to pinch her cheek, he said good-humouredly:

'"Oh, wise little Daniel!" Shall we blow all the gaols in the world to smithereens and invite all the gaol-birds to a big lunch, eh?'

'No,' she replied gravely, 'I would not recommend either. Unfortunately, the gaol is a necessary institution, and because it is so it supports my argument. If the love and charity

preached were really practised, the gaols might crumble to dust, or, better still, never be erected. But they do exist, and always will; yet that is no reason why a duplicate should, so to speak, be raised by a man's own kith and kin to wall him out from their little world like a pariah. If love and charity fail with Mr. Lockstud, it will be time enough to utterly ignore his claim to it—to utterly condemn him.'

'Maybe you're right, my girl,' admitted the Captain, not unimpressed; 'but love and charity are pretty names more often than not, like the shoddy velvets and cloths that gull the public with a false pile that looks like the real thing, with its cheap gloss, but won't stand too strong a light or too much wetting, and is only for show, but not for use. Test it, and you'll find a flimsy rag; and I'm afraid I've got a stock of shoddy on hand, like lots of others.'

Una here went over to her uncle and hung about him coaxingly.

'But, uncle dear, you must get rid of the shoddy material, and try and find the real, genuine article. If you try, you will find it, and you will say, "I am sorry for this miserable man, and if by a word or deed of mine I can make *him* sorry for his misdeeds, I shall do a good thing; and if there's a chance of doing that good thing, neither word nor deed ought to be withheld."'

Captain Pennacove now kissed the cheek, still rosy from the pinch, and said:

'Ay, ay, my girl! You'd soften a Herod. But even if I try to pitch the shoddy out of the window, there's sure to be some more left behind.'

It was customary after luncheon for the old man to take his siesta, and next a walk or a drive with Una, or alone; but as she expected Charlie Mountfu this afternoon to come and be perfected in a new song, the Captain was condemned to a solitary ramble.

She was practising the accompaniment as her uncle entered the drawing-room, hat and stick in hand, and inclined to make a joke of the discussion at lunch.

'I'm going now, Una, and if I feel like throwing off the shoddy, and meet Mr. Gaolbird, I'll say, "Come and be loved."'

Saying which, he would not wait to hear how she would take

his jest, but walked out of the room and into the street, mumbling, 'Come and be loved indeed! Come and be kicked! Bah!'

As the hall clock with its prefatory whirr gave out five distinct strokes, Mountfu, up to time, made his appearance, and walked to the piano.

'Welcome, Signor Puntiglio,' said Una. 'You are true to your appointment.'

'True in all that concerns me with you, Una,' he responded wooingly.

'Am I to understand that you are not true to anybody else?' she asked lightly.

'You know well enough what you are to understand.'

'Of course I do. You are here for a singing lesson, and not to waste time in talk; so let us begin.'

She struck the keys with such a decisiveness, in sweeping chords, that they said for her, 'Come, sir, no nonsense!' But Mountfu bent and lifted her hands from the piano, holding her wrists with gentle force.

'You understand,' he answered with tender accents and a pathos that alarmed her, 'that I have not come here only for a music lesson. It is not the singing alone that brings me here; it is——'

'I hear a carriage!' cried Una, thus lopping a sentence that she wished to remain unspoken, as she rose hurriedly from the piano-stool. 'Let me go to the window and see.'

He dropped her hands sullenly, and dived his own into his trousers-pockets. It was ever the same thing; his wooing made no progress. Una always evaded him like a coy little bird, not to be caught with sweet grain. And he was so desperately in love that even his worldly position, at present mediocre, did not deter him from letting it be recognised, or make him less sanguine of success. He thought she must reciprocate his steady, deep affection, the growth of years, and now fully ripened.

'Your lesson is doomed for a time to stand over, Charlie,' she called from the window. 'Here come visitors for me—the Lannagers.'

'Then I'll go away, and come back after the prescribed ten minutes of the visit shall expire.'

'You will do nothing so rude, sir,' she said in a jesting tone, but with a serious face. 'You will not leave me to bear the infliction alone; and they will meet you going out as they come in, and construe the action discreditably, or, rather, misconstrue it.'

With that the street-door bell, with its silvery electric peal, rang out a summons for attendance.

Charlie made an exclamation under his breath which was neither elegant nor courteous, since it consigned the Lannagers to some undeserved perdition for their malapropos call; and his countenance was not suggestive of sweetness as mother and eldest daughter, with rustling silks, were ushered into the drawing-room.

They were both effusive, but the elder lady more so, with her wide, fixed smile, as she wrung Una's hand, and poured forth eager questions relative to her and her uncle's health, as if their welfare was the one thing needful to send her cup of happiness running over. Receiving satisfactory replies, she expressed an extravagant delight, and next generously diffused some of this frothy loquacity in Charlie's direction, upon whom it was wasted, and to which he responded shortly.

'And how is your *dear* little friend—such a *charming* little creature—Miss Lockstud?' she asked, turning to Una. 'We heard that she was ill, and feel *so* very *distressed* about it.'

'Oh yes, how is she?' came like a refrain from the daughter.

'Very much better to-day,' was the reply. 'She looked ever so much better;' and Una's eyes brightened.

'Oh, you saw her to-day—how nice!' said Miss Lannager. 'Mamma and I would so much like to see her.'

'We never called upon Mrs. Calliport, you know,' said Mrs. Lannager; 'but do you think'—here her head went on one side insinuatingly—'if we called to see her now she would be indignant, and think we only came to see her niece? She is such a *dear* old lady. I would like to know her better.'

Una, not feeling able to answer for Mrs. Calliport's manner of accepting Mrs. Lannager's visit, was glad to be able to say at once that she and Jessie had gone to Wondoo.

The Lannagers and the full coterie of the Lockstuds did not know how very ill Jessie had been. The prevailing impression was that she had met with an accident at her aunt's house, and

so was confined there until able to be removed. It could not be guessed that she was kept there to escape the influx of friends who would be certain to worry her with well-meant intentions. And it may be remembered that Mrs. Calliport's social circle was particularly limited through her own reserve, which now served poor Jessie well in her desire to get away from everybody but the especial few who loved her and wept for her sincerely.

But surmise as to the nature of the accident was busy, and Frank Lannager, who was just as much in earnest about her as Mountfu was about Una, called daily at Cecillambda to inquire after her; but knowing she was at Mrs. Calliport's, he sent a bouquet every morning there, without card or any intimation of the donor's name, which was scarcely necessary, for Jessie guessed from whom it came, but only sighed and pitied when she thought of him.

When Mrs. Lockstud gave out that her daughter was the victim of an accident, she scarcely accused herself of a subterfuge, because she thought a broken or bruised heart a serious disaster too—the worst of accidents.

'Gone to Wondoo—again?' exclaimed mother and daughter alike interrogative.

Una nodded her head and gave a quiet 'Yes.'

'Is it safe for her to travel yet?' asked Mrs. Lannager, still smiling. 'She broke her ankle, did she not? How *distressing* for her!'

'We did hear that her spine was injured,' here put in Miss Lannager, with a concern not quite feigned; 'but that is not true, is it?'

'No,' answered Una with hidden pain, 'decidedly not.'

'I am *so* glad you can say so; for, of course, you must know,' said the mother again, eager to find out what was really the matter. 'People do exaggerate so, you know, and we should have enough to do to believe all we hear. Perhaps the accident is not so serious, after all.'

'Perhaps not,' said Una, not taking kindly to the sounding process. 'I told you she was much better.'

'Well, we are woefully disappointed to have missed seeing her. We really ought to have called on Mrs. Calliport before. Lottie here'—Mrs. Lannager glanced towards her daughter—

—'is positively *dying* to see her—such a *delightful* little creature!'

Miss Lannager, whose well-knit frame and general air of brightness did not betoken anything of a moribund tendency, laughed and said:

'Oh, I shall live long enough to see her again, and soon, I hope; but I am not the only one "dying" on her account.'

'Nonsense!'

Mrs. Lannager's eyes shot a gleam of annoyance, in peculiar contrast with that perpetual smile. Perhaps her daughter's playful toss of her word 'dying' was offensive, and she could not hide its effect. However, she suddenly dropped the subject of Jessie to take up Jessie's father, and apply the sound again to Una.

'How is Mr. Lockstud? He looks quite another man. I am sure he must be ill. Do you know?'

Mrs. Lannager had not only heard distorted rumours of Jessie's illness, but of her father's late unlucky speculations as well. Longing to get at the truth, she yet was not sure how the pumping system would befriend her with Miss Pennacove, but was anxious to try it on.

Seeing Una hesitate, Charlie unconsciously did her a real service, for he answered for her laconically:

'Bile.'

Mrs. Lannager was not satisfied, evidently, for she shook her head, and spoke without looking at anybody.

'Bile may make people horribly melancholy and wretchedly yellow, but not positively old and gray. He has aged twenty years the last six weeks. Now, hasn't he?'

'I think he must be suffering in some way,' said Una, taking refuge in an equivocation.

'Yes; to be sure he must. How painful to think of it!' Mrs. Lannager thought she was getting on. 'I hear that he lost heavily on Asahel—did you?—heavily enough to make most men look ill; but, my dear, I wouldn't believe it. Of course, it's no business of mine; but is it true, do you think? I'm not inquisitive, you know; but he is such a *charming* man. It is a pity if it is true, eh?'

Mrs. Lannager's head tilted slightly on one side, and her eyes rested searchingly on Una's face.

'It is a case of "They say," Mrs. Lannager,' answered Una, with an uneasiness she could not conceal from the sharp observation of the questioner. 'And "They say" is an abominable pest, often misleading, and never to be fully relied upon. No doubt he has much to worry him, and his friends would be kinder, I think, not to raise reports likely to increase his worries.'

Miss Lannager caught a certain inflection in the word 'friends' which, like a gentle prick of a rebuke, reminded her that her parents were presumably friends of the Lockstuds. So she quickly answered, before her mother could speak:

'Quite right, Miss Pennacove; so they should. And if Mr. Lockstud has a rebellious liver, as Mr. Mountfu supposes, he will get over it, and "They say" will have its tongue tied, and serve it right. Come, mamma; we have other calls to make.'

They went, and Mountfu's parting was more fervent than his welcome had been.

'I fancy,' observed Miss Lannager, seated in the carriage next to her mother, 'that we interrupted an interesting *tête-à-tête*, and Charlie Mountfu has much the same complaint as our Frank.'

'And I fancy,' said Mrs. Lannager, only intent upon one subject, 'that there *is* something shady about the Lockstuds, and Frank must be made cautious.'

'Goodness!' ejaculated the young lady. 'Why, you almost forced him to pay attention to Jessie, and now that the attention has led to actual love on his part, you want him to fall out of love again, just like a circus-dog trained to fly through a hoop backwards and forwards, according to the way you hold it.'

'Absurd! and you must hint at his idiocy before that girl.'

'"That girl" knows all about it, and doesn't need any hints.'

Miss Lannager tossed her head at the implied correction.

'Well, I don't care what she knows,' rattled the mother *sotto voce*, and looking towards the coachman, 'about him, but she *does* know more about Lockstud's affairs than she will admit. Jessie will not get a penny, perhaps, and she knows it, and isn't likely to stand in the light of an excellent match for her friend by proclaiming the fact. Frank *must* be put on his guard.'

'And if Mr. Lockstud had been successful in speculation, what then?' asked Miss Lannager.

'What then? Why, he would have been lucky, and it would not be a duty on our part to break off any likely connection. Your father and I never mix too freely with unlucky people; it isn't safe. You never know but what, like drowning men, they may cling too close, and drag you down to drown with them.'

Mountfu, having escorted the ladies to their carriage, returned to Una, once again to breathe freely; and she, evidently determined to proceed with the singing-lesson, had reseated herself at the piano, and recommenced the accompaniment. But though he stood at her side, he did not attempt to sing.

'Any more coming?' he began in jest, yet with a dash of gravity. 'Let me know if the roll of carriage-wheels should greet your quick ears, before they pull up at the door. I am unequal to a second strain of the kind.'

'You would have been discourteous had you run away,' she answered quietly. 'As it was, you were a help to me.'

'Was I? Now, that's the kindest thing you have said to me yet.'

He dropped his voice dangerously.

'I declare I will say something positively unkind if I have to play this accompaniment over again for nothing. So now to business; and, remember, when I pause on a note, you are to take it as a sign to pause too. Now.'

Once more she struck the keys, and rippling chords seemed to echo her 'Now.'

'Ahem!'

Mountfu cleared his throat, but, ignoring the music and her peremptory 'Now,' he looked at her fair slender hands; from the hands he glanced to her profile; then at the shapely head, with its wealth of wavy blonde hair.

'Well,' she said almost sharply; 'begin.'

'Very well,' he replied, with a shade of mischief in his eyes, blending with the admiration she evoked; 'I am going to begin; but please remember when I pause you are to do the same.'

'What *do* you mean?' she asked, with a touch of anger colouring her tone and manner.

'Don't be vexed with me, Una. I *can't* sing to-day.'

He moved his hands and arms nervously, walked off a few paces, circumnavigated a gipsy table, and came back again to stand near her.

'I mean to pause, if you will let me, and to sing the song that is nearest my heart, and on my tongue—not *that* one to-day.' He pointed to the music set before her. 'It is—oh, Una, it is, "Tell her I love her so"!'

Una involuntarily gave forth a discordant jangle. He ought to have understood it as a want of harmony with his outspoken sentiment. She was about to speak, but he interrupted her:

'Don't say a word yet. You are too good to hurt a living creature wilfully; but if you fence with me you will hurt me. You have always put me off with raillery; but say you never meant harm by it—that is, indifference. I love you—I love you; and if you will try to love me just a little, I will try so hard to be worthy of you. I will make some way in the world, and not be always in my present position. I'll leave the clerkship behind, and when you find me getting on at something better you will know how sincere I am. Oh, Una darling!'

He put out his hand to take one of hers, but she snatched it away, and pressed her eyes with it. What she had warded off so long with playfulness—like Tennyson's parrot, biting the dainty finger 'more for true heart than harm'—had come at last and met with a reception which was not entirely calculated upon.

'Have I asked too hard a thing?' he murmured sadly.

'Yes,' she answered at length, dropping her hand, and looking vacantly at the piano—'too hard a thing. I *have* meant all I have said—have wilfully misunderstood you, that you might be spared the pain of a fruitless confession. I wanted you to understand that, and you would not. I am sorry.'

'To understand the "fruitless confession"?'

'Yes, yes. Oh, Charlie, let us still be friends—good friends—the best of friends!'

Her eyes were cast down, her lips trembled like her accents, and he drew nearer with an elbow on the top of the piano, his body bent to her, and scanned her face as he questioned her in a voice not quite like his own:

'Am I such a miserable fellow that I can only inspire friendship?'

'No; you will inspire more than that some day, and wonder at your folly in thinking you once cared so much for me.'

'Never.'

All the happy mischief in his face gave way to a remarkable gravity in one always inclined to merriment.

'I could be content with so little, if you would give it me.'

She rose from the piano, and held out her hands to him. They were immediately clasped in his.

'No; a little would not content you,' she said. 'A good man deserves all the love of the woman he is to wed. I can't give it you, though you have made me fond of you; and if you were richer or poorer, it would make no difference to me, could I feel for you as you do for me.'

'That is your answer—your final answer?' he asked, still hand-linked with her.

'Yes.'

He bowed his head, and released her hands, and then in a muffled tone said:

'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye for to-day,' she replied. 'You must come again, and forget this afternoon. I wanted you not to speak, and the speaking has caused us both pain. Let us try and forget it. I can't afford to lose a friend.'

'You may be better able to forget than I!' he said, and a sudden pang of jealousy set his lips in sullenness, while, by some intuitive process, his thoughts went out over the sea, over the land, even as far as Knutsford.

At the garden-gate, as he was making his exit, he met the Captain just about to enter.

'What is the matter?'

It was Mountfu who put the question, without any greeting; for the old man's face had lost its ruddiness, and his eyes had that dazed look which mostly follows a shock.

The Captain, for answer, put his arm through the young man's, as if for support or companionship, and drew him inside the gate again and back to the house.

'Where's Una?' he asked, somewhat feebly.

'I left her in the drawing-room,' said Mountfu, rather reluctant to return to the scene of his discomfiture; but when they entered the room together Una was not there. 'Shall I call her to come to you?' asked Charlie, fearing the Captain was ill, as he watched him mopping his head with his silk handkerchief, while the cold perspiration stood in beads on his forehead.

'No, no;' and the Captain sat down heavily on his easy-chair, still busy wiping. 'She'll hear it fast enough, I'll be bound. Let her be. Lord bless my girl! How cold it is! Open that cupboard, will you?' he said, pointing to a marble-topped, mirrored chiffonniere, 'there's a good fellow, and bring us the whisky and a tumbler. Don't call anybody. You'll find it there all right.'

Mountfu had no difficulty in putting his hand on a decanter, necklaced with a silver label, inscribed 'Whisky'; and with a tumbler carried it to the Captain, who, with a shaking hand, poured out a third of a glass and tossed it off neat.

'There, that'll warm my old blood!' he cried. 'I am not as young as I was.'

'What is the matter?' asked Mountfu again, with pardonable curiosity. 'What has frightened you?'

'Frightened me! I should think so—the biggest scare I've ever had! There's been an accident—fatal.'

'To somebody you know?'

'Good Heaven, yes! Theodore Lockstud is dead—killed!'

'Dead!' exclaimed Mountfu, terribly shocked.

'Dead as a ducat—guillotined on the railway.'

'I don't understand,' faltered Mountfu, feeling suddenly sick with the tidings, and turning as white as the bearer of them.

'I can't quite do that myself. I've been for a drive, and was passing the terminus, and saw a crowd rushing towards the station. "What's on?" I called to the driver. "Accident, sir, I think," he said. "We'll drive up and see," I said; and we drove forward with the crowd. It was not a railway accident, but an accident on the railway. An accident, they told us, to a man travelling by the three Southern train up-country. He was putting his head out of the window, as people will do, and a down-train was coming on with a door unlocked and flying open. It rushed passed the up-train, and that open door guillotined the head that was pushed through the window on the up-train. It belonged to Lockstud. I can't realize it. Give me a little more whisky.'

Mountfu, feeling faint, helped the Captain again, and helped himself as well.

'Are you sure it was Lockstud?' he asked.

'Wish I wasn't. He was talking to somebody he knew a second before, a gentleman, who sounded the alarm, and brought the body back to Phillipia, to the morgue.'

Mountfu sat down like one stupefied, and the Captain renewed his mopping at a fresh burst of clamminess; mopped his hands and head and face, and shivered as he thought of his jest that afternoon, and the headless trunk lying at the morgue.

'How shall we tell Una, and his wife? and—good Lord——'

The Captain's thoughts now went in the same direction as Mountfu's had a little while ago—away to Knutsford, to Roland Goldwin; but he did not complete his sentence, for he abruptly closed his lips and went on flurrying with his handkerchief.

It had to be told.

Before another twenty-four hours were gone it was known far and wide—flashed abroad.

Theodore Lockstud had succumbed to this last unlucky hit—was decapitated, and, let us hope, ransomed.

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE PRESS TELEGRAMS AFFECTED THREE INDIVIDUALS.

About a hundred and thirty miles from Phillipia there is a district not old enough to have lost its country blush or verdure, yet sufficiently advanced to have a large central city of some commercial importance, with a large agricultural and pastoral interest supporting it. We will call it Debella.

At walking distance from the city, more towards the line of country, there stood rather a heavy, wide-spreading and lofty building of brick, set in a fair area of cultivated grounds, and enclosed with a tall, strong iron railing, with its carriage gates and wickets.

Nobody could mistake it for a private residence, frowning grimly, as it seemed, on the outside spectator. Yet Mercy and Munificence had reared it, and, within, the garden, fresh and blooming, somewhat redeemed it from its unhomelike aspect. It was the Debella hospital.

The sun, not long risen, partly brightened the eastern portion,

while the rest, still shadowed from the early rays, stood cold and firm. There were already signs of early-rising workers, for smoke curled lazily from the rear chimneys, and a woman could be seen on a balcony sweeping down a wall, and farther on, over the balcony rails, a blanket and sheet flapped gently in the morning breeze.

Presently one of the wickets opened and another woman emerged from the garden to the roadside and walked briskly away. A slim, active woman she was, with sunken eyes and drab-gray hair, and clothed in black—a black-straw mushroom hat and black mittens, which exposed lean fingers. She was one of the probation nurses, hard-worked, never-complaining, and about to take her daily hour of out-door exercise. We have seen her before. It was Mrs. Dripper.

Nimble-footed, she sped towards the town, till she entered one of its streets with shuttered shops, and passed private homes, where the tradesmen's carts were trundling on their way, and milkman, baker and butcher announced their presence by an occasional shout, according to their respective burdens, or a housemaid, in the act of shaking a doormat or furbishing a knocker, stopped to stare curiously at the gray-haired nurse; and a bare-legged newsboy, with a pack of newspapers under arm, and a hand curved at his mouth, bawled, '*Debella Her—ald!* Row in the 'ouse! Terrable confler—gra—tion. Shocking ac—cerdent!' etc. This was what had impelled Mrs. Dripper to the town. She wanted a paper, and carried a coin with her for its purchase. Sometimes she had not the coin to spare; to-day, having one, she was anxious to know something of current events, and so held out her money and received a *Herald*, soft, damp, and fresh from the press. Paper in hand, she retraced her steps towards the hospital, intending to enter the People's Park, about a quarter of a mile ahead, where she could sit down and economize by taking some of her hour in the open air, and indulge in reading at one and the same time.

Arriving at the park, she rested on a bench under a broad-shading fig-tree, where she could rest her back and read quite comfortably.

The tree-boughs rocked, and their leaves, dew-bespangled, glistened in the sunshine; birds twittered sweetly, and hopped from branch to branch; sometimes their little heads turned

sideways, and a bright eye, with evident distrust, rested on the woman who sat beneath. The locusts, in a noisy chorus, began their hoarse chirping, and the dew still lay upon the ground like frost; while a sweet scent of young grass and wild-flowers permeated the atmosphere.

It was early yet for visitors to the park; Mrs. Dripper thought she had it all to herself; so she had at the outset, but, engrossed in her reading, the minutes sped rapidly and brought newcomers.

A laughing jackass, perched near by, laughed out his notes; she took no notice, and he laughed again, stretched his wings, and soared elsewhere to find appreciation of his morning greeting.

The birds above her, concluding she was harmless, warbled blithely, but soon had their fears aroused again by a stifled scream. The woman had dropped the paper and given vent to an exclamation of horror. With one accord they in terror fluttered from the tree and flew out of harm's reach.

The woman's head had fallen forward on her hands; a shudder convulsed her, and, rocking herself in an agony of thought, she cried aloud:

'Oh! oh! Lord have mercy on his soul, and mine!'

''As oo dot a pain?' came a baby voice at her ear, and a tiny silk-gloved hand came lightly on her wrist. 'Poor 'ooman, is oo ill?'

The crying ceased, and Mrs. Dripper raised her head from her hands, to see a dot of a girl at her knee, staring wistfully at her with tender brown eyes, and dressed in deep mourning.

'Yes, yes, darling!' moaned Mrs. Dripper; 'a terrible pain! a frightful pain! Dear little girl, where do you come from?'

The child was about to reply, when a peremptory voice, a woman's, rang out somewhere near:

'Elsie, naughty girl! come here this minute.'

Mrs. Dripper started up from the bench. The voice startled her into a sudden eagerness to see the owner. She turned sharply round, and saw, standing a few feet off, by another tree, a lady whose back was turned to her, showing a stylish figure well dressed.

The figure and the voice were alike so painfully familiar that impulsively she walked swiftly towards the lady and rudely

peered into her face, as well as she could, for a light gossamer curtained it.

The lady drew herself up proudly, and the gossamer hid the hate and fear that dilated her pupils. Hurriedly catching at the child's hand, she said, in a lower tone:

'Come away; she is mad! You are a naughty girl to speak to all sorts of people.'

The child covered her eyes with a little round arm, as if to cry, and half running, to keep pace with the quick footsteps of her leader, went whimpering away.

Mrs. Dripper stared after them, and, now that privacy was over, decided to leave the park, for it was lively with nurse-maids and their charges, toddling at their skirts or wheeled in perambulators—with girls trundling hoops and boys kite-flying—with workmen, after an early breakfast, shouldering their tools and plodding onward to the day's labour; but the lady and child were gone, and Mrs. Dripper, dazed with the tidings given in a lengthy paragraph, a telegram, relative to Theodore Lockstud's death, tormented with the likeness she had observed in the lady to one with whom she was but too well acquainted, went her way sorely troubled and mentally crying:

'I could have sworn it was her, and that she hadn't gone to Europe at all, only her hair is coal black, and I saw black brows through the veil. She thought I was mad, and no wonder! Only to think of it; the man is dead—killed, and like that! What should happen to her and to me? Who knows? God forgive me! What right have I to blame her or him? None.'

Thus reflecting, Mrs. Dripper returned to the hospital. The lady and child hastened away, unconscious of the stare that followed them, and when little more than a stone's-throw from the park entered a rustic, cosy little cottage. The lady was in no amiable mood, as evinced by her angry look and her action towards the child, who had to submit to renewed scolding, accompanied with a shake by the arm.

'You little imp, if you ever speak to that woman again I'll half kill you!'

'She dot a pain,' blubbered the little girl, with benevolence already active.

'And you will get a pain if you disobey me.'

The lady, who was known at the cottage as Miss Gelden, breakfasted with the child, who sat demure as any prim old-fashioned dame, with luxuriant brown curls tumbling in charming confusion over brow and shoulders, and eyes large and wistful, mostly fixed on her plate, only lifted occasionally to cast timid glances at her companion, of whom she was afraid.

A pretty child, the daughter of a well-to-do miller, recently a widower, and so overcome with grief at his loss that, his health suffering, he was compelled to travel by command of the doctor. Before doing so, however, he was anxious to procure somebody besides his servants with whom to entrust his little girl for the few months of his absence from home. He advertised for a lady to take her in charge, and likewise superintend the house. Out of several applicants he chose Miss Gelden, whose manner and address impressed him favourably, which, taken altogether with the fact of her having long passed girlhood, and showing references which he accepted upon her bare word, gave him full confidence in her capability for the position. Waiting a fortnight, however, after her installation to note how the child and she got on together, he left for a tour of the colonies, well satisfied at having secured Miss Gelden's services, for during that fortnight she was as mild and motherly as it was possible for an utter stranger to be. He had requested her to have strict charge of his little girl, and to take her out daily. But Miss Gelden, for some reasons of her own, objected to going out any time in the day but the early morning, and so respected her employer's wishes by taking Elsie to the park every day but Sunday, between six and seven a.m.

With his departure her sweetness and gentleness took sudden flight, for she often failed in patience with the wilful ways of Elsie, as well as with the defects and shortcomings of the servants, his absence giving a free rein to a vindictive and exacting temperament hitherto curbed.

So little Elsie, cowed into unnatural quietness, sat silent, spooning her porridge, while Miss Gelden ate her breakfast and looked over the morning paper. Then something very unusual happened.

Miss Gelden fell back in her chair; her eyes started, her hand crumbled the paper with spasmodic and involuntary working, her face set like stone.

Elsie stared at her in childish wonder and some alarm.

Miss Gelden next fiercely struck the table gong and waited for a servant to attend.

Susan, the housemaid, hurried to the breakfast parlour.

'See to that child. I am ill!' all but gasped Miss Gelden, who, having disposed of her charge, walked hastily to her own room.

About two hours after, when she was supposed to be lying down, Susan and Elsie were surprised to see her standing before them equipped for walking, and shadowing the pantry-door. Susan, with sleeves rolled up to her elbows, sat within the pantry with Elsie on her knees, while the pantry work stood in abeyance, the breakfast things littered on the shelf, awaiting till the adventures of Jack the Giant-killer were all told to the eager little listener. She quickly put the child from her lap, conscious of her idling, and expecting sharp rebuke. It did not come, for Miss Gelden was too ill or too self-absorbed to note the delinquency.

'I am going to Phillipia by the twelve train,' she announced, 'and can't be back till to-morrow. Can you manage without me?'

'Oh yes, miss,' responded Susan, with an accent joyful enough not to have escaped the lady's notice at any other time. 'Are you better, miss?'

'Yes.' With this curt monosyllable Miss Gelden disappeared from the pantry door, and hurried from the house. When at a safe distance Susan caught hold of the child as a partner in a dance, sang 'Oh, how delightful!' to the waltz measure, and tripped out of the pantry on to the veranda, then all round the house, with her skirts flying wildly and Elsie's thick curls at a horizontal swing, as they whirled and panted and laughed at this most unexpected freedom.

* * * * *

Theodore Lockstud's funeral was a long one, and, saving one exception, had all male followers. The female was not from the mourning coach, and provoked supposition from the many who were not sufficiently depressed by the proceedings to keep their eyes from roving and taking observations.

Jack Lockstud, Captain Pennacove, the clergyman, and the family doctor, were of the mourning coach. They stood at the

grave-edge, Jack with eyes lowered and nostrils slightly quivering with emotion suppressed, the others appropriately solemn. The woman stood some distance off, attired in a dark ulster, and with a brown gossamer drawn in full folds over a low broad-brimmed hat, which set closely down upon her face.

The ceremony over, the cortège slowly wended its way out of the cemetery, and the woman, watching stealthily, advanced as the grounds cleared. She was left alone by the newly-made grave.

Then, with the cry of a wounded, fatally hit creature, she fell on her hands and knees, grovelling at the mound.

'Your heart was not all mine,' she muttered; 'you were a sneak, false to the love you professed, selfish, cold; and you loved that boy you called a hero, the boy who has driven me abroad an outcast, a scapegoat in the wilderness to rid him of the sin I would have fixed on him unknown, who makes me suffer for his heroism! Oh, let him be cursed! I hate him, and I love you—have always loved you when I thought I hated. Fool! idiot! to love you and ask to die for you, if that might have been. Now, what is life but storm, and death but oblivion of all? Sweet oblivion be mine. I must die! I will die—I shall die! For what shall I live?'

And the miserable woman moaned and groaned, and away at Debella, Elsie, light-hearted and joyous with removed restraint, clapped her hands and laughed and prattled, and the boy—the hero—was being borne along by rail from Greycott, and was more than half-way to Etoco—each influenced by this one man's death, though not alike.

Roland the day previous had received a telegram from Captain Pennacove—a vague message, which only told him of a fatal accident to Lockstud, in kindly preparation for the tidings that were to follow, as he anticipated, but which, as it happened, preceded it. The *Greycott Banner* had its 'wire' communication, and, glad of something sensational to swell its columns, to excite the public mind and triple sales for that day, caught at this especial 'wire' and made the most of it, enlarging with graphic force on sickening details. Alec Gower sent a messenger into Greycott every day for letters, messages, and papers, so that Roland's telegram and the *Banner* reached the station at the same time, in the same bag. But the paper being

handed first, Roland, waiting for the sorting of the letters, opened it without any particular eagerness to read until the telegraphic paragraph, headed in startling capitals, caught his eye:

'BANK MANAGER BEHEADED IN A RAILWAY CARRIAGE.'

And then he read on like one in a hideous dream, and with a fancy that the dead man could not be one and the same with the Theodore Lockstud he knew, but must be another of the same name. With dulled senses that rendered him incapable of realizing fully what he read, he mechanically took the telegram from somebody's hand—he knew not whom—and for a time, unconscious that he held it, betook himself to his own quarters to try and think in solitude.

It became known soon that Roland's telegram had brought him some bad news, for he did not appear at the Gowers' ample board that night, and, moreover, refused to eat when called upon, and had shut his door against all intruders.

It was only the following morning that Gower learned what the bad news was.

Prompted by some uneasiness, he called at Roland's room almost at daybreak to make inquiries, and found the door wide open and the bird flown.

With a comical expression of wonderment, he stepped into the room and investigated. There were certain signs of packing and flight: an open trunk with tossed clothing, a litter of papers, some loose trifles, forgotten, perhaps, in hurry, and the bed, not having been occupied, just as it was made the day before.

All this Gower took in at a glance, and upon further search discovered a note, addressed to himself, which was to throw some light on the matter.

'DEAR MR. GOWER,' it said,

'You will pardon me running off like this. The fact is I cannot rest, for I must go to Phillipia. My dearest friends are in trouble; they may need me, and I feel not an hour is to be lost. The bank-manager whose terrible end was announced in yesterday's *Banner* was the father of a family with whom I was as one. You can understand my distress. I am going to take Titania to carry me to Greycott to meet the down-train to

Etoco, and Sprightly will accompany me in order to bring her back. My kindest regards to Mrs. Gower, and thanks for all your kindness to me—hers and yours. All going well, I hope to return.

'Yours truly,
'ROL.'

Gower's comment on this was a whistle in the first place, and then, 'In the name of rum gumption, what does he mean by galloping off when he's half dead with the scare, without an ounce of food in his stomach, and never a wink of sleep the night?' He looked at the bed and its perfectly smooth covering, and whistled again. 'It's unco guid he's got plenty o' siller; he'd never make any for himsel', he's too softie. Noo I must go home and tell the wife.'

So it came to pass that Roland, having grasped the miserable situation at last, felt impelled to rush to Phillipia. He had ousted Sprightly from his couch of skins, and had coaxed him out of a heavy sleep to catch and saddle up the horses with a liberal promise of tobacco on arrival at Greycott by way of indemnity.

Not long after midnight the white man, with his black escort, was travelling towards Greycott at a smart canter, with the clatter of the horse-hoofs beating a second to the quick thud of the heart at his breast.

CHAPTER XI.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

CAPTAIN PENNACOVE broke the news to his niece after much deliberation and when he was steadier nerved.

Mountfu left him to his own resources, with a horror of scenes and tears, especially when it was possible that Una might figure prominently.

But there was no scene at all.

Finding that Una was remaining longer away than usual, the

Captain sought her. She was in her own little study, but not studying, excepting, perhaps, the problem of roguish Love, which will play pranks, and set his victims too often worshipping at the wrong shrine. He knocked at the door.

'Can I come in?' he asked.

The door opened immediately, and Una stood there.

'Do you want me, uncle?'

There was a wistfulness in her eyes, a suspicion of moisture on the lashes.

He noted both with the quick eye of love, but did not stop to inquire the cause, for her expression accorded with his own humour and helped him to make his communication. Had she met him with her usual brightness, the task of telling her anything which should mar it would have been difficult to him. He looked at her very earnestly, and wound an arm about her waist as he drew her back into the study.

'Yes, my girl, I want to speak to you,' he began nervously. 'You're not angry with me, are you?'

'Angry! Why?'

Una smiled faintly. His mood was peculiar, even unnatural, to him; it pained her somehow.

'Because of what I said at lunch, you know.'

'About Mr. Lockstud?'

'Yes, about him.' He placed a chair for her, and sat down quite closely to it, but turned his eyes from her face now to stare at the carpet. 'I thought you might be vexed still; but don't let it—don't let it vex you. I feel different about it now.'

'Do I look vexed at this moment, uncle?' she asked, with a forced and uneasy laugh, meant to cheer him, and trying to forget her interview with Charlie, who was responsible for the sadness she could not hide. 'I was vexed, or rather hurt, because, you know, it was not right to——'

'Yes, yes,' he interrupted, 'I know it wasn't right, and I've come here to tell you so. I'm real sorry, and if I could see the fellow now before me I'd shake his hand hard, Una, and forgive him too, as sure as my name is Timothy Pennacove and I'm an old man.'

He looked so contrite, so crestfallen, as he sat there in dejection, leaning forward on the arms of his chair, seemingly counting the carpet-stitches, and with that gray, pallid tint in his

complexion instead of the ruddiness, that Una's anxiety—always on the alert for him in his advancing years—took the blood from her own cheeks, and she said quickly, with the idea of rousing within him his happier temperament:

'Of course you are sorry, though you never meant half that you said; I knew that quite well. Your tongue belied your heart. Supposing you and I go to Cecillambda this evening, and meet him as if nothing had happened. We will help his wife to do him good.'

'No, not that!'—he floundered helplessly here for a second—'not that! We can't do that!' Next, he suddenly lifted his head and asked: 'You never thought overmuch of him, did you? He wasn't a great friend of yours? I don't think he was, eh?'

'No, uncle; I never could feel a strong liking for such a man as Mr. Lockstud. Yet I always feel a pity for him, something like one feels, perhaps, when a deformed or afflicted creature appeals to the sympathy of his fellows. After all, such a disposition as his is a deformity of its kind. We have no right to mock at it.'

'That's true, I dare say, my girl, and that's why I am sorry. Now, would it distress you very much to hear that he had hurt himself in any way—say, with a fall or a blow, for instance?'

'Uncle!' Una cried, with a quick intuition of evil tidings awakened by his manner, 'you have heard something, you are hiding it, and it concerns this miserable man! Don't think to frighten me! Tell me the truth! Has he broken a limb?'

'Well, yes.'

'Seriously?'

'Very seriously.'

'Oh! And does his wife know? Is he at home?'

'I can't answer either question. I only know he is so bad that to think of what I said to-day makes me miserable, that it would make the worst of us forgiving, and it sets us thinking how any minute we may be called for with all our sins on our heads.'

Una's eyes grew big with fear and pain, her lips compressed as though nerving herself to bear an inevitable stroke of pain without uttering a cry.

'He is dead!' she exclaimed.

The Captain did not contradict this assertion, and she put no further questions for awhile; but her face blanched, and a shudder went through her frame.

Jessie's words that very morning ('Papa came to see us last night. We are all friends now, and I think I feel happier') rushed to her memory to make her heart sink and palpitate. Too shocked just then to ask what had happened, she could only sit silent and dazed.

The Captain took her cold hands within his own tenderly, and said, as if in apology:

'I couldn't help telling you, could I? You'd have heard it sooner or later; it had to be told. But it has frightened you, my girl!'

'Yes, it has. I never thought of death.'

Then she asked for particulars, and he told her only what he thought necessary, sparing revolting details.

Presently she got up from her chair and walked away from him to her writing-table, to stand and gaze stupidly upon her papers scattered there and see nothing for obscured vision. Her uncle likewise rose and followed her. He knew that she was crying, and, too much moved to speak, he simply drew her to his broad bosom, that her head might lie there and be tenderly patted. After this pause, filled in with silent tears, it was characteristic of Una to control herself and stop her weeping.

'Uncle,' she said, 'we must not waste time. I must go to Mrs. Lockstud at once—that is, as soon as you can find out for me how much or how little she knows. Mrs. Calliport is not here, and there is no close friend but me. She must know, also, sooner or later, and Jessie——' She stopped abruptly here, and clasped her hands closely at her breast as one who sees an impending peril to a fellow-creature without having the power of averting it. She struggled for composure, and spoke again: 'Uncle, Jessie must not know just yet. It will kill her—it surely will kill her!'

'Unfortunately the papers will have it to-morrow—perhaps to-night,' he said.

'Oh, she must not know it!—must not hear it! What shall I do?' she cried, filled with alarm for Jessie, and still clasping her hands, which action in itself was a prayer for help to devise some plan which might shield her girl-friend from the shock.

And then, as if her prayer was answered, her face brightened, and a new idea was borne to her. 'I have it!' she said—'I have it! I know Mrs. Brown, the proprietress of the sanatorium where Mrs. Calliport and Jessie are staying. I will send a wire to Mrs. Brown. It is the only thing I can do.'

Owing to this decision on the part of Una, the following despatch was received at the Wondoo sanatorium addressed to 'Mrs. Brown, proprietress,' and signed 'Una Pennacove':

'Mr. Lockstud, the father of the young lady now with you, has met with fatal accident. Oblige by breaking tidings gently to his aunt, Mrs. Calliport, and keeping them and all papers alluding to death out of Miss Lockstud's way, in consideration of her present delicate health.'

A reply came the next day, but not from Mrs. Brown:

'Know terrible truth. Jessie knows nothing. Come up. I must go to Priscilla. Not fit to stay here. I can't hide my misery. Come.'

Una was not slow to obey as soon as she possibly could. Having broken the news and given what comfort she could to the widow, she hastened to the daughter. And thus the scenes all swiftly shift.

Una was at Wondoo, Mrs. Calliport at Cecillambda, and Roland on the ocean bound for Phillipia.

Mrs. Calliport left Jessie under the impression that the country air was too strong for her, and looked so haggard that Jessie had no difficulty in believing this. The shock conveyed in the news which Mrs. Brown undertook to break away from Jessie's hearing, and let fall as lightly as her tact could prompt, yet fell heavily enough.

Aunt Jessie, with a heart that seemed crushed and with the dead weight of misery at her breast, held aloof from her niece that night on the plea of a bad attack of asthma, in which she desired to be left alone. Two days after the death, consigning her niece to Una's care, she parted from her in an agony of pain to meet Priscilla later in the day, and feel as if she had grown ten years older since she had bidden her good-bye but a short time ago.

Her complaint was aggravated, her limbs shook, her voice was weakened, but her will was strong, and her sympathy and help powerful. So she went to her luckless nephew's widow—poor, broken-hearted, dazed little widow, from whom the full truth had been in mercy concealed. She knew her husband was killed on the railway. It was enough. She had not been allowed to see him, in spite of urgent entreaty, and Jack had hidden or destroyed any paper touching upon the death. The frightened children gathered around her, but could not deeply mourn with her, while she wept and moaned and extolled her husband, thinking of his last good-bye and his repentance.

The first great anguish had passed when Aunt Jessie embraced her; she was able to sob out in her arms:

'Oh, Aunt Jessie! he was sorry—so sorry! God was merciful and took him when his repentant tears were scarcely dried, when his heart was soft, and all his intentions good. Something must have told him he was going to die—he was so kind, so good, so affectionate at the last.'

But widowhood was not to be Priscilla's greatest trouble: another followed with no stealthy creeping step to tread upon the other's heel.

There were rumours floating in the city, and who shall say how they arise when a man's financial reputation is at stake or his credit questionable? Rumours of mortgage and loan and bank-account overdrawn, which, quickening the ears of tradesmen concerned, showered on the widow, in the second week only of mourning, a downpour of duns, falling like burning drops of brimstone, and which, in her utter helplessness to combat or to meet, crushed her with shame and distress worse than the pain of her husband's death; for that had its silver lining, with the memory of his remorse and appeal for her pardon and prayers. Here cold, black ruin was stalking mercilessly to wind about and wound her in its meshes. But for timely help, she might have succumbed. She was incapable of acting, and could only be led by firmer minds in the first torrent of her misery and desolation. The firmer minds belonged to Mrs. Calliport and Roland. Cecillambda was done for Priscilla. The governess and servants were dismissed; jewels, plate, and the many costly articles appertaining to the average home of a gentleman of means were left intact, to fall

ultimately, with the house, to the hammer. She readily gave up all, crying afresh to think that with the sacrifice creditors were still wronged. She, and her children—including Louisa, now taken from school, and excepting Roland, Jack, and Jessie—were transplanted to the only asylum ready to land them from the wreck—Mrs. Calliport's home. It was large and commodious, and saving for the novelty of having a house filled with young people, the move did not cause Mrs. Calliport much uneasiness. What would have become of them but for Aunt Jessie, it is difficult to imagine; but we need not trouble to imagine, because she was there, and being there, was determined to befriend.

Una in the meanwhile was with Jessie, guarding her carefully from premature knowledge of the calamity, in the hope that she would soon be strong again and better able to bear it. She set aside her studies, that all her time might be devoted to the invalid, and was always ready to cheer her with loving words and tender counsel, feeling some reward in detecting a faint indication of an easier mind in the brightening of the eye and the contented smile.

Roland had written once to her since his return to Phillipia, but Jessie was kept in ignorance of that return; for, being totally unexpected, she would naturally ask a series of questions to lead to an explanation. And though, as a rule, Una read out his letters unreservedly to Jessie, there was much in this one which she was compelled to skip, and upon this skipping a little matter hung which was to have some significance for Una.

The letter was a great relief to her, but she could not share that relief with Jessie. It had not the ring of dejection which she had anticipated.

'Jack and I,' he wrote, 'are the guests of your good uncle at present. He wearies at your absence, and seeks us because he is tired of his own company, he says; not that either of us can take your place, I say. I am back in Phillipia, and feel I cannot leave it now that those I love so dearly are in such misery, though for all the good I can do—I, who ought to be the mainstay of the family—it would have been just as well to remain at Micola. But your uncle is indeed a friend in need

to Jack and me—such a friend that he ought not to be thwarted in his generous desire, though it does seem that the meeting of it places me in a most peculiar position. I am to fish in the stream where I have been poaching, and from which I fled on the discovery that it was poaching. By a lucky coincidence, the gentleman to whom your uncle has entrusted the management of the Goldwin estate of late years finds that he can better himself elsewhere, and leaves a vacancy in the office, which I am appointed to fill until the estate is wound up. An extra clerk being necessary, Jack has been advised, also by your uncle, to give up the Bank and enter the Goldwin offices; and as his remuneration will be higher, he was willing enough to close with the offer.

'I told you that Washington Larry had forced me to promise the acceptance of a loan from him, because of my announced intention of adopting the law as a profession. I thought it my only chance. Circumstances alter cases, and the loan will not be solicited just yet; for here I can begin at once earning money, and that without exciting the least suspicion that I am other than Roland Goldwin, managing his own estate. The one great drawback is that the millionaire must pose as the miser, for I have vowed to let my salary accumulate, and so go towards furthering my aim of repayment. To do this, only sufficient funds will be drawn to meet bare necessities. Of this resolve I have not told your uncle, but it is the only salve to my conscience.'

He wrote of much more; of the calamity that had befallen the family, of Mrs. Calliport's generosity and affection, of the family's debt to her, of his own undying gratitude; and there was certainly a large portion to be concealed from Jessie.

But Una received a second letter that morning from the Captain himself, which accounted for the coincidence of the exit of the now ex-manager of the Goldwin estate. There is no need to give it *in toto*, but for the benefit of the reader we will extract a paragraph:

'I've got hold of the boy now, and won't let him go. After beating at my brains for a scheme, one has turned up. M——, our manager, is going off. He wanted a bigger screw. He's worth it, and should have it, only I want him to go. He said

he had the offer of a more lucrative appointment, but would prefer to remain where he was, if made worth while. I advised him by all means to take the better appointment, and he has gone, and Rol is at the rudder in his stead; and the rise refused to him shall be the boy's. He is only a boy, and knows nothing of business. Confound him! he's as slippery as an eel, and it's the only way I could get him in tow—a real tow; for I shall have to be at the office again, I know, to lead him on the sly. I shall miss M——, and have to get into harness again for awhile; but that's no odds, and mum is the word.'

Una's eyes sparkled ever so slightly, and her face flushed. The ruse which offered an anchorage to 'the boy' pleased her, though it meant for her uncle the work from which advancing years had suggested retirement.

'But,' she thought, 'uncle will not have the leading for long. There is that in Rol which will perfect him in anything he undertakes.'

How could she help being pleased or showing her pleasure? Jessie noted it—noted the skipping through Roland's letter, but only sighed quietly, and said nothing.

It was while Una was thus picking her way carefully through its pages, that Roland, remembering the packet entrusted to his keeping by Washington Larry, betook himself to John Tackerline's chambers—John Tackerline, the same who had drawn up Jerry Goldwin's last will, but looking more than twenty-one years older, with his iron-gray, mutton-chop whiskers and bald head, with crow's feet at the temples, and corrugated brow, but bodily and intellectually vigorous still, and with a strong but short sight behind his gold-rimmed glasses. He had conceived a strong attachment for the honest lad, who had leaped in his terror of dishonour from a pinnacle of wealth to alight in a bramble-bush, and take the sting of it with a smile. He received him in surprise, not knowing of his return, and greeted him with a loud heartiness.

Though he knew of the link between him and the late Theodore Lockstud, he could scarcely show sorrow or sympathy in this case, or even adopt a becoming melancholy, as he held out his hand in welcome. He was surrounded by busy clerks at that moment; but when Roland requested a private inter-

view, he made a sign for him to follow him, and led the way to his own office, where Roland had so often drawn his own unlimited allowance.

Unconsciously he drew a deep breath at the recollection. Not a word was said by either in reference to the death.

The lawyer, nursing his right leg over his left, and pulling at a whisker, peered through his glasses at his quondam ward, and said kindly :

'Well, my lad, what is it? How can I serve you?'

'I want your advice upon a very knotty point.'

'Yes.'

'Jeremiah Goldwin left his will with you.'

'Exactly.'

'But he wrote something besides the will, which he gave over to Mr. Washington Larry.'

'Oh! Go on.'

'He addressed it to me—I mean, he addressed it to his son, Roland Kovodel Goldwin—to be opened and read by him when he should be about two months over his majority. It is a thick packet, and he gave it into Larry's hands within a week of his death, bidding him keep it, excepting in the event of threatened decease, in which case he was to deposit it with you. Larry, living, has had it in his possession all these years, until recently. Now it is mine, because it worried him. He reasons that I, having taken the place of Roland Goldwin, ought to open and read it. His reasoning is principally based on a dream, which to me savours of the comic, and really is not worth mentioning or repeating. Suffice it to say that I received the packet to please him; that I promised to consult you about it to please him. He is such a friend to me that I am anxious to please him in all things possible. Now, Roland Goldwin is dead, and can it be possible that another man's son has a right to open that packet? I have scruples about it.'

'Has Larry any idea what it contains?'

'Well, to a certain extent he has, for he hints at some secret, some crime, I fear—but thinks there might be more of which he knows nothing.'

The lawyer, caressing a whisker, pondered for a second, and then said :

'Larry may be wrong, he may be right. It is not at all

improbable that the communication may be a sort of codicil—not legally binding, of course—but one submitted to the judgment of the heir, and depending on his good feeling or otherwise towards a certain person, whose conduct led to the peculiar restrictions of his—Jeremiah Goldwin's—will. I allude to his unhappy widow, who was perhaps treated with undue severity by him, and for whom I must entertain some pity after all, whatever others think. Having bound her to a single life or comparative poverty, perhaps it may have been his intention to remove all restraint on the attainment of his son's majority, that being the period for the harshness of the sentence to be mitigated, and she being not by any means an old woman.'

Roland had never viewed the packet in connection with Mrs. Goldwin at all, but now it struck him that the lawyer might be correct in his surmise; yet not that his view of the matter warranted the reading of the private papers of Jeremiah Goldwin.

'Allowing that, and what then,' he asked, 'if she can gain nothing by the written wish, since she has forfeited all claims on the estate?'

'The heirs—who, with me, are pledged, and have been willing to let her escape justice, to condone a crime for *your* sake—perhaps will be desirous to respect the wishes of the testator—who, in a great measure, drove her to a desperate remedy to protect her own interests—and may be also willing now to shirk legalities for *his* sake. And, again, he may wish him—the son—to do many things with regard to certain properties, and appeals to him through his affection, and not the prosy law, so deferring the disclosure of his plans as well as of his past until years of discretion might render that son capable of conceiving the full object of his father's wishes.'

'Then you *do* advise the opening and reading of the contents of the packet?'

'Yes, I do; and if it will soothe your conscience, bring it round here, and you can open it in my presence—put the sin on me.'

'I would like to tell the Captain of it first, and also that Larry should know of your decision.'

'So; very good. I think old Larry is right. Depend upon it, my boy, Jerry asks for something to be done.'

'This is what Larry himself thought. I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Tackerline. You will soothe my conscience.'

'Tut! When you are ready, here am I, in my den with closed doors, and within walls that have no ears.'

A wire sent to Larry that morning produced a return before the day was done:

'Coming down. Defer reading till I am with you.'

To delay the reading was more acceptable to Roland than otherwise, for he had no fancy for prying into Jerry Goldwin's past, and raking up what might be unseemly. He was as little anxious to read his last writing as Lockstud had been about the little book in his aunt's davenport, and yet—blind mortals!—in each there lay the germ of an unlooked-for happiness.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BLEEDING HEART.

Mrs. Brown's sanatorium was a large weather-board cottage, with wings stretching on each side, and rooms grafted on at the rear. It was like an old tree putting forth fresh shoots, and in full blossom at this season.

There were many visitors at this time of year, and the sanatorium was always well patronized.

Una and Jessie occupied apartments in one of the wings. We find them now in a little parlour—not elegantly furnished, but of that primness and lack of graceful ease peculiar as a rule to rooms on hire.

It had a faded square of Kidderminster, and a hard horse-hair suite consisting of couch, armchair, and six straight-backed chairs, all pinafored with the old-fashioned dead-white cotton antimacassars, tied with cheap ribbons. Also an ancient piano, of fair repute in days past—being a Collard—now yellow-keyed, and of that tone described as 'tinny,' and with plaited silk facings, likewise draped with a crochet antimacassar falling like a bridal veil. There were a few oleographs on the flock-papered walls, and a fireplace with its cold iron bars, unattractive, hidden behind a fall of coloured tissue paper, cut into network, and decorated with impossible-looking roses. There was a square maple-framed mirror on the mantleshelf, with a clock that, like the piano, still bore the impress of better days, though enfeebled with age, with one hand gone, and a marble casing; this was flanked right and left with a cheap china vase.

In the centre of the room there was a round table, where the young ladies had their meals privately, but at present covered with a red table-cloth, and dotted with books and a couple of tiny jars holding fresh-cut flowers, with Una's desk opened and spread with paper and blotting-pad.

Opposite the fireplace was the one window of the room, curtained with cretonne hangings, now well pulled back that the air might freely play into the room, and that the occupants might, if they pleased, have full view of a rustic garden, with a scattering of fruit-trees, and beds of flowers of divers colours and species—the whole enclosed with a fence, completely covered with a hedge of vines and blackberries, which shut out the street or roadway.

Beyond the road there stretched a wide expanse of green country and distant hills, misty with heat, and of the hue once popularly known as elephant's breath, in reality the breath of summer.

They could also see a row of gabled cottages, straggling homesteads, and a church with its spire blinking under the morning sunshine as it pointed straight to a cloud-flecked sky.

Out on the road three or four chubby, bare-footed, brown-legged children were busily engaged in the manipulation of earth-pies; their chatter and merriment floated through the window, their hands were wrist-deep in mud, and stained with blackberry juice, the result of depredations on the hedge. Saving for the little stir in the air they made, the rumbling by of a cart fruit-laden, or the jog-trot of a Chinaman with his nimble, jerky, shuffling locomotion under his pole, bearing a basket at each end freighted with vegetables, there was no traffic at this particular hour of the day.

Jessie was reclining on the horse-hair couch, set by the window, her eyes wistfully gazing on the scene without, while

Una sat near by at the table and over her desk. She had just finished reading aloud certain portions of Roland's last letter.

Any newspaper containing the least reference to Lockstud's death had been kept out of Jessie's reach and sight. This did not entail very much caution on Una's part, because Jessie was not over-eager to read for herself, but liked to be read to.

She was too tired to hold book or paper, and too listless to prospect over any paper for news likely to interest her. Una did the prospecting, and culled here and there from patches of clover—in type—that is, what she thought clover for Jessie's literary palate. Una humoured her in all things—humoured her in reading aloud part of this letter of Roland's, which was so full of the forbidden subject for Jessie's ears, that necessarily she had to be cautious and steer clear of the shoals it presented.

Jessie, as it has been before hinted, wondered that Una stopped short sometimes with a hurried, 'Oh, that won't interest you,' and so omitted several lines. She was more observant lately; but she made no remark, and if her eyes were swimming at the conclusion, Una thought it was with the great trouble revived, for the mere mention of Roland's name always brought tears to this unhappy sister's eyes.

'To-day the letter was about to be answered, and Jessie, for reasons of her own, had requested a second reading. Una had given it, but with exactly the same omissions, and with Jessie's eyes fixed upon her, Jessie's ears quickened and observation sharpened.

The second reading over, Una turned to write, and Jessie turned her face to the window.

This time her tears received some fresh impetus from a new tributary swelling the stream; but she made no moan, and tried to smile through the shower.

Una's pen flew swiftly over the paper. The children's voices were raised in discussion over the pie distribution; a baby civil war was imminent, and Middie, listening, smiled feebly, and wished she could be a little child again with only a child's woes. Next the church clock struck, and she counted eleven bell-like strokes, and lifted her eyes to the spire, which, like a

prophetic finger for her, pointed to brighter realms. With an utter absence of vitality, her soul went up in silent prayer for another life—a life of peace; a prayer breathed in a sigh, deep-drawn and audible enough to immediately rouse the writer from her work and smite her with compunction.

'Mid'—Una in a second was at the couch, and kneeling by it on a hassock, with her arms about the sick girl—'Mid, I am selfish to leave you to yourself so, when you can do nothing but think. I will defer my writing till you sleep, and read to you now. Shall I?'

Middie turned and caught Una's face between her two slender brown hands.

'You selfish!' she cried—'*you!* No, dear; *I* am selfish, I am wicked. Oh, Una, Una! life is so hard, and I pray to die—I want to die!'

'Mid, this is wrong. You must not say so. You may be happy yet.' Una took the little hands from her face and held them against her breast. 'You are so young.'

'Never happy here,' answered Jessie. 'Only perhaps a glimpse of happiness here and there, but so much misery between. One glimpse came to me when papa took me in his arms and kissed me so affectionately, just as your uncle would kiss you; when I felt that I could forgive him because he was so sincerely sorry—was not so hardened as I feared; when his tears fell on my cheek and his hands caressed me and trembled so. I've heard you say sometimes that we all have a good and a bad angel by us; it was the good angel, then, that looked out of his eyes that night, Una, and it made me happy. If God took him to-morrow, Una, I think He would forgive him much because he was so sorry.'

Una could not answer; she could only look silently upward into Jessie's face, with fingers still fastened and pressing harder on the hands she held.

'I once thought,' continued Middie, 'that I could never, never forgive him. Isn't that dreadful and wicked?'

'You do forgive him now?' murmured Una, thinking the present hiding of his death was dreadful too, if not wicked.

'Oh yes, yes! And when I die he will come to my grave, and the good angel will look out of his eyes again, and I shall ask God to let it stay by him always—always.'

'Oh, stop—stop, Mid! I can't bear to hear you talk of death as if you were an old woman instead of a bright girl.'

'Why?' Jessie looked affectionately into the upturned anxious face of her dear friend. 'Why, when, if I try to be good, I shall be the happier for dying? Tell me, Una—you are good, and so clever too—do you think death terrible?'

'No; decidedly not terrible. It is the one thing certain in this world. But it is terrible to prematurely desire it. It must come to us all sooner or later, and, God sending it, it must be a blessing, a wise ordinance, not a terrible one. If we believe in His goodness as we should, we must accept death as a mercy; but we should not court or invite it—especially not in our youth, dear, when there may be so much waiting for us on earth to do towards making others happy, when our love and our presence may be a comfort to those surrounding us, when we can go on doing good, perhaps, as the years grow, and better fit ourselves for death when it shall be sent to us. And you, Mid, are so dear, so very dear to us all.'

Jessie sighed again, and looked thoughtful.

'You say that, just because you love me, not that I am useful in any way. But I want to be good, for I feel I shall be sent for soon. Do people become angels as soon as they die, I wonder? Do they have gauzy wings and smiling faces? And are they always happy? Oh, tell me, Una!'

In her firm reliance on her friend's profundity, she now searched her face as if she were a spirit of another world and could answer her fully and satisfactorily.

'How can I answer you, Middie—I more than another?' said Una, rising from her knees to sit on the edge of the couch and bend nearer to this eager questioner. 'If we are called we should be ready; then the soul shall find wings and the angel shall be developed. How or in what shape, who can tell? The pictures given us are but of man's conception, beautiful ethereal forms created by his ideality, with their wings and seraphic countenances and haloed heads. Not one can tell us how we shall appear, or of the mystery that follows the dissolution of soul and body.'

Jessie slightly knit her brows in an effort to think and discuss a question seldom forcibly presented to the mind until calamity befalls or bodily prostration gives the soul eager desire

to soar to regions unknown. Death to the life-loving is mostly remote; health and happiness push the mere thought of it to the rear; it is a thing to be shut away, as it had been for Jessie in the days of her sunshine and gladness. Now she faced it as a friend, and longed to better understand its secret, its promised sublimity. So, with a puckered brow, she asked:

'And yet why are there people who think it the end of all? I have heard gentlemen talking to papa make so light of sacred things. I have sometimes believed them right, knowing them to be highly educated, and of course so much cleverer than I. One said death was "total extinction." It can't be so, can it? I shouldn't like to die out soul and body altogether.'

'The gentleman who spoke so, Mid, was of those men who would take the bread from us and substitute stones—I mean, for the faith that nourishes the soul he would give us the sceptic's windy creed.'

'They think, I suppose,' said Jessie, wise in her simplicity, 'that, with all their learning, they must know all about it, and so think to force their superior knowledge on others. Perhaps they say to themselves, "There can be nothing to know, else *we* should know all about it."'

'Perhaps they do. But it seems to me that the mystery following death is the great and sure sign of the wonderful hereafter. We walk blindly every day, not knowing what shall be even in the very next hour. God gives us memory; He permits our minds to treasure up the records of a century, if we live so long. We may revel in the past, it is all ours; but the future is His. Science here is as powerless as a new-born baby; it is baffled. And this ignorance of ours, this inability to pierce for light to be let in on what remains so dark, asserts our utter dependence on God's mercy and love, inspires that sweet trust which is called faith, the faith that whispers consolation in trial, that buoys us on the flood of misfortune, the childlike trust that shall carry us to eternal peace. This is all I can tell you, Middie. Have faith, and pray to live that you may lead a useful, happy life before you ask to die.'

Una's voice fell low and trembling at the last, and she bent closer still, letting her lips touch Jessie's forehead; while Jessie, with her head now on Una's shoulder and her face turned to Una's, said:

'I have faith; more now since you have spoken, more in myself too, because I don't feel so wicked as I did. I have been wicked—don't smile at me—wicked and foolish, but have prayed—oh, so hard!—to be better; wicked about papa, and bitter, cross, and selfish.'

Una was about to refute this latter statement gently, when her mouth was covered for a moment with the uplifting of a hand.

'Don't speak yet, Una, please. Let me tell you everything. Yes, I *have* been selfish. You have read me the few letters you have received from Rol from Knutsford—read me tender messages to myself, and advice, and all his sayings and doings at Micola, and yet the reading has not given me pure pleasure. I have watched you reading, and somehow I see things now as I never saw them before. And this last letter brought a happy light into your eyes. Oh, I saw it! I saw it!—and know what it means. I judged you all wrong some few months ago, and now, judging right, I have been vexed, irritated with a new feeling—a vile feeling—that ought not to exist. Oh, Una, I have been jealous of *you*, envious, wicked, selfish! It tortured my wicked heart that you could think of him exactly as you pleased while for me it was sin. I have read of men receiving a stab with the sword-blade up to the hilt in the flesh, which, when once drawn away, means bleeding to death. Well, that sort of blade seemed in my heart; but, praying hard to be good, I have drawn it away slowly and surely. The effort was great, but, dear, it is done—it is over; but the wound bleeds, yet without pain. I shall bleed to death, for I can't stop it. And if I die, what matter? For now that I am good, God will have pity on me and take me.'

'Middie! Middie!' Una cried hysterically, as she fairly embraced the girl as dear to her as any sister could be, and for whose pain her own heart was bleeding.

Jessie did not cry; her pretty, soft brown eyes, sunken as they were, rested with trust and love on Una's face; but they were dry, and a smile played about her mouth, for her confession had lightened her burden, and she was already experiencing the beginning of a peace that was to be the end. Una was silent, and Jessie, after a pause, went on:

'You never gave me your full confidence. I once thought you had none to give, but was misled. You were so brave.

I thought you wedded to your books just because you said you were, and I know you said it for my sake; you can't deny it—you are too truthful. You can't deny it—not to me, dear—not to the dying. I shall not breathe it to a soul. Tell me, do I see clear?'

Here a hand went up again to rest lovingly on Una's neck. Una's face was hidden, her cheek pressed one of Jessie's, but as yet she could not speak.

'Ah, dear, you *can't* deny it, I know it,' Jessie whispered softly. 'Answer me outright now. Charlie Mountfu loves you. Has he told you so?'

'Yes'—very lowly.

'And you refused him, though you like him?'

'Yes.'

'Not because you are wedded to your books, but because you love elsewhere. You love dear old Rol, and oh, Una, look up! Remember, the blade is out of my heart now. I am a good girl, really, and, knowing that you love each other, I shall die happy.'

Una could not look up just then.

'Well, don't speak; your silence answers me,' said Jessie. 'Rol never loved me as he loves you, or as I loved him. See how I get at the truth. If he had loved me more than as a sister, his heart would have been broken too. He would have found no pleasure in Knutsford, or in writing to you as he has done. Thank God, he has been spared the agony that was mine! He will be happy again. And he has said things in that last letter to you which you would not read to save me pain. He has perhaps declared his love. See, Una, how clever I am!'

Una raised her head at last, and her face was so full of alarm that Jessie said quickly:

'Don't look so. What have I said to frighten you?'

That Jessie should have wormed out the truth from her in reference to her real sentiment for Roland was embarrassing, but that she should place such a construction on her omission of various passages in his letter was positively painful.

'Mid, you are mistaken,' she began, rising from the couch, and clasping her hands as if in appeal. 'There is not one word of love in that letter. He does not know—does not think of love now.'

Jessie raised herself feebly, half sitting up, and she said seriously:

'Because you blinded him as you did me. My eyes are wide open—very wide open now. You can't blind me again. He must know some day what I know. He shall.'

Una went down on her knees for the second time; she put her arms protectingly about the invalid, and said with pardonable emotion:

'Don't let us speak of this again, Mid. Rol does not think of love or marrying now. You wrong him. He is too full of your trouble and compassion for you. If you would make us both happy, get rid of this morbid fancy of coming death. You are so young—so precious to us all!'

Jessie, returning the caress, said:

'I will try, Una; but I can't help it, because I'm always tired, perhaps. But what could it have been in the letter which you would not read to me? All that interests you about him must interest me. Every line is a pleasure.'

'I will tell you some day. It was partly business matters, which would only worry you; and you must not be worried, if I can help it.'

'About his own affairs? Poor fellow! But tell him, Una, money can't buy a noble mind or a true heart, and that he is rich. You know how to put it. I can't find words; I am not clever. And, Una, why hasn't mamma written to me yet? I've not had a line even from Aunt Jessie. Do you think she can be ill and they won't tell me? It makes me anxious, you know.'

'I will write and ask,' said Una, quick to pacify her.

'How good you are to me!' said Jessie. 'What should I do without you? I'd hate to have a stranger about me. Now, Una, I really believe I could sleep. I feel easier; and you go on writing your letter.'

'If you feel like sleeping, I will.'

Jessie closed her eyes at once and lay back on her cushion to endorse the statement of her sleepiness; and Una, looking on, thought she appeared sweet and ethereal enough to represent the man-conceived angel, but with wings folded and unseen.

She went back to her desk and sat there, not writing, but with a host of thoughts crowding in her brain, and a whirl of emotion

at her heart. Jessie's pathetic longing for death, and the perception that had penetrated deception, startled and alarmed her. With an elbow resting on the desk, and a cheek pressed against an open palm, supporting her head, slightly tilted, she sat lost in reflection. It was quite true that Roland had not written one word of love, and she knew him well enough to be sure that, having once given him to understand she could not feel for him more than a sister's affection, he would abide by what she had said, and never appeal a second time, guided by the conviction that she must know her own mind, and could not say one thing while meaning another.

'And if I had not told him to go to Jessie that afternoon,' she mused, 'and give her his love, we might have been betrothed—he and I. She would have pined less then than now, and no disclosure would have arisen to shatter his position, and to wreak vengeance on a guilty woman. Crime would have thrived exultant, and the innocent would be spared the knowledge of years of theft. I unwittingly sowed the seed from which the bramble has sprung so rapidly to do its work. But for me, Mrs. Dripper would have held her tongue; but for me, Rol would still be a millionaire. Was it my will, or an impelled obedience to some higher law, which gave me strength to suffer for what I considered the right, and so forge the chain to drag down the evil and exalt the good?'

'Have you finished, Una?'

Jessie had dozed scarcely ten minutes, and opened her eyes to see Una in that attitude of meditation and staring vacantly at her. Una awoke from her reverie.

'I have not begun yet. You have scarcely slept at all.'

'Haven't I? I thought it was near lunch-time. But never mind me; go on and write, and please ask Rol something for me—will you?'

'Yes, of course I will. What is it?'

'Well, ask him, if I send for him ever, wishing badly to see him, you know, whether he will come as fast as steam can bring him.'

'I will,' replied Una, trying to speak lightly; 'and I will tell him you are trying to be happy, and we shall soon have our merry Mid back again.'

'I shall be happy. I am happy now—tell him that; but

I shall be happier when I may see him again, if only just once.'

'You shall see him many times, dear, and be rid of your present ideas,' predicted Una.

To this Jessie said nothing, but closed her eyes for the second time, implying she wished for another doze. Seeing this, Una at last set to work and wrote rapidly.

'Let me tell poor Middie,' she said to Roland, 'that you have returned to Phillipia on business. It will be the truth; and the fact of knowing you are so near—while this presentiment of early death so haunts her—will relieve her mind and add to her happiness. I am in daily dread of her father's death being known to her, for at present she is as little able to bear the shock as ever. She is very weak, and this accounts for the morbid fancy of which I have written, and I certainly think she needs a doctor. Can't you reason with Aunt Jessie about this and overcome her opposition? Actually Dr. Blatt is recruiting his health here and taking a holiday; but I believe he would make a concession in Jessie's favour, if I ask him. You know he is clever. I am so anxious about her. Do try and win Aunt Jessie's consent.'

Here Una, with a few dashes of her pen, all unconsciously helped to forge another link in the chain of coming events.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HANGING SWORD GIVES WAY BEFORE FRANK LANNAGER.

ROLAND, having received and read this last letter of Una's, was sorely troubled. Seeking an opportunity as soon as possible to speak of it to Mrs. Calliport without adding to Mrs. Lockstud's present misery, he took care to have a private interview.

'There it is,' he said, as he folded the letter carefully and slipped it back in his breast-pocket, after having acquainted her with the gist of its contents. 'Mid is not getting stronger for the Wondoo atmosphere. It is time for a doctor to be called.'

'To torment her with questions,' argued Aunt Jessie.

'Much can be told him that need not implicate the family, and much that, as a gentleman, he may be trusted with. Dr. Blatt is a gentleman,' reasoned Roland.

'Una is too indulgent, too sympathetic, too nervous, I fear, to have the care of a girl who only needs rousing by a little wholesome firmness. You can't expect her to be benefited all in a hurry. We all think we are going to die when we can't get strong quickly, and Jessie thinks so, and is allowed to brood, perhaps. If it were not for her mother needing me as she does, I would go to Wondoo again and send Una back to her uncle. She never talked about dying to me. Her heart is well-nigh broken, and her body gives way in natural sympathy, but it is not so frail as to give way altogether.'

Aunt Jessie's eyes had a certain fear in them, for all her expressed incredulity about her niece's serious condition, and her fingers began to dovetail nervously on her lap.

'For all that, I really think a doctor should see her.'

'To saturate her with noxious physic,' Aunt Jessie replied with an obstinate humour peculiar to her when she felt her stand weakest. 'She will get better without one, if Una gives her regularly the homeopathic doses I instructed her to give. She will tide over it.'

'And if she should not,' urged Roland, with tears unshed and glistening—'if she should not, how shall we comfort ourselves, or how shall we reproach ourselves for not seeking that which offers the chance of reliable help? I can't understand your opposition, when in all other things you are so just and so reasonable.'

'My opposition is based upon reason, my prejudice against the whole fraternity. In desperate cases the patient more often than not has to bear the brunt of the doctors' experiments, and they end the attack with a hit or a miss. In surgery I give them best, but unfortunately they can't heal a broken heart, a mental affliction, and our Jessie is suffering so. She wants time; nature and the simple remedies of my own will be her best physic. You and Una are impatient and imprudent.'

Mrs. Calliport's breath came thicker and faster. She would not admit that Jessie might be worse, yet she was as troubled as Roland himself.

'Then,' said Roland, 'in this matter, you must pardon me if I take the responsibility of the "hit or miss" on my own shoulders, and write to Una to secure Dr. Blatt's services.'

Mrs. Calliport sat up straight in her armchair and spoke severely:

'You are wrong; fifty doctors will do her no good. Do you suppose for a moment that I should not have called in a dozen, if I thought one out of the lot could restore her to what she once was? She will get better; and if she should not it will not be for lack of the doctor. Theo also said she must have a doctor, and I would not yield.'

'Yield to me, aunt,' Roland pleaded. 'We owe you so much; you have been our good angel; it hurts me to do one thing without your sanction. Consent to this proposal of mine, and let Dr. Blatt be called.'

He took one of her hands and gallantly, nay, affectionately, pressed it to his lips. Mrs. Calliport was mollified.

'I don't believe,' she began, with wheezing breath and a catch in her voice—'I won't believe the dear child can be getting worse, and yet if anything happens to her it will break my heart, too!' And here, fairly overcome, she gave way to a flood of tears, and added brokenly: 'Have your way, have your way.'

Roland kissed her hand again in silence. He loved and venerated the old lady, of whom he spoke to Una as the 'dear fairy godmother of the Lockstud family,' and to act contrary to her wishes, as he would have to do had she not conceded, would have savoured of ingratitude. Recovering herself, she detained him as he rose to leave her and hurry to write to Una of his success. 'Stay, my dear; don't go yet, now you have got all you came for. I want to talk to you of something else while we are quite alone. I want to tell you something that may comfort you—give you a grain of comfort, perhaps.' She hesitated, looked fondly at him, and then mysteriously added: 'The name you are compelled to retain is not entirely false.'

'I don't understand,' Roland said, looking puzzled.

'No; how should you? You will directly, though. I've been wanting to tell you this ever so long, but never got the chance, for I don't wish Priscilla to know of it. The child who

died and was buried as Cecil Lockstud was'—she let her voice fall to a whisper—'Roland Kovodel Goldwin.'

'Yes; well?'

'Well, when I heard his second name was Kovodel, it startled me rather, for it is not a common name. Now, strange to say, you are neither a Lockstud nor Goldwin, but you *are* a Kovodel.'

Roland, of course, had to rise and walk up and down the room, for this sudden communication at once agitated him.

'You surprise me!' he said.

'Naturally. But it is true. Theo's mother was a Mrs. Kovodel. Circumstances compelled her to adopt the name of Lockstud. Now do you understand? You are in reality Cecil Kovodel.'

'Remarkable!' ejaculated Roland, now standing still, with his arms across his chest and his eyes on his aunt. 'Tell me why. Was there a family dishonour, then?'

'Don't be impatient; you shall read for yourself.'

'Read?'

'Yes, read. There is a little book in my davenport which will explain everything. The night before poor Theo died I told him of this book, because I was going on a journey, it seemed to me, and, being an old woman, did not know how it might affect me. I remember distinctly saying to him, "Who knows what a day may bring forth?" never thinking of any fatality for him, and I meant him to read it after my death. Well, you see, he never read it, and died in ignorance of his true name, and I only speak of it now to you in sacred confidence, because I know how sensitive you are about retaining a false one. You are really entitled to the one of Kovodel, and it may be soothing to you.'

'It is. I shall respect your confidence,' Roland replied gratefully, 'and I am anxious to read the book.'

'You shall read it and then burn it,' said Aunt Jessie; 'for it can be of no further use, and the truth need never be known. Do you see the coincidence? Theo never knew his real name, yet by his own act he unconsciously forced his son to bear it.'

'It *is* remarkable!' repeated Roland; 'and a most striking coincidence.'

So Roland went back to Unaville with a little book in his hand—a manuscript book, old, wrinkled, and faded in leaf and binding, and filled with a woman's angular writing.

There was another coincidence of which he had not spoken to Mrs. Calliport. It was that he should be made the depositary of two distinct disclosures touching the dead, who were as naught to him, and whom he had never seen, and who, being respectively the old man Jerry Goldwin and the parents of Theodore Lockstud, could not possibly have anything in common with each other.

He was prepared to read of some family backsliding hidden beneath an assumed name. It struck him then that a taint had perhaps run in the blood, and communicated itself to the father, whose memory he could not cherish.

It was his own grandmother's diary he held, and so eager was he to know why he was a Kovodel that he read it through that same night before he went to sleep. He read it from beginning to end, and handled the book reverently as something sanctified—so sanctified that he would not burn it, but put it carefully away in his desk side by side with the packet received from Larry.

Owing to the perusal he could not frame a letter to Una that night, and therefore wired the next morning to send at once for Dr. Blatt.

On receipt of the telegram Una, thinking it best to see the doctor herself first, and personally request his attendance, hurried to the private cottage secured for a temporary residence by him, and made a fateful move.

For the first time since her misfortune Jessie was left alone. Pillowed and shawled she lay on the hard horsehair sofa, staring through the window and up at the sky, at the church and the mountains beyond, with a far-off, melancholy gaze. Una had put into her hand an interesting periodical, illustrated, but she was evidently not attracted by it, for it had fallen on the floor unheeded.

How could she read? She knew why Una was away, because she had told her it was the wish of all at home that Dr. Blatt might be asked to prescribe for her, since she was not getting better quickly enough to please them.

But here Una had perforce resorted to but half a truth,

fearing her charge was decidedly getting worse, for all indications of getting better were painfully remote.

Never attempting to oppose the wishes of her family, Jessie submitted to receiving Dr. Blatt, but the idea of talking to him of her ailments was repulsive. Moreover, like Mrs. Calliport, she had no faith in his medicines restoring health to her; and now a sense of loneliness crept about her like a cloud, and blinding tears shut out mountain and church.

Listless and so weary, she sank back amongst her cushions, longing for Una's return. Had she continued looking through the window, she would have seen a familiar figure at the sanatorium gates, about to enter.

Presently Mrs. Brown peeped in at the door, creaking it on its hinges. Jessie looked towards it quickly. It was a relief to see somebody, and the comely buxom proprietress was pleasant to look upon in her clean cotton dress and smart morning cap, her crinkly bands of hair tucked partly beneath, and her clear complexion with the polish of a china doll.

She entered softly, and went up to the sofa.

'I thought you might be asleep, miss,' she began. 'Did I disturb you?'

'Not at all, Mrs. Brown.'

'Your friend, Miss Pennacove, asked me to step in to you sometimes while she was gone, to see if you required anything, or were lonely at all. But you won't be lonely now, for there's a gentleman come to see you.'

Here one of Mrs. Brown's eyes went through an attempt at a wink, meant to imply that she understood the young lady was about to receive a visitor in whom she must take more than an ordinary interest.

Jessie, unheeding the lid contortion, and full of nervous dread at seeing a stranger, cried out:

'Is it the doctor so soon, and Una not here?'

'Dear me, no, Miss Lockstud; it is a *young* man.'

'Who is it?' asked Jessie querulously.

'Why, to be sure, now, here's his card in my pocket all the time. Shall I show him in?'

Jessie took the card gingerly and to her dismay read, '*Mr. Frank Lannager, Junr.*' A flush dyed her face and brow, and just as suddenly receded again, as if it had made a mistake in

painting the hollow white cheeks in painful mimicry of health, and so had hastily retreated.

'Oh, why had Una left her? She would be here but for that horrid doctor,' she told herself. 'Shall I refuse to see Mr. Lannager, when he has taken the trouble to call? That would be wrong and discourteous. How does he happen to be at Wondoo?'

Mrs. Brown, noting the flush and the tremor and the imminent destruction of the card within the thin shaking fingers, meaningly smiled, and never waited for Jessie's reply, but bustled off to Mr. Lannager, Junr., and was leading him to the little parlour before Jessie's mental debate had been decided for or against his reception.

So he entered and advanced to her, hat and stick in hand; and she, half shrinking, tried to look pleased, giving a faint smile which terminated with that droop of the lip which heralds so often the cry of a child.

'I am sorry to see you so unwell,' he said, holding her hand. 'My sisters are anxious about you.'

He was more than sorry—he was shocked—to see how much she had suffered. He was full of sympathy as he was of love for her, and had determined to visit Wondoo that he might see her and tell her so. His parents were not in the secret of this movement; his sisters were. With the former he had adopted subterfuge, saying he felt in need of a change, and that he would take a short 'spell' somewhere; but the latter knew where the 'spell' was centred. He had arrived the night previous, and now considered the Fates propitious, as he could meet Jessie alone.

'I have not been well,' she answered; 'and it is kind of you to come and see me. Una will be here presently; sit down.'

Obeying, he drew a chair near to the sofa, and, setting his hat close by, he laid his cane across his knees, and began to remove his gloves. He was so thoroughly surprised and pained at her fragile appearance that for a time presence of mind deserted him, and he felt incapable of finding words, until she asked how his sisters were, and gave him something to say.

'They are quite well, thank you,' he replied. 'I wish you were as well and strong. You have had a long bout, haven't you?'

'Yes,' said Jessie. Then, anxious to glide from the subject of her illness, she asked: 'When did you come to Wondoo?'

'Last night. I felt seedy, too, and wanted a breath of country air.'

He began to work his cane nervously on his knees like a rolling-pin over the dough, and the apple in his throat made a slight spasmodic movement as if resisting an effort to swallow it. He was trying to hide his grief, but words meant to comfort her stuck at the root of his tongue somehow; and she, thinking he was really suffering, said:

'You must be leading too sedentary a life at your desk.'

'No, I don't think it is altogether that; perhaps, like yourself, I may have mental sickness. Perhaps,' he went on with another gulp at the apple, 'your trouble may be mine. Indeed, it is your trouble that brings me here now to offer condolence, and to cheer you if you will allow me.'

His eyes watered, and he gazed at her mournfully through the sympathetic mist, noting for the first time that she wore a maroon robe of some soft clinging material, with a fall of creamy lace from throat to hem, and at her wrists, but no sign of mourning anywhere. Yet he scarcely drew any inference from the observation, for he did not think it possible that she could be still in ignorance of her father's death, and the family monetary difficulties. His reference to her trouble made her heart seem to stand still, and filled her face with consternation.

'Surely,' she inwardly cried, 'he has not heard anything of this horrible secret of Rol's? What trouble can he mean?'

Misconstruing the agitation he saw, he went on quickly:

'Forgive me if I harass you; but do hear me out. I have come to tell you that I love you—have loved you a long time, and must go on loving you through weal or woe.'

Jessie crouched and hid her face, crying out in her heart:

'Oh, Una! Una! Come home and stop this!'

'Oh, believe me, my dear Miss Lockstud!' he continued, blundering and blind, yet getting bolder after the first plunge, and striking out for deeper water—dangerous depths into which Jessie was to be dragged with him, 'I love you all the more for the affliction and the calamity which have come to you. My father is too fond of me to balk me in any desire, and he is fond of you, I think, knowing how dear you are to me. He

will willingly take the place of your own poor father, so suddenly taken from you. Never mind the loss of wealth—the loss of dowry. I have enough for both. It will be all the greater joy to take you for yourself alone, that you may know I love you for your own sweet self. I am almost glad you have lost your dowry, that I may be able to save you from missing it, and be the friend you need if you will only let me.' His words came freer with his earnestness, but he avoided looking at Jessie for fear of losing himself in nervousness, and kept his eyes on the faded Kidderminster, making imaginary figures there with the point of his cane. When at last he ventured to turn his head towards her again, it was to see her sitting upright, and with an aspect of threatened stupefaction, which made him exclaim: 'Miss Lockstud—Jessie, what have I said? Nothing to alarm you, surely; I mean all I have said.'

'What are you saying? I don't know,' she cried, as she put a hand to her left side as if to still a pain. 'Are you mad, or am I?'

'Mad!' he echoed. 'Oh, only mad for love of you, Jessie.' He was so eager, so vehement in his suit, that he went down on his knees before her, and caught up the hand that lay idly on a cushion. 'I will be everything to you. You need not mourn your father so deeply. Your mother shall not be forgotten; she shall be solaced in her widowhood and poverty.'

Jessie pulled her hand from his, and cowered again with both hands covering her face, and a low wail of suppressed agony escaped her purpling lips.

'Go away—go away!' she gasped.

At that moment footsteps were heard in the hall that led to the little parlour, and Frank simultaneously rose from his knees in alarm and confusion as Una appeared at the door accompanied by an elderly gentleman, bland of countenance and tall of stature.

'Mr. Lannager!' said Una in surprise, and next, when she saw Jessie's attitude, 'what is the matter?'

'I don't know,' Frank answered, not knowing, indeed, but white with fear. 'We were speaking—I—I—was speaking to Miss Lockstud; that is all I can tell you.'

He spoke and looked like a culprit, and the elderly gentleman gravely addressed him:

'The young lady needs my services, sir; perhaps you had better leave her to me.'

Frank, now recognising Dr. Blatt, caught up his hat, and, bowing to Una as he passed her, hurriedly walked out of the room. But he had no intention of leaving the house until he could see the doctor, for whose departure he lingered, and whom, after a weary waiting, he waylaid at the sanatorium gate with:

'Pardon me, may I have a word with you, Dr. Blatt?'

'At your service,' said Dr. Blatt. 'You are Mr. Frank Lannager, are you not?'

'Yes,' answered Frank impatiently, as if his name were of no consequence whatever, and then with feverish haste: 'Tell me, what ails Miss Lockstud? I—I am no idle questioner, but a friend of the family.'

Dr. Blatt replied interrogatively:

'And a particular friend of the young lady, I presume?'

This was said with no undercurrent of badinage, but with an emphasis on the word 'particular' which conveyed his real meaning.

'Dr. Blatt, I meet you to-day for the first time, but I have heard of you, and know you to be a gentleman. When I confide to you that my happiness or misery must depend upon your answer to my question, you will understand that I have answered yours.'

The doctor stroked a silvery beard, and maintained silence for a few seconds, while he turned to walk up and down the footpath with Frank at his side and his phaeton waiting his pleasure at the curb.

The good doctor was perplexed, and scarcely could decide how much he might tell this young man. He had learned during his interview with Una Pennacove that Miss Lockstud was the victim of a mistaken passion for one whom she could not possibly marry; that the trouble of it had undermined her health; that her friends were anxious about her; that they wished him to see her, if he would make an exception in their favour and offer his services within the period he had prescribed for himself for rest from professional duties. Knowing the Lockstuds, he was willing to make an exception, and had received Miss Pennacove with the utmost courtesy, and, more-

over, had ordered his phaeton at once to proceed to the sanatorium, and offered a seat therein to Una, who accepted it gratefully as the quicker way of returning to her charge. On the road she took care to impress upon him that her friend was still in ignorance of her father's death and the ruin of his family's prospects, as she was not considered to be in a condition fit to combat with the tidings. When he saw the patient he was somewhat puzzled to account for the state of mind apparent, but not for long.

The girl's wail of anguish and rush of questions, as soon as Miss Pennacove bent over her, told him much. For a time she was unconscious of the doctor's presence, and he knew that by the advent of a young gentleman—Frank Lannager by name—there had arisen mischief irreparable; knew that he had unwittingly tipped his would-be Cupid's arrow with a quick poison; and now, with the sincere passion and misery working in his face, also knew that the poor girl was very dear to him. So the good doctor was really perplexed, walking slowly with his hand on his beard, benevolence at his heart, and a restless, impatient lover at his side waiting to be answered.

'She has had great trouble,' he said at length, slowly and deliberately, 'and it has affected the action of the heart. Under the constant strain of mental pain, the heart, being the most irritable and susceptible of organs, is bound to sympathize; and sometimes, where there exists a natural weakness of that organ—though to be combated by attention to certain rules—it cannot contend against overwhelming shocks: such a shock as she has had, for instance, may lead to painful results.'

'Good heavens! do you mean—you can't mean——'

'I mean she is seriously ill; but it is just possible she may recover.'

Frank turned ghastly white, and his knees trembled.

'Oh, can't you tell me she *will* recover?' he asked wildly.

Dr. Blatt looked grave, and shook his head.

'My dear sir,' he said, 'doctors are not wizards; they are only the servants of science; or soldiers, perhaps, with Science for captain. They are ever on the march—on the alert to meet and defeat the physical ills to which humanity is heir. Yet the battle is not always to be won, and though our means of defence daily improve and gain strength, they are yet

primitive, and we are unable to count upon success in attack upon every enemy. I will try my best.'

Frank was dumb, his head drooped, his arms hung loosely at his sides, and he looked the embodiment of despair. Had he known that his loosened tongue had put forth a flame of its kind to sear the heart he had fondly hoped to win and soothe, the poisoned arrow would have been turned to his own bosom to give him escape from a never-dying remorse.

Dr. Blatt turned a pitying face on him, and said:

'Call on me to-morrow, if you remain here, and I can report. But I forbid you calling again on the young lady.'

The doctor, adding a kindly 'Good-morning,' stepped to his phaeton, and Frank Lannager walked moodily away. Thus Una, in her zeal for Jessie, left her alone, and the sword, which she thought did not hang exactly over the beloved invalid's head, fell with a fatal stroke.

CHAPTER XIV.

'VENGEANCE IS MINE.'

JESSIE did not succumb immediately to the drop of the dreaded sword. But, too weak for the exertion of removal to Phillipia, she was fain to remain at Wondoo, whither her mother and Aunt Jessie hurried on receipt of a few lines from Una, telling them what had happened, and imploring them to come.

To Roland this fresh misfortune was as the proverbial straw that overweighted the camel. So overcome was he that the Captain, thinking to comfort, made light of Dr. Blatt's diagnosis and vowed he was a 'croaker' and that the girl, with youth in her favour, must recover. But Roland was not to be comforted.

He waited in an agony of fear for the summons that might come any day to call him to her side for a last farewell; but the interval was so fraught with desolation of spirit that he looked himself a fit subject for the sick-bed. So much did he look it that the Captain forced a holiday upon him, insisting he should not do

any office-work till he felt better. As a result his thoughts were never diverted from the one sad channel, and if not impelled to take exhausting walks, he roamed aimlessly about Unaville, unable to set his mind to anything. His appearance excited comment.

Friends of the days that seemed so far distant, and yet belonged to but a couple of months ago, met him during these rambles and wondered why a countenance normally sunshiny and genial was so grave—even austere—wondered why he chose to keep Goolgun shut up. Conjecture was busy, and said he was in trouble; for when it became known that Jessie Lockstud was so seriously ill, that small world in which her family had figured as social planets, knowing of his intimacy with the Lockstuds, and remembering rumours of a private engagement existing between him and Miss Lockstud, believed it had divined the full cause of his dejection—a belief that spared him trying questions often. Yet many were put to him relative to Mrs. Goldwin, who was supposed to have gone abroad, and who, of course, was always referred to as his mother.

Was she fully recovered? What sort of a trip did she have—quick or slow or stormy? etc. How long would she be absent? To which he made safe replies: He had not yet heard; she was an indifferent correspondent.

Brooding over his misery, he found himself curiously eager to know where she had gone. She had dropped out of his life, but never from his memory—sore, keen memory—to which Jessie's illness acted now as a stimulant. What he prayed to forget was roughly, bitterly recalled. Indisposition for her of some kind had been expected to follow the cruel revelation of prolonged crime; wretchedness was bound to cloud her sweet young life, but it was fondly believed that youth would prevail against the sorrow, and time assuage. These might have availed but for that love-speech of Frank Lannager's centred in a bombshell. He could not blame him, for he had stumbled only as one with bandaged eyes, not knowing where he trod; he had behaved too nobly to be condemned, and all wrath and rancour were directed at the woman who had laid the foundation of the family misfortune. He had tried to smother hate and passion, but all that was human in him arose in revolt. Had her guilt touched him alone he could have borne it with patience and

fortitude; but no, like an octopus, its stinging feelers gathered all those who were so dear to him in one agonizing embrace.

Moodily perambulating one morning within that week of intensified misery, walking in rather a busy street, a woman suddenly stood before him, barring his progress. Her mittened hands were clasped, her face uplifted. Lost in reverie, his eyes did not take in outward things, until her voice, so familiar, broke through his abstraction. He halted and saw his foster-mother.

'Don't you know me, Master Rol? Would you pass me by?'

'I did not see you,' he replied.

'You do now; you see me now. Won't you shake hands? Oh, can't you forgive me yet?'

She impulsively caught at his right hand, and he allowed her to hold it, though he said never a word about forgiveness; her presence just then seemed to throw a lurid, stronger glare on retrospect.

'Oh, you are changed,' she went on, almost sobbing; 'and I have been praying to see you to tell you much that you should know. I think the good Lord has forgiven me, because He has heard my prayer. I didn't know how to get at you. I knew you were back at Phillipia, but I daren't show myself to them that might tell me all about you, if they would. But here you are dropped out of the skies, as it were, in answer to my prayers, and I have so much to tell you.'

'What more can you have to tell me?' he asked, going back to her confession of that terrible night—burned, etched in his mind. 'What more?'

'About myself—others!' she cried, forgetting in her excitement that she might attract attention of passers-by. 'I am trying hard to be good—to wipe out my sin. I have had my punishment, and it is all deserved, I know; and you will yet have your reward, Master Rol, and you will cheer my old heart just once by saying you forgive me.'

Unable yet to respond honestly to her appeal, he said calmly:

'If you have much to tell me, we had better find a more secluded spot. Let us step across to the statue there—Bonomea Place.'

Conscious of curious looks being thrown at them by foot-passengers ever passing, and of helping to block the path, he hastily drew his hand from hers, and, with an air of the deepest melancholy, silently turned and led the way to Bonomea Place—a green slice of earth, not a quarter of an acre in area, and divided from the street by a tall railing, making a garden-like enclosure, with a flower-bed here and there, and a couple of garden benches: while in the centre there towered a bronze statue, the first erected to the memory of a plain citizen in the Australian colonies, to immortalize one John Bonomea, one of Phillipia's greatest and worthiest of men—a king amongst philanthropists, financiers; a benefactor to those countries where his indomitable energy had found vent, and his benevolence and forethought wrought unlimited good for the working man.

Australia, never backward in recognising merit and bestowing the laurel, stamped one of her characteristics here; and Roland, entering with Mrs. Dripper, stood on what was consecrated ground in the sight of a grateful people, ever ready to honour worth.

They seated themselves on one of the benches, from where they could see, had they chosen to look, commercial prosperity represented on either side in the many-storied buildings of shipping firms and wool-brokers; shipping masts and spars peeping upward from the distant wharves, and a 'bus-stand immediately fronting the statue, where an omnibus stood waiting its specified time to start, the driver on the box flicking the flies from the horses' ears with a lazy, light switch of the whip; while other vehicles, besides the 'people's carriage,' rattled, plying to and fro with a lumbering, busy din, and pedestrians hurried by on business intent.

'Now you can talk,' said Roland, turning to his companion. 'What is it you have to tell?'

'You have not answered me yet,' Mrs. Dripper persisted. 'You avoid answering me. I asked you to say you'd forgive me'—again she clasped her hands in entreaty—'and you won't say it. Say it and mean it.'

'I try to forgive you,' he answered; 'let that suffice for the present. You are right—I am changed from a boy to a bitter, hardened man. The old nature has gone with my right to the old name. I am miserable, and see nothing in the future but gloom.'

'Don't talk like that, Master Rol; you have a bright life before you yet.'

'I was not thinking of my own future especially. Do you know that our Jessie is ill—so ill, the doctor admits, that her life is but a question of days? Think of it all! Think of her afflicted mother! Think of the wrong that has sapped her life—will consume it!'

Mrs. Dripper's bosom heaved and she pulled down the veil from her bonnet to fall over her face.

'It is too true,' he went on. 'And see how quickly it is to follow that other death! Surely you know of that?'

'Oh yes, yes—everything,' moaned his listener.

'And the insolvency and ruin?'

'Yes.'

'The additional misfortune we tried to hide from her, but in a moment, quite unforeseen, she learned everything from a stranger, and it is killing her! One consolation stands: she in her sweet innocence will be removed from the sting of shame, and find peace. It is God's mercy, perhaps. But for her widowed mother—for me——'

Roland could say no more for awhile, and averted his head. Mrs. Dripper was crying quietly behind her veil.

After pausing thus, he cleared his throat, and spoke again:

'You ask for pardon when my heart is full of distress—full of vengeance—for that woman who has besmirched you with her sin. See how changed I am—how desperately wicked in this sore temptation for revenge!'

He bowed his head despondently, and felt that all the philosophy and goodness for which Una had aggrandized him were seemingly being wrenched from his soul.

'Hush! hush!' said Mrs. Dripper solemnly. 'It is about her I have so much to tell. You won't feel so much revenge when you know. I've felt that way, and I know. You have suffered, but not so much as me, Master Rol, because you can't feel that you deserve it, and I do deserve it. I have lost all my money, lost friends, and my daughter—my own child—can find no room for her old mother at her fireside in her old age—the child I was tempted to sin for. Her husband objects to

the mother-in-law, I suppose, and so I stand alone like an old stump stripped of its branches. But you have done nothing but right, and have taught me to see the right. For your sake more than my own I have cursed her, and prayed for evil to overtake her, and now it *has* overtaken her, and I've seen her, and am sorry for her. Oh, she is punished—dreadfully punished!'

'You have seen her—and where?' asked Roland, with that frown on his face which might betray him as Theodore Lockstud's son.

'I left her only this morning at the Warrelda Asylum.'

'There! Why there?'

'For the best or the worst of reasons. Why do people get sent there, Master Rol?'

'Good heavens!' He started up from the bench. 'Do you mean she—she is mad?'

'Mad as a March hare! God help her!'

Roland, unprepared to hear of retribution of this kind, sat down again somewhat stunned. The frown fled, his chin drooped till it touched his chest, his hands grasped his knees, and a shudder shook his athletic frame.

'Go on!' he cried. 'What more?'

'Well, she came first to the Debella hospital, you see—came as Miss Gelden. She got into a gentleman's house as governess or housekeeper, I'm not sure which. One morning I met her at the park, but I didn't feel quite sure. It looked like her, and it didn't. It was her figure I saw, and her face, only her hair and brows, being dyed, were deep black and not golden, and I went away worried over the likeness. But it was her, after all, and I knew it when, the morning after Mr. Lockstud's funeral, she was brought to the hospital. She had taken laudanum, and the servants found her, as they thought, dead. The gentleman—her employer—was not at home, and the servants, in terror, ran off for the doctor. He said she was not dead, she had blundered somehow, and with much trouble he brought her back to life, but helpless. The servants, it appears, didn't like her a little bit, and both objected to having her on their hands when she might die any day, so they flatly refused to have anything to do with her, and the doctor, as soon as he could, got her removed to the hospital, and that's how I met her again,

still wondering who she was. I was soon to know, for I was appointed to nurse her through the night, and she was carried to one of the wards and laid upon a bed alive, and, as I thought, coming to her senses. But she never came to her senses, and she never knew me. The next morning—in the small hours—another nurse took my place while I slept, and she came and told me afterwards all about it. "Fancy," she said, "that poor Miss Gelden is quite out of her mind! We thought she was getting round, when she sat up and looked about her as if roused from a sleep; but later on, when I addressed her as Miss Gelden, she abused me horribly, and said it was an impertinence for me to call her Miss Gelden. 'Who are you, then?' I asked, just to humour her. 'I am Mrs. Theodore Lockstud, remember that!' Oh yes, she is out of her mind, sure enough! She'll be a case for the Warrelda Asylum, poor thing!" Well, Master Rol, I turned quite sick and faint, and felt sure then it must be Mrs. Goldwin, though it would be hard to recognise her now, with her black hair and pinched, ghastly face without a bit of beauty. And to hear her talk about the fidelity of Indian widows, and scold everybody who comes near her for not letting her die on her dear Theo's grave! "I'll die there yet, in spite of you!" she keeps on saying. She quite forgets the name of Goldwin, it seems, and I—when I knew who she was—begged not to have to attend her, saying I was frightened.'

Here Mrs. Dripper caught at her breath and wiped her eyes.

Roland sat still as death during the recital, but as soon as there came a pause he turned to his foster-mother a countenance softened and pitying.

'You were right to say I should feel no revenge with the knowledge of this. It is dreadful! Is there no hope?'

'I don't think so. The hospital doctor said not, and, just as the other nurse had said, he thought her a subject for the asylum, and took it upon himself to get her removed there, and I was told off with a wardsman besides to bring her on to Phillipia, and get her up the river to the Warrelda Asylum. So I pinned this thick veil about my face for fear of accidents, and thought it better to come than make a fuss. But she never knew me. And we called her Mrs. Lockstud all the time—you know, they always give in to the whims of mad

people—and she is there safe and sound. I asked the asylum doctor what he thought of the case, and if she would get her senses ever, and he said: "Yes, on her death-bed, perhaps, and that can't be very far off." That is all, Master Rol, and that is why I am here. I can't start for Debella until this evening, and then I shall set to work again, and pray for the poor creature to die. It makes one sorry she didn't take enough of the laudanum to kill her outright; better to be dead than alive as she is. She must have been attached to poor Mr. Lockstud, after all—more than attached, though she often railed against him to me. Perhaps that was a blind. And I am thankful to meet you. I could go down on my knees and say, "Thank God!" Now you know all I have to tell.'

'Good heaven!' ejaculated Roland again; 'what will Larry say to this?'

'That's the old man she used to call a gorilla?'

'I suppose so; she did not like him.'

'Like him? She hated him, and I have hated her; but not now—not now. I'm getting on in years, and begin to sicken of all the misery and wickedness there is in the world. When once I feel fit for it, I'll pray to die.' She got up and held out her hand for the second time. 'We may never meet again, Master Rol—who knows? I tell you, I am sincerely sorry—sincerely contrite—for my part in the sin. I trust to a merciful God for pardon. Won't you give yours, full and free—you, the dear child I nursed and watched over for years?'

He rose now, and clasped her hand, and answered thickly:

'As God is my witness, I forgive you with all my soul.'

'Amen! amen!' murmured the poor woman in a choked voice. 'Oh,' she added, 'ask Miss Jessie to forgive me, too.'

'Miss Jessie,' replied Roland, 'is too nigh to the angels this hour for me to question her wishes or her purity of thought. I am sure she forgives you, and all concerned.'

'God bless you and her!'

And Mrs. Dripper wrung his hand, dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief, and hurried away.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SEVERING OF THE GORDIAN KNOT.

SHORTLY after Roland's meeting with Mrs. Dripper, Washington Larry arrived early one morning in time to partake of the general breakfast at Unaville.

Eager to force an adopted fatherhood even on the son of his one-time enemy, he resolved to journey again to Phillipia, and follow Roland as soon as he could leave the station. The news of Lockstud's death accelerated his departure from Knutsford, and owing to this he was in Greycott to receive Roland's message in reference to Tackerline's advice about the reading of Jerry's packet, and hence his return message stating that he was coming down, and desiring delay in the opening of it. This determination to stand by the lad who had won his heart at the outset brought a healthy purpose into his narrow life. It was a new thing to him to feel that somebody existed, depending on his help, who would be all the happier, perhaps, for his affection. It was as a draught of fresh, invigorating air—a flood of sunshine to penetrate his tough skin and warm his old bones—something to give him a new interest beyond the turning over of money on the station, and stroking a cat—a new Cicero—to remind him of the happy days of yore.

There was an odd rejuvenescence about him, a revived attempt at old jokes, and a decided effort to straighten his back. The knowledge of Jessie's illness and the doctor's fiat did not oppress him, excepting in his sympathy with Roland; for, of course, the girl was his sister, he reasoned, and it was natural for him to be troubled. He was not aware of that other tie which had once linked them, nor of Jessie's desperate love; the only explanation he had received relative to Mrs. Dripper's full confession had come from the Captain, who had been left quite as ignorant as Larry of the real circumstance leading to the disclosure, and had been led to believe that the foster-mother, over-burdened with the weight of her own sin, had been compelled to make known everything to Roland, and so had flown from the shelter of Goolgun. But Larry had not

forgotten that Saturday night when Roland had indignantly refused his counsel against entering the Lockstud family, and had even gone so far as to hint at the probability of his marriage with the eldest daughter.

'He flirted a lot with her, I dare say,' he said to himself, 'and was fond enough of her to say a thing like that. He don't like to think of it, anyhow.'

To Roland he said soothingly:

'Well, well, it is all a muddle to me a' times to see how things get twisted the wrong way. Now, if that yaller-haired witch had gone long ago—when *she* was a girl—lots of trouble would ha' been saved other people. D—n her! I say.'

And here he was to learn for the first time that she—the witch—was already anathematized, for Roland put out his hands to stop further invective, and said with much pathos:

'Don't—don't say that! A curse has alighted without human invocation.'

'Not strong enough,' said Larry, thinking her poverty and expulsion from house and home were alone alluded to.

'Not strong enough?' repeated Roland in dismay. 'Oh, you don't know; she is in purgatory now on earth—a soulless, mindless woman—an inmate of a lunatic asylum.'

Roland, thinking the hopeless overthrow of intellect and darkness of soul the heaviest of human afflictions, expected Larry to be shocked, and thought he was, for the old man vented a convulsive 'Ah!' and no more for a few seconds. But Larry was not shocked, and that interjection was given as if he had inhaled a strong smelling-salt to take his breath away temporarily with its pungency, but yet to offer relief immediately after.

Understanding Roland's disposition in the matter not to be quite in harmony with his own, he did not wish to betray to him a sense of exultation, which was certainly uppermost with the powerful sniff drawn from this unexpected information.

'Mad, is she?' he mentally cried. 'Well, thunder! that's about squaring things, for she's drove plenty mad in her time.'

Roland, misconstruing his silence, spoke again.

'Yes, in a lunatic asylum. She tried to poison herself, and failed. The doctor brought her back to life and purgatory.'

'Ah!' said Larry for the second time. That she should rush desperately at Eternity's gate only to find it fast locked against her still was better, he thought, than an easy transit from life to death as a probable settlement of her difficulties. So, at a loss for words of a neutral kind—safe not to expose his heart, yet not to express sorrow—he fell back on another 'Ah!' and abruptly turned the subject. 'Come, what's the good of talking about it?' he said. 'We'll drop her. What about that packet?'

'What packet?' asked Roland in abstraction, his thoughts at Warrelda that moment.

'What packet?' echoed Larry brusquely. 'Why, Jerry's, to be sure. Have you forgotten?'

'Oh, I must confess to having forgotten all about it within the last few days; there has been so much to think about of more consequence.'

'You're a fine feller! What has fetched me here but that packet?' asked Larry, who had not come for the reading of Jerry's packet alone, but wished it to appear so. 'I want to be by, and purtect him in case he's too hard on himself, you see.'

'Very good. When do you wish it opened? It is immaterial to me. Your time can be mine.'

'Thunder! I'm more anxious for it than you.'

'That is true. It is too much like digging into the poor fellow's grave for my fancy, and stirring up decayed bones best left alone, perhaps; but the sooner over the better, since it has to be done. Let us go this morning, if you like, and ask the Captain to join us: he knows all about it.'

But to this Captain Pennacove objected. Unlike Larry, he could not find any pleasure in listening to what might be a private confession, although he knew quite as much of his old friend's past as Larry did. There might be more to know, possibly, of which he would rather remain in ignorance, and therefore he declined. About an hour later on, and the day of Larry's arrival, Roland, finding the lawyer could spare an hour or so, was seated with Larry and Tackerline in the private office of the latter. The three—the old squatter, the quondam ward, and the legal adviser—sat at the office-table. Roland in the centre, appointed reader, with his hands on the packet—

'It is marvellous,' said Roland, not addressing anybody in particular, and making no attempt to continue.

'It is not an uncommon occurrence,' remarked Tackerline, wondering at Roland's evident agitation. 'But I will read it since you wish it.'

The lawyer took the sheets into his own hands, and, peering at them closely through his glasses, took up the thread where Roland had dropped it, while Roland, as grave as Hamlet before his father's ghost, leaning forward with his hands supporting his head and his elbows on the table, remained thus till John Tackerline drew to the conclusion.

'"And now,"' read the lawyer, '"after all these years the curse has ripened—has found me out. I've been fooled—duped by a woman I must love still, a snake fawning on me for my money—a beautiful snake, your mother—not wholly false, but false enough to prove how right poor old Wash was—false enough to drive me crazy and never to wish to see her again. Poor old Wash! he couldn't stand by and see me wronged in any way."'

'Ay,' put in Larry with a groan.

'"Oh," continued Tackerline, '"I loved her, and I love you, my son—dote on you, have plotted and planned for you, have prayed to live to see you grow! There were years of life in me till last night, now the old craft is sinking, and I daren't look at her again; she'd bewitch me again, and I want to punish her like she has punished me, through the cursed money. I'll be even with her; but you, my boy, when you read this, may provide for her as it shall seem good or just, and may remove the yoke I shall fix about her neck. As a man you shall judge, as a son you shall do your duty, if she lives, and never visit her sin to me upon her head. That's all about her. Now for poor little Stella and that wretch, Basil Sebaste. With her white face, and him stiff in death, as I thought, I fled from the house where but a little time ago I had settled down happy with my young wife. I fled to a friend—Timothy Pennacove—the best friend of my early days, second mate on board the *Gitano*, and my successor as first mate when I gave up the sea for Stella. He rose to Captain since, but I made it worth while for him to give up the sea, too. He brought me to my senses; he told me I had been too rash—hinted at Stella not being in the

wrong, and when thinking that I would have rushed back to her, he held me from going, saying I was going straight for a reef with my eyes wide open; said if my girl was false I was better away, and if she was true she'd follow me, for he was off for Australia the very next day, and vowed he'd carry me off with him. So he did; he smuggled me on board the old *Gitano*, and the hue and cry never reached me. Shaved and dyed and dressed as a Jack-tar, I sailed, as I thought, from the clutch and the curse of Helen Sebaste. The old captain never smelt a rat at all, and thought me a sailor friend of the first mate, asking to work his passage to Australia. But one young sailor fellow, sharper than the master, found me out, and I told him everything, and he helped to keep the dodge afloat. That same is Jacob, now as old as me, and well provided for on the Washington run. I like to reward my friends as Monte Cristo did. Well, my son, as soon as I arrived I dropped the sailor clothes, and I became Jeremiah Goldwin; each name had its own meaning. I meant to win gold, and there was always a jeremiad at my heart. But when the *Gitano* sailed back I sent a letter by Tim to old Lockstud, Stella's guardian——"'

'Lockstud!' interpolated Tackerline; 'that's strange, to meet the name here, isn't it?'

It was a mere comment urged by the question of coincidence to which the name pointed, and only met with a grunt from Larry.

Roland never spoke—never changed his position.

'"Sent a letter by Tim to old Lockstud, Stella's guardian,"' repeated Tackerline, '"explaining everything, and asking for news of my wife. I didn't get an answer for months; remember, it was all sailing then, and it was a long time before Tim touched England again; and when it did come—from Tim, not Lockstud—it floored me, and I took to money-making like a man to dram-drinking to keep him from thinking. I had been all wrong, it said. Basil Sebaste had been an old flame of Stella's, but before she met me she had found him out for a villain, and what she had once thought love was only infatuation or fascination with the cur's handsome face. Old Lockstud told Tim this, mind, and swore I should never see my wife again—that he wouldn't trust her to a mad-brained scamp, wouldn't disgrace her with my name! I was a

murderer, and had better not show my face in London, or the law would have me. He was in a towering rage, and at the last blubbered like a girl, for he was so fond of my Stella. 'Why didn't she tell her husband of her old lover, then?' asked Tim; and to this Lockstud said she was frightened to tell, because I had once said I couldn't bear to think that she ever cared for any man but me. I did say it, for my love was strong and fierce. Well, this fellow had some letters of hers, said Lockstud, for which she had begged, but he wouldn't give them up till he saw there was something to be made by them, and then he and his sister came upon her one day when I was out, and he had her letters with a big price set on them. She offered to give it, too; and then the wretch, not satisfied, dared to embrace and kiss her. There it is in a nutshell. I cast him from her and threw him; she swooned, and died six months afterwards in child-birth. So I helped to kill her and the child—at least, I'm not so sure about the child. Whether girl or boy Lockstud wouldn't tell, and neither would he say outright whether it was living or dead, and that's all old Tim could tell me. Now, my boy, understand there might be somebody living of the name of Kovodel. I could not make inquiries without betraying my true name, and, besides, Stella was rich, and I knew the child, if living, would have all hers, and that the Lockstud folks would see to it. I've always been on the alert to find a Kovodel, but have never met with one bearing the name. Old Lockstud had plenty of relations, and I sometimes thought this Theodore Lockstud might be one of them, but daren't ask him any questions. It was for this I was so ready to befriend him, for I liked the old man, and wanted to make some sort of reparation. Again, remember Stella's maiden name was Maybell, and she may have taken *that* name; so be on the look-out for a Maybell if you can't find a Kovodel, and do something to help one or other on in the world, if it is needed. I almost forget that I am not Jeremiah Goldwin now; that is, I did till last night. I was very miserable over Tim's letter. I prayed hard in those days, but think I prayed more to Stella than God, knowing that she was innocent and good, and feeling I had wronged her so, and would have liked to die, only I wasn't fit. I said I'd live and get rich and found charities, and do good with my riches, and bury the old name,

and raise one that should be honoured. So I got rich, and the years rolled by, and I didn't pray so often I fear. A friend came to me in my loneliness: he loved me; he saved my life, and for it I told him all my past; but it made no difference, he stuck to me, he did, and thought me a good man in spite of all. He believed in me, and helped me to believe in myself, and we two rough chaps were close as a pair of lovers, dear old Wash and me."'

Here Larry displayed visible emotion. Roland never stirred, and Tackerline was the only one of the three calm, cool, and collected, as he read on:

'"About six or seven years after Stella's death an advertisement went the round of the newspapers. Somebody wanted news of one Cecil Kovodel, whether living or dead. Well, my boy, as Cecil Kovodel was buried as soon as his escape was good, I answered the advertisement, stating I knew him well, and that the man was dead and buried. Jeremiah Goldwin was too wide awake, too old a bird, to be caught in that way; and now you know all. I shall lay that ghost—Basil's sister's ghost. She goes as I write. Her grip loosens, the fire in her eyes is dying out, she can do me no more harm. She is going—going—she is gone! Go, tell Basil he is avenged. Lucky Jerry's day is done. Good-bye, son; good-bye to all I held dear—wife, wealth, and child; yes, and Wash and Tim. You own my surname in your second. I would have it so, that you might not have a wholly false name. Whatever it is, I pray you to keep it honoured. May God send a blessing on it for you—for your heirs! May He forgive me, and show you how to forgive. In this confession I hope I wash my hands of that man's blood! Amen."'

Thus the reading concluded. John Tackerline rustled the leaves in his hands in the act of refolding; his brow was more corrugated than ever; there was trouble written there. The history in itself did not affect him; he was not wholly inclined to blame; but he was not pleased to have the knowledge of a crime thrust upon him, or to think that he had been instrumental in the revelation of it. It presented, too, complications from a legal aspect. His search for next-of-kin to Goldwin, as it transpired now, was to grope for shadows, and was fully

understood to be so by the two men appointed heirs in the absence of next-of-kin. This, then, accounted for their confident assertion that none would be forthcoming. The packet threw another light upon the matter, and pointed to the possible existence of a relative of the name of Kovodel. In such a case it would be his painful duty to seek for a Kovodel instead of a Goldwin; and, supposing one to be found, it would not only oust the young man at his side from any foothold on the estate that the heirs had contemplated making for him, but might lead to the exposure of the family disgrace, which otherwise could be hushed. But as yet he would not hint at these facts to Roland; but, turning to him, said gently, noting what he thought to be an attitude of dejection, and not seeing his face, it being hidden now behind his hands

'He only erred through jealous love; his goodness since has surely purged that stain from his soul. Many a man, under the same provocation, has been maddened to violence. Being temporarily insane, he was scarcely responsible for his action.'

Larry, never waiting for Roland to reply, leaped from his chair, and, going over to the lawyer, brought a horny palm down on his shoulder with a familiar slap:

'Thunder! you're a brick! You never said a truer word.'

At last Roland lifted his head, and did not show the pained face that Tackerline had been expecting to see. Yet he was experiencing a sense of suffocation from over-wrought feeling, and his features twitched.

'Cheer up, youngster!' said Larry; 'there's no harm done.'

Then Roland, quivering from head to foot, rose from his chair, and began to pace the office as if to wake himself up or warm his blood, and went through a sort of pantomimic posture, with his head thrown back and eyes fixed in a strange ecstasy on the ceiling, with his hands locked in each other convulsively, and lips moving, but giving no sound; and the two men looking on believed him half demented, until with a rare effort his speech came back to him, and he, standing still, turned to them, and spoke:

'I thank you, Mr. Tackerline, and you, Mr. Larry, for urging this duty on me. But for that, my key would have lain idle and useless. Bear with me. I have not lost my senses. I say I possess the key. Let me drive to Unaville and bring it to you. I implore you to give me another hour, and read it at once. Don't delay. Don't deny me. I shall fall into a desperate state if I have to keep to myself what that key can tell.'

This ungovernable ebullition communicated itself in a certain portion to Tackerline and Larry.

The former breathed an exclamation of surprise, and rose in some excitement, wondering what was to come next.

The latter let fly a good round oath.

The one said:

'Go and bring it, then. I shall be ready.'

The other said:

'He shan't go alone; he ain't fit to be trusted.'

So that when Roland caught up his hat and hastened from the office without another word, Larry did likewise, and followed him into the street and into a cab.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MILLIONAIRE AFTER ALL.

In less than an hour Roland, with Larry, returned to the lawyer's office. He could not sit down, nor could he read that which he had described as the 'key.' Again Tackerline was requested to do the reading, and Roland, having set the little book on the table before him, stood behind the lawyer's chair, with his hands grasping the back of it. It was the little book that Aunt Jessie had given over to his keeping, and upon which so much depended for Roland himself, and which in its full and weighty significance he could not yet properly comprehend.

The only emotion working him now was of marvel and awe combined, in the recognition forced upon him of the strange dovetailing of two histories falling into his own hands, and having, as he once thought, no possible connection with each

other. It was the diary of Theodore Lockstud's mother, written in her girlhood, in angular characters, and in a jerky, irregular, disjointed fashion.

John Tackerline and Larry were alike infected now with Roland's impatience to read and find for themselves the 'key' that lay waiting somewhere in hiding amidst the leaves of the little book that the former held in his hand—the solution of some mystery—and close to his eyes after the manner of short-sighted people. And thus he read:

'"August 15, 184—.—School-days over, and I'm engaged again. Only to think what a narrow escape I have had! If dear old Guardie had not been such a good, gentle Guardie, I might have been wicked enough to deceive him—might have been the wife of an adventurer. But I couldn't deceive him. Fortunately I told him everything, though Basil urged me to say nothing. What a trap he and his clever sister laid for me! An innocent, silly school-girl! How clever she was to get him into the school as music and singing master, because poor old Bandini went away! How she fooled me; how fond of her I was; and how I thought I loved him! But it wasn't love at all—how could it be? For don't I love Cecil now with all my heart? Their father was Greek, but the mother an Englishwoman, they told me, and I dare say *that's* true; for Basil is like a Greek god for beauty. Pshaw! I hate handsome men! Cecil is worth fifty handsome men; and, oh, how he loves me! For me he left his ship, and will never leave me. He isn't rich, but what matter? I am. And, besides, he *is* rich in himself. Guardie says he is a rough diamond, and doesn't the diamond glitter for me—even without the dandy polish? It does. I wish I had the courage to tell him all about Basil, but I haven't yet. He is so *jealously* fond of me, stupid fellow! I will tell him some day, and I'll move heaven and earth to get those letters of mine from Basil. Oh, Stella Maybell, what a little idiot you have been! I'll have my little sister from school as soon as Cecil and I are married. She mustn't run the risk her sister has—nearly being married to a villain: a man—oh, it makes me shudder!—a man who embezzled once, and came over here under the name of Sebaste. Guardie found all that out. I ought to be thankful, and am; and in less than three months I shall sign myself Stella Kovodel——"'

Tackerline paused here and drew a long breath. Roland still clutched at the chair-back, and Larry was beginning to understand that the writer of the diary was no other than the first wife of his old friend. But neither he nor the lawyer held the key yet to which Roland had so wildly alluded.

'It is strange,' remarked Tackerline, 'that this should fall into your hands, Goldwin.'

'Thunder!' cried Larry, 'I am sorry for that little lady. If poor old Jerry could ha' seen that, he'd never ha' married that yaller-haired witch!'

'Go on, go on,' said Roland petulantly. 'Read! read!'

And the lawyer, not interested, but eager to grasp the key, read obediently, patiently wading through the simple records of a girl's days, and rhapsody over Cecil Kovodel, and comments on places visited with him, and the people they met. Then came a break and a leap over half a year.

'"May 30, 184—.—Well, who can keep a diary with all the travelling and sight-seeing occupying one's time, and a husband who will have every moment of the day with me? Dear little book, I fear you are doomed, and some day I shall burn you for rubbish. I have been married six months, and we have been travelling and had a nice time—no time for diaries; and the three months before our wedding were just filled up with milliners and dressmakers, and embroidery and love-making; so I couldn't write as much as I wished. Now I'll just make one more note and drop you at the bottom of my box, till Cecil gets tired of me and gives me more time. But that won't be ever! I am wondrously happy! That is my note. Now rest, my diary."'

It evidently did rest, for the next record was dated close on three months later, and rang out a dismal change:

'"August 20, 184—.—I have you again in my hand for an entry which must be written. My last words set down stare me in the face—mock at me. 'I am wondrously happy!' Can I be the same girl who wrote them? For who so wretched as I? It is all over. Wedded bliss all gone, never, never to return! I have been so ill, they thought I would die; yet I live still to write this. They sent for Jessie—dear little thing!—to cheer me, and I did not know her. For her sake I try to keep up. Poor child! she clings to me so and frets over me,

but does not understand all I suffer. She never saw Cecil, and now, perhaps, I shall never see him again—never see my baby! I shall droop and die in my misery! He has gone; he has left me; and Basil is dead. Let me think how it happened. I want to write it all down for Jessie. She can't understand now, but she will when she is older; and then Guardie will give her this little book, and she will know exactly how it all happened. Let me think. Oh, how my head swims, and the tears blind me! I must think. How was it? Cecil was out for a walk—unfortunately a walk without me. I did not accompany him, for I was not feeling strong. I begged him to leave me at home (afterwards that helped to make him suspicious, perhaps), and I stopped at home, lazily lounging and reading a novel. Presently I was told that a lady and gentleman were in the drawing-room wishing to see me—old friends, who had not thought it necessary to give their names. Visitors had been coming and going for some time to welcome us, so it was nothing new, and I rose from my lounging, set my dress in order, and hastened to meet them. I met Basil and his sister. My first impulse was to fly, my second to remain and receive them with calm dignity. Helen's eyes flashed and her lips smiled.

'"'"'We have found you out, you see,' she laughed. 'Old friends can't be so easily separated, can they?'

'"I tried to appear at ease, and said:

'"'"'Miss Sebaste, I am willing to let bygones be bygones.'

'"Basil laughed now.

'"'"'So are we, little Stella. You are nice and snug here.' He looked all round the room impertinently with the eyes I once thought beautiful. 'But we really think you ought to impart some of the cosiness to us.'

'"'"'I don't understand you,' I said.

'"'"'Don't you?' he said. 'Well, now, doesn't it occur to you that we don't intend letting a chit of a girl play fast and loose with us? We want money, and your guardian, having ousted me from my employment, we look for redress from you—in fact, not wishing to be mean, we offer you a *quid pro quo* for that redress. I bring you your letters.'

'"'"'Oh, give them to me—give them to me!' I almost

screamed. My face was on fire, and I held out my hands. 'Give them to me, and I shall think kindly of you.'

'"They both laughed as if amused.

'"'"'Thinking kindly,' said Helen, 'won't give us bread-and-butter, or clothes or a roof. What is your price for the letters?'

'"I eagerly offered £20. They shook their heads. I offered £50, and they smiled at me contemptuously. Basil had them all tied neatly together, but he, putting them back in his pocket said:

'"'"'Your husband will perhaps be more liberal.'

'"'"'You mustn't show them to my husband!' I cried in terror. 'Give them to me; what is it you want for them?'

'"'"'Nothing short of £200, young lady,' he said; and with that—O God!—he caught me in his arms, and said I owed him more than that. I was his promised wife. Cecil Kovodel had robbed him. I was more beautiful than ever—his sweet little Stella. He kissed me wildly, madly; and Helen's laugh, so spiteful, rang in my ears; while I writhed, twisted, and fought with him, and felt my senses reeling. Suddenly he let me go. Was I dreaming, or silly? Half fainting, I fell into a chair, and he was still struggling, but now with Cecil. They were wrestling, panting, fighting like dogs, and then it came to me. Cecil, entering, must have seen and heard. I remember Helen trying to separate them; then Basil falling—seeing blood flow from his temple—his face marble-white, his eyes closed. Oh, I remember Cecil's hand at my wrist, and his question, 'Who is this fellow?' and then Helen's answer like a hiss: 'The affianced husband of that false jade; the man she has duped, wronged; the man whose death shall lie at your door.' With that I knew no more, for I swooned, and I don't know how long I lay unconscious. I only know, when my senses returned, that I saw Guardie and his wife at my bedside, and no Cecil. They told me little by little all there was to tell. Yes, my husband had seen and heard everything, and he had thrown Basil, but he fell on the jutting point of the steel fender; there was a gaping wound at his temple, and that led to his death. It was all in the papers, and Cecil—my Cecil—was being hunted for, and if found might be hanged, they said; but they never found him. I prayed for his escape. They surely won't have him now, for he is gone, and I shall never see him again;

and he is thinking me flighty, heartless, or false—anything but what I am: his devoted, heart-broken wife. Oh, why was I such a coward not to tell him of Basil? I have helped to his destruction; I have made him an outcast, and I am compelled even to resign his name, and now live in an isolated corner of London, hiding my head, and shut out of the world, which to me was so bright but a short time ago. I am known as Mrs. Lockstud, a widow. Guardie bade me take his own name, because of Kovodel glaring before the public. Jessie, too, thinks I am a widow, poor child! and am I not? Shall I live through it all, shall I? Shall I ever see my little one? Shall it and I meet ever the poor unhappy father? I fear not—I fear not. Yes, I am widowed indeed, for my darling is dead to me. God help him and me, and if I die, may he know the truth some day—know I am true. And if I die and my baby lives, in this my little book I set down my wish that my sister will be a mother to it. It eases my mind to write so, and a few years hence she will read what I have written, and I trust to her love for me to let the *child* know nothing of the disgrace that must stain our name. The *man* or *woman* may, if endowed with that sweet pity which shall show charity to the one great error of the father's life. I can write no more."'

Tackerline paused, drew out his handkerchief to flourish about his face, and would have spoken but for an impetuous 'Go on, do go on!' from Roland, who still grasped the chair-back. So he proceeded; but there was little more to be read, and the head of the key, peeping, shot forth a ray of light, and was soon fully exposed, stripped of its wrapping.

The next entry was in another handwriting, dated six years later, and began with an abrupt announcement:

'"My beloved sister, Stella Kovodel, departed this life February 10, 184—, having given birth to a son, I being thirteen years old at the time.

'"I have not long been put in possession of this little book, which I hold as a sacred treasure—a sweet relic. Her dear boy, now close on six years old, I take to myself as my own. She consigned him to me, and to him will I endeavour to do a mother's duty. I don't know what has become of his father, and should not know him if he stood before me this minute. Mr. Lockstud, her guardian and mine, might have learned a great deal of him through a friend of his—the first mate of the *Gitano*, I believe—who brought a letter from Cecil from Australia, asking for news of his wife, and defending himself. But poor Stella was not long dead then, and Guardie's soft heart was heavy with grief and unforgiveness against the man who drove her to an untimely grave. He vowed that he would have nothing more to do with him, and he never answered his letter. But now he regrets the step, the stand he took, and is eager to discover the whereabouts of the boy's father, to get some news of him for the boy's sake. For who knows but what the separation may deprive him of a possible inheritance? he says. He is in Australia somewhere, where they say gold is picked up in the streets, and where Cecil Kovodel may get riches. He is advertising for him throughout Australia, and I hope he will never be found. Theo will have his mother's legacy, and will be well-to-do without aid from his father. All my soul revolts against him, and the hot jealous blood that so surely killed my Stella. But for his son I hold myself responsible as regards his moral and intellectual training. He shall be as a son to me in all things, though I am married now, and have a little son of my own. So help me heaven!

'"JESSIE CALLIPORT."'

There followed one more entry in the same writing, and dated quite three years later:

'"Mr. Lockstud has received news of Cecil Kovodel's death, and Theo is all mine; not one can claim him now. He shall know of his father when I think the right time comes. He shall remain Theodore Lockstud to the end of his days.'

* * * * *

It is useless to describe the fervour of the moment, the animation of Roland's face, the facial contortion of Larry, who, seemingly doubtful as to whether he was standing on his head or his heels, scratched perseveringly with a forefinger behind his ear, as if for further information, or John Tackerline's spasmodic accents and bodily jerks as he rushed almost breathlessly through this last memo—this indisputable testimony of Mrs. Calliport.

Larry remained for a time dumb, dazed, as though an invisible brick had been thrown at his head; while he looked

stupidly around the office, wondering what had struck him, and produced a strange pain.

Not so the lawyer; he was in a state of effervescence. He shut to the book, dropped it on the table, leaped from his chair, made a rush at Roland, and, catching at his hand, shook it, as if the owner had just been rescued from a dangerous stream or a violent death, and lastly caught him by the shoulders to shake his whole body as he said:

'You are a lucky dog, after all!'

'You admit,' said Roland, getting calmer as the lawyer waxed jubilant—'you admit cause for my agitation now; you can understand me now. After all, I was no stranger in Jerry Goldwin's house. It was not so unnatural a thing to be reared on his money. The debt is relieved of half its weight.'

'The debt!' gasped Tackerline. 'What debt?' There is no debt in the case. Is it—can it be possible you have not conceived the weight of this revelation—that you have overlooked the fact of this key being more than a solution, but one to open the door lately closed to you by your own hand? Why, you are Goldwin's own grandson!'

'Exactly,' said Roland. 'That is the marvel and the relief.'

'Oh!' groaned Larry to himself, aware at last of the cause of the dull pain at his brain and breast. 'To think that wretch was my Jerry's own flesh and blood—his own son!'

'I really think, my lad,' went on Tackerline excitedly, 'your mind must be somewhat unhinged with the discovery of the relation of this little book to Goldwin's packet, else you could see for yourself. Why, boy, it lifts you out of the Slough of Despond indeed. If Lockstud were living he would surely be Jeremiah Goldwin's heir. Well, can you see it now? Lockstud is dead, and his son shares in his property. *You* are one of the next-of-kin, *you* are the man we want, *you* are one of the heirs of Jeremiah Goldwin. Before God and man you have in truth now the right to step at once with a firm footing into the inheritance you not so long ago resigned.'

At this Roland felt the room wave with him, and, overwhelmed, he sank into a chair as giddy as if he had been suddenly hoisted to a mountain-peak, or borne aloft on the wings of an eagle, nearer to the sun, nearer to heaven, with the

blinding blaze affecting sight, and the glory of it evoking mute worship.

As in a trance he heard Tackerline still explaining, heard Larry exclaim: 'Thunder! my head is getting light. It's my dream—my dream! There's Jerry—I see him, I hear him! "Wash, this boy is my heir!"'

That boy practically was Jerry's heir.

* * * * *

Roland did not wait to be summoned to take a last farewell of Jessie, for but twenty-four hours after the revelation unfolding to him such an unexpected and dazzling vista of happiness he was hying to Wondoo, having previously apprised Mrs. Lockstud of his coming in a mysterious 'wire,' worded:

'Shall see you soon. Wonderful and good news. Tell Mid she must get well now.'

Jessie, with the knowledge that something had happened to Roland of a happy nature, certainly did revive in a temporary way—so far revived that she declared she felt able to rise from her bed, where she had been confined some days, and could dress and look her best to meet Roland once again when he should arrive. Una, outwardly calm, awaited him in feverish expectation of she knew not what; while Mrs. Calliport and Mrs. Lockstud made no secret of their perturbation excited by the telegram, but exchanged surmise constantly, and not one of the four anxious women, alike devoted to Roland, could possibly possess even an inkling of the tidings he had indicated as 'wonderful and good.' He came at last; but it was quite an hour after his entrance to the sanatorium that Una and Jessie were gladdened with his presence. Mrs. Lockstud and Aunt Jessie were the first to greet him, and they drew him into that little parlour before mentioned, the first to be served with that highly-seasoned dish he had in store for them.

He, as anxious to relate as they to hear, poured forth in detail all that he had come to tell.

The girls, in the meanwhile, waited as patiently as they could, and when Una recognised his footsteps drawing near to the bedroom, where Jessie sat up in an easy-chair in readiness for his reception, she, only waiting for a glance at his face, slipped quickly and unperceived by him through a door that

led to Mrs. Calliport's bedroom, in her desire to leave the brother and sister alone.

Mrs. Calliport had just returned from the parlour, but Mrs. Lockstud had followed Roland, thinking her daughter might need her through the ordeal of meeting him thus; for they had never looked upon each other since the cognition of their actual relationship.

So Una found Mrs. Calliport alone and on her knees, with a face uplifted, hands clasped, and lips moving as if in prayer. She would have retreated, but the old lady, hearing and seeing her enter, requested her to remain, and rising with alacrity most unusual, caught her in a warm and close embrace.

'Don't run away—don't run away, dear!' she cried, disposed to be demonstrative, and so beside herself that she was ready to do the most unheard-of things.

As if inoculated with that spirit of awe and marvel and gratitude and ecstasy which had animated Roland, her countenance, though tracked with tears, was radiant. Una, taking her trembling hands, led her to a chair, into which she sank somewhat exhausted, while her breath was laboured as she managed to articulate:

'Wonderful news, my dear!—oh, wonderful! Stella, Stella, if I had only known! If Theo had but known! And to think I never knew his father! Oh, what trouble might have been saved!—what disgrace!—what——' And then followed a paroxysm of coughing, the sound of which, reaching Priscilla Lockstud's ears, had the effect of bringing her hurriedly from Jessie's to Aunt Jessie's side.

She and Una gave the necessary assistance, and, the cough ceasing, Una turned to Mrs. Lockstud for a clue to the news just communicated.

'Oh, what is it? What has happened?' she cried. 'It must indeed be something unexpected!'

Mrs. Lockstud was as incoherent, however, as Mrs. Calliport, and as full of ejaculation, and Una, desperately longing to know everything, determined to return to the room just quitted to learn all from Roland himself.

With anticipation and interrogation written on her face, blanched with emotion, she went to the door, and softly opened it.

Roland was sitting by Jessie's easy-chair, holding her little hand in his, and stroking it. Evidently he had not begun his wonderful story yet, for the elation and hope Una had noted in his step, and his cheery smile as he entered, were gone, and she heard him say:

'No, Mid; you will get strong—get well. There is happiness in store for us yet, for I am a rich man now.'

And then the rustle of her dress made him turn quickly. He rose at once and met her, but his hand shook as it pressed hers, and neither seemed able to find words.

It was Jessie who spoke first. There was a brightness about her that, like a shining veil of finest, softest texture, yet could not hide the sombre lining beneath—the lines of suffering—the shadow of what was to come. She looked from one to the other, and said:

'Oh, this is like old times! Come, Una, sit down, and let us talk, we three together.'

Roland and Una could not liken it to 'old times,' but they tried to smile as they sat down, one on each side of her—tried not to see the shadow beneath the shining veil.

'It is a new time—a marvellous time!' corrected Roland. 'So much has happened, Una.' He turned to her, trying to speak with the heartiness of old, but failing, for his voice trembled and his features twitched. 'Jessie knew I had something good to tell, but she has not heard all yet. She says she is content to know it is good, and must have her say first. Like all women, she will have, I suppose, the first and last word. She has told me another story in a few words.'

With this he looked earnestly at Una—looked straight into her clear eyes, which suddenly lowered their curtains, as she found her heart beating wildly with the quick intuition of the gist of Jessie's story.

In this signal of confusion he read its sequel.

Here Jessie put out her two hands, one on each side, to grasp one of Roland's, one of Una's; holding them thus, she drew them towards each other, mustering all her strength in the effort, and placed Una's in Roland's, setting her own on both as a crown, the whole a living, throbbing love-knot.

'Una,' she began, 'Roland says he is rich again. And I am so grateful, though I don't know yet how it has all come

about. He says I am to get strong and be happy. And I am happy already, now that you two understand each other at last. Hide nothing from him now, Una. He knows, and you know, God meant you for each other, and me to be just what I am—a loving sister to both.'

Then one impulse moved Roland and Una alike, for, so linked, they rose together to stand, as if the spot whereon they stood had become consecrated ground, and Jessie no high-priest, but a God-sent angel uniting them.

They stood in silence, and as the feeble, plaintive voice of the dying girl fell sweet and low, Roland drew Una to his heart, and for the first time covered her lips with his own.

EPILOGUE.

IN SMOOTH WATERS.

UNAVILLE wears once again the aspect of the one-time Bachelor's Nest, for Una lives there no more, but only two quaint, stooping, white-haired old men, who smoke their pipes and drink their whisky toddy and take their strolls together; for Washington Larry has resigned station life, has his Knutsford cat, and has cast his lines in with the Captain. Since Roland's claim had been legally established by John Tackerline, and the whole matter comfortably settled within the private circle to which alone Roland's history was known, and they had more than enough to supply their own wants, they were content.

The estate was wound up, and the disposition of the portion willed by Jeremiah Goldwin to certain charitable institutions had been attended to; for two years have flown since Roland learned that he was an heir to Jerry's estate; since the wrong was righted, the crooked made straight; since, to use Larry's own word, 'Things were squared up fine.' The Goolgun doors are thrown open to strangers, for Roland has elected to live elsewhere, being averse to the old associations: he and his wife

reside in quite another locality, some distance from Virginia Bay, and intend shortly to visit Knutsford together.

There exists a baby Goldwin, too, to rule the house; a sweet, dimpled, starry-eyed autocrat of two months, christened Jessie, but better known as 'Mid,' and more often than not called 'Princess,' 'Queenie,' or 'Sweetest,' by her faithful nurse, Mrs. Dripper, who is far happier than she thinks she deserves to be, and who does not cease to shed a penitent tear and offer praise over the cradle where nestles 'the sweetest babe that ever crowed for kisses.' She prays alike at the cradle and the grave, a grave not more than half a year old, where a marble monument stands, on which is inscribed,

'SACRED TO THE MEMORY

OF

ISABELLA GELDEN,'

over date and place of death. Only a few know outside the private circle above alluded to that the occupant of the grave was buried at Roland Goldwin's expense, that her tombstone was erected at his order. But those quixotic benevolent tendencies of his, to which Mrs. Goldwin had so frequently referred with scoffing, now protected him from too much comment. 'He is a millionaire,' said the few, 'and always did do odd things, you know, things that never harmed anybody, but often did much good.'

Charlie Mountfu had yet to learn much of the movements of his Phillipia friends. After coming to an understanding with Una Pennacove, he gave up his vocation at the shipping firm, and, for diversion, took to commercial travelling; and during his travels within the two years, owing to his will-o'-the-wisp life and flight into the far interior of other colonies, where few papers found their way, he failed to gather a sequence of those events touching old friends. But he knew of Una's marriage, and having recovered from his disappointment, he determined to call and see her, to renew the past friendship, as soon as chance offered.

Returning to Phillipia, he, to prepare himself for this visit, first sought out her old home to chat with her uncle, and glean all information of her surroundings. So he presented himself

one evening at Unaville, and was received with genuine warmth by the Captain and his mate, Washington Larry.

Seated at the table, just as Larry and Jerry had smoked and talked and sipped so long ago, he found the two, and sat down to make a third, while decanters, tumblers, spoons and sugar-bowl, side by side with a hot-water jug full to the brim, its boiling hot contents bedewing the metal cover, were arrayed before them.

Over their pipes, and with a glass of excellent sherry at his elbow, Mountfu plied his convivial hosts with questions, Larry only putting in a word here and there.

'So your niece is Mrs. Goldwin?'

'Yes,' from the Captain.

'She forsook her old love, then—the University? And yet she was as anxious one time for a degree as any politician for a portfolio.'

'That she was,' responded the Captain again. 'But she is not the girl to give up anything she sets her heart on, let me tell you. She worked for her degree, and she got it, too.'

'By Jove! she got it after all, eh? Well done!'

'She did so,' mumbled Larry, as proud of her achievement as the Captain was, and pleased with Mountfu's 'Well done!'

He then relapsed into silence, sucking his pipe, and stroking Cicero, curled and purring across his knees.

'And she set her heart on the millionaire, and got him, too,' said Mountfu, taking a mouthful of his wine, and looking into the wineglass. 'What became of the other girl they said Goldwin was after—Miss Lockstud?'

At this question the Captain, feeling as if ice were trickling down his spine, was disconcerted.

'Don't you know? She's dead—died two years ago, about.'

'Dead! Good heaven! I never heard of it. I met her often here, and thought her a bonny girl. What happened to her?'

'Just family trouble, poor creature!' answered the Captain.

'Ah, yes; I remember her father's end. I heard it from you first. Terrible, wasn't it? And, then, he left his affairs in such a hopeless muddle.'

'Yes; it took the life out of her, sure enough,' asserted the Captain, puffing a cloud of smoke up to the ceiling. 'It nearly

upset Una—they were like sisters, you see—and she tended her to the last. She sent for the tribe of sisters and brothers to come to Wondoo and see the last of their eldest sister, and I liked the girl, and was anxious about my Una, too, so I went up to Wondoo myself. I won't forget it in a hurry. The poor thing was so changed. She flickered for a day or so, and they all thought she might come round; but she didn't, but just went off when they least expected it, quiet and happy like. Lord bless my girl, how Una felt it, to be sure! She couldn't settle to her books for a long time, and if it hadn't been for Rol she would never have been herself again, I'm sure.'

'It must have been harder on poor Mrs. Lockstud, though, don't you think?' said Mountfu.

'Well, of course it was—her troubles came so thick and fast; but it's a long lane that has no turning. The whole family is set up on its feet again, and back at Cecillambda.'

'What, is the rich old aunt gone too?'

'No; but she will go soon, I'm thinking. They hadn't to wait for her death to get hold of her money, because she took them off the raft and set them on a weather-tight boat. She's a rare old lady, is Mrs. Calliport.'

'Well,' remarked Mountfu, 'that's a salve for past afflictions. And what's become of the handsome dowager, Mrs. Goldwin? Still in England?'

Here Larry took the pipe from his mouth, and was moved to speak, with an irony undetected by the young man:

'Oh, the change done for her; it upset her fine nerves.'

'And is she dead, too? Do you mean she is dead?'

Larry closed his mouth on his pipe-stem and never replied. So Captain Pennacove answered, with a little shifting of his eyes:

'We got news of her death about six months ago.'

'Died abroad?'

'I don't exactly remember where,' equivocated the Captain.

'So that is the news, eh? She was a grand woman in her time.' Larry writhed in his chair. 'And the Lockstuds are back again in their old quarters? Well, life is a chequered work, isn't it? There was another daughter growing up—rather a fine girl, too—called Louisa, I think.'

'Yes,' said the Captain; 'she is a fine girl, and young

Lannager thinks she is awfully like poor Jessie. I'm not sure but what she will be Mrs. Frank Lannager some day.'

'Well, Lannager isn't a bad sort,' said Mountfu, after draining his glass. 'But for luck Roland Goldwin is really his father's own son. It just seems to drop into his hands for the mere holding of them out.' Mountfu was thinking of his success in winning Una. 'He doesn't know what disappointment is—he doesn't know much of the hardships of life.'

The two old men exchanged meaning glances, and neither made any remark for a few seconds. It was Larry who broke the pause at length.

'Rol Goldwin,' he said, 'has Jerry's honest blood in his veins, and if he's got his luck too, he's only got what he deserves; and that's more than many a man can say.'

His tone was aggressive enough to assure Mountfu that he had unwittingly touched on a sore place, so he immediately prepared a plaster.

'You're about right there, Mr. Larry; let's drink his health.' He helped himself to another glass of sherry. 'Here's to Roland Goldwin, the lucky and the deserving!'

He raised his glass, and the Captain followed suit; Larry, appeased, did likewise, lifting his hand from Cicero's back.

The three glasses clinked, and Mountfu added in all sincerity:

'May the sun of his prosperity never go down! May he share it all his days with her whose price is far above rubies! May they be rich in sons and daughters!'

'God bless them!' responded the Captain.

Then quoth Larry with a wave of his pipe:

'"All's well that ends well," says the prophet.'

THE END.

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