

DAUGHTER OF BOHEMIA.  
A NOVEL.  
BY Christian Reid  
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DAUGHTER OF BOHEMIA.  
CHAPTER I.

"Ah, wasteful woman, she who may  
On her sweet self set her own price,  
Knowing he cannot choose but pay,  
How has she cheapened paradise;  
How given for naught her priceless gift;  
How spoiled the bread and spilled the wine,  
Which, spent with due respective thrift,  
Had made brutes men, and men divine!"

On one of the most quiet and deeply-shaded of the shaded streets which are the boast of the pleasant Southern city of Alton, stands a handsome double house with a portico in front, and wide piazzas on the side, running the whole length of the building, and overlooking a flower-garden of considerable extent and great beauty.

Opening by French windows upon the lower of these piazzas is the breakfast-room, into which, on a certain bright morning of May—the 5th of the month, if any one likes to be particular—roses of almost countless number and variety were sending their fragrance, together with the buoyant air and golden sunshine. The breakfast-table, spread with delicate china and bright silver, occupied the centre of the floor; but as yet no member of the household had made an appearance on the scene. Despite the fact that the sun had been about the business of lighting and warming the earth long enough, it seemed, to rouse all sluggards from repose; despite the impatience of the cook, whose muffins were hopelessly falling, or the gloomy face of the footman, who held punctuality to be a cardinal virtue in masters and mistresses, the clock chimed half-past nine before the first step—a leisurely, creaking, somewhat important step—was heard descending the broad, shallow staircase.

"I'm blest if there isn't master at last!" said Robert, sardonically. "A nice time for a man what calls himself a business-man to be comin' down to breakfast! No!"—as the cook expressed her anxiety anew with regard to the muffins—"I ain't a-goin' to take up the things till they ring for 'em. He won't want his breakfast till somebody comes down to keep him company; he's one of the sociable kind what don't like to eat by hisself."

The gentleman thus characterized meanwhile entered the breakfast-room, newspaper in hand and eye-glass on nose. "A fine-looking, portly gentleman!" was the usual popular verdict on Mr. Middleton; and, for once, the popular verdict was an eminently just one. He stood six feet in the elaborately-worked slippers which he wore, and which were innocent of heels, while his size was in proportion to his height. He had a fresh, ruddy complexion, well-cut features of the nondescript kind, which we see on ninety-nine American faces out of a hundred, and keen, brown eyes, with a flash of humor in them. Add to this his brown hair, turning gray, and his brown whiskers, worn *à l'Anglaise*, and you have a picture of the man as he sat down by one of the open windows, and began to glance over the newspaper, while he waited for the appearance of some feminine body who could pour out his coffee and give a friendly countenance to the empty table, Robert having been right in saying that he was a sociable man, who did not like to take his breakfast alone.

He had not long to wait. Before the clock over the mantel had chimed another quarter, a lighter step was heard descending the staircase, and the sweep of a feminine dress sounded across

the hall. A minute later a slender, graceful woman of middle age entered the room a woman who had probably never been pretty, but who had plainly always been distinguished-looking, and under whose manner of well-bred repose a great deal of nervous force was latent. She wore a becoming trifle of a morning-cap on her glossy, dark hair, and was dressed in that sheer, crisp lawn which inspires such refreshing thoughts of coolness on a warm summer morning, so that, despite the fact of his having been kept waiting for at least ten minutes, Mr. Middleton smiled as he looked at her.

"We are all rather late this morning," said he. "I am afraid an engagement in the house does not agree with us."

"Do you think the engagement has any thing to do with our being late?" asked Mrs. Middleton, as she moved across the room and touched a bell, which announced that breakfast might be brought up. "I am late because I scarcely slept at all last night; and, after unusual wakefulness, one is apt to fall asleep rather heavily in the morning."

"And what was the reason of the unusual wakefulness?" asked her husband. "Have you never heard of such a thing as cause and effect? I think it probable that you would have slept quite as well as usual if Leslie had not come back from her ride yesterday evening and informed us that she was engaged to Mr. Tyndale."

"Of course, I thought of Leslie," said the lady, deprecatingly. "How could I help thinking of her when we are obliged to face—so unexpectedly, too—the necessity of giving her up?"

"It ought not to have been unexpected to you. Women generally see such things even before they exist."

"They must be very clever women, then," said Mrs. Middleton, with a laugh. "I am not a very clever woman, you know, and I am usually content with seeing them when they do exist. I cannot understand my blindness in this instance," she went on, shaking her head as if in rebuke of her own stupidity, "unless my state of false security was the reaction from the nervous suspicion with which I viewed all of Leslie's admirers when she first entered society. I thought every lamb a wolf then; and, when the wolf really came, I thought him a lamb."

"You might have known that this would come to pass some time, however."

"Of course I knew it; but I hoped—well, you know what I hoped. That is all over now," said she, sitting down, with a sigh; "and I suppose there is nothing for it but to allow her to marry the man with whom she has fallen in love."

"If you are laying that down as a general principle," said Mr. Middleton, "I must say that I disagree with you. Because Leslie falls in love with a man is no reason whatever for allowing her to marry him if he should chance to be an undesirable person."

"But Arthur Tyndale is not an undesirable person," said Mrs. Middleton, in a distinctly aggrieved tone.

"I did not say that he was," replied her husband. "It was only the general principle to which I objected. Girls are not exactly famous for wisdom of matrimonial choice."

"Foolish girls make foolish choices," said the lady, sententiously. "But not girls like our Leslie."

"Do you think our Leslie has made a very wise one?" asked Mr. Middleton, significantly.

"I am as sorry as possible that she has made any at all," was the quick reply; "but, as far as the choice itself is concerned, I do not think that it is possible to call it an unwise one. At least it would be difficult to find an objection to Arthur Tyndale. I know nothing whatever to be said against him." (This in a tone which left a decided impression that the speaker would have been glad if there had been something to say against him.)

"Nor for him!" added her husband, dryly. "It is a very great mistake to suppose that a character is admirable when it is merely made up of negatives," he went on, after a short pause. "There are positive virtues, as well as positive vices. Because young Tyndale has none of the last, is no earthly reason for taking for granted that of necessity he has all of the first. I don't like him!" he ended, shortly. "There's not the stuff in him I hoped to find in Leslie's husband."

"I think you underrate him," said Mrs. Middleton, in that tone of painful candor with which we bear unwilling testimony to the good name of a person whom privately we have strong reasons for disapproving.

"He is young, well-born, and wealthy people might well think us very unreasonable not to be satisfied; and yet I had so set my heart on Carl—"

"Confound Carl!" interrupted Mr. Middleton, irritably. It was not often that he was betrayed into so much heat of expression; but, as he flung his paper aside impatiently, it was impossible not to think that he would have liked to fling it at the head of the absent Carl. "What the fellow is doing I can't tell!" he went on, walking to the table and sitting down. "He certainly pays very little attention to my wishes or requests for his return."

"The loss is his!" said Mrs. Middleton and, as she drew herself up, her color rose.

"But the annoyance is ours!" returned her husband, shortly. "I shall have all the vexation of making a will, of dividing and deciding about my property— pshaw! Give me a cup of coffee, and let me get down to the bank and drive all this worry out of my head!"

The coffee, which had made its appearance by this time, was poured out, and, while Mr. Middleton received his cup, a door opened and closed in the upper regions of the house, a fresh young voice was heard singing several bars of a song, a pair of high French heels came with a quick patter down the staircase, the rustle of soft drapery swept across the hall, and into the breakfast-room entered a slender, graceful girl, with one of those fair, high-bred faces, which instinctively remind one of a white rose.

"Good - morning, uncle," she said, dropping a light kiss on the top of Mr. Middleton's head— where there was a considerable bald spot— as she passed on her way to her own seat. "How nice and cool you look!" she went on, scanning him with critical approval as she sat down. "I certainly do like to see men wear linen in summer. —Thanks, yes, auntie— coffee, if you please. I have seen you before this morning, have I not?"

"I was in your room an hour ago," said Mrs. Middleton; "but I scarcely fancied that you saw me. You seemed fast asleep just then."

"There you were mistaken," said Leslie. "I heard you ask Maria how I had slept as if Maria knew!"

"I was afraid you might have been feverish from having been caught in the rain yesterday afternoon."

"There was scarcely rain enough to wet a pocket-handkerchief," said the young lady, "and Mr. Tyndale insisted on our riding so fast that we did not have time to get wet. It was delightful, but rather breathless! I began to feel as if I might emulate the accomplished Dazzle, who could ride any thing, from a broomstick to a flash of lightning, you know."

"I suppose it did not occur to Mr. Tyndale that your horse might have taken fright and broken your neck," said Mr. Middleton, dryly.

"Perhaps he looked upon it in the light of a neck which he had a right to break," answered Leslie, composedly. "At least I had told him a short time before that he might have it if he chose."

"I don't think he need have been in quite such a haste for all that," retorted her uncle.  
"Time enough for murder after matrimony."

Leslie laughed— it is easy to laugh at even the poorest jest when one is young and happy, and the world seems absolutely over-flowing with sunshine— and when she laughed, she looked, if possible, prettier than before. Animation was especially becoming to her face, for it waked all manner of entrancing dimples around her mouth, deepened the delicate flush on her cheeks, and kindled a bright gleam in her soft gray eyes. She was a charmingly harmonious creature, with an aroma of unconscious refinement about her. Not a line-and-measure beauty, by any means. Not a woman who could defy criticism, or serve under any circumstances as a model for a sculptor. Many a painter, however, might have been glad of such a study as she made, sitting there in the fresh glory of her youth, with a ray of sunlight brightening the silken meshes of her brown hair, and touching with a pencil of light her pure white brow, over which a few light soft tresses

wandered free. "A born child of prosperity," almost any one would have said, looking at her, and yet although life had from her early childhood been a very fair and pleasant thing to Leslie Grahame she had not, strictly speaking, been born to the gifts of fortune which she had enjoyed. Her eyes had first opened upon a very different prospect indeed—the more common prospect of those thorny by-ways and toilsome paths of poverty which are intensified in bitterness by memories of gentle rearing and the consciousness of gentle birth. Her father—Mrs. Middleton's only brother—had been a cavalry-officer, who lost his life in a fight with the Comanches in Texas. Her mother was a weak and foolish woman, who, being little more than a girl at the time of this event, cried herself sick in the first two weeks of her "bereavement," then wiped away her tears with the facility of a child, and very soon married again in a manner calculated to draw down upon herself the condemnation of society and the indignant reprehension of all her friends. These friends, who had objected to her first husband on the score of that impecuniosity which seems to attend the profession of arms in all countries and at all times, felt themselves deeply outraged by this second choice, which quite dwarfed the foolish romance that had made a silly school-girl elope with a penniless soldier. Their remonstrances, however, were heeded as remonstrances usually are when those who utter them have only power to—remonstrate. The young widow persisted in bestowing her heart and hand upon a plausible, handsome adventurer, of whose antecedents no one knew any thing, and whose habits of life were notoriously disreputable. That he was an Irishman, a slight accent—it could scarcely have been called a brogue—betrayed to Anglo-Saxon ears. But, further than that, even gossip was unable to penetrate, for he was only temporarily living in America when he met Mrs. Grahame. Why he married *her* is one of the mysteries which are beyond the ken of men or angels to fathom; but it is likely that, with an interesting widow in deep crape, he associated some substantial expectations destined, if so, to vanish into the thinnest of thin air. Why she married *him*, requires no explanation, for she was one of those women who seem born to do foolish things from their cradles to their graves, and was, besides, of the large class to whom a husband is a simple necessity of life. Immediately after their marriage, Mr. Desmond (such was the gentleman's well-sounding name) took his wife abroad the continent of Europe being then, as now, the grand resort of all Bohemians of his class insisting, however, that she should leave behind the child of her first marriage. She made little demur to this peremptory demand. Mrs. Middleton, who had been married several years, was very glad to adopt the little waif, and, with a tempest of weak tears, the mother parted from her child—as it chanced, forever.

For, of course, she never returned. Two children were born abroad, and then, worn out by the vicissitudes of a wandering, shifting life, all prettiness gone from her face, all health from her body, all strength (if such a thing had ever existed) from her mind, the poor, faded wreck bowed her head and died. She had kept up a sort of straggling correspondence with little Leslie—to whom, in her bright, luxurious home, "mamma" was the dimmest of dim memories—but her other relations had long since dropped all communication with her, and there was no one to care particularly when a foreign letter sealed with black came to Mr. Middleton, in which Mr. Desmond informed him that Mrs. Desmond had died on a certain day of a certain month at Coblenz-on-the-Rhine. Mr. Middleton acknowledged the receipt of this information by a business-like letter, remarkable only for its brevity; and the result on Leslie's life consisted in the fact that, for several months, she was reluctantly compelled to wear black sashes with her white frocks.

By the time this young lady grew up, everybody had quite forgotten the poor, foolish woman safely laid to rest in her foreign grave. Miss Grahame was a beauty according to the not very high popular standard of beauty—an heiress, and a very bright, pleasant girl besides, so it was not wonderful that she made quite a success at her first appearance in society. It was not a success which diminished, either—as successes often do—when season after season rolled away, and the pretty belle remained certainly not unsought, yet assuredly unwon. Perhaps there was safety of heart and fancy in the multitude of her admirers; or perhaps she felt an obligation to

brighten, for a few years of her youth, the kind home that had sheltered her childhood. It is to her credit that Leslie laid much stress on the latter consideration; yet it is likely enough that, if she had ever been seriously "interested," as old-fashioned people say, this obligation would have shared the fate that such obligations mostly do when opposed to the master-passion of mankind. However this might be, the fact remained the same. Suitors came and suitors went, but Leslie shook her head and said them nay, until one came to whom the girl's heart surrendered with all the more abandon that it had held out stoutly for so long.

Why this desirable person, against whom nothing could be said, was not so fortunate as to secure the approval of the guardians as well as the heart of the lady, may be explained in the fact that his wooing and success had knocked over, like a house of cards, a very pretty little plan which the Middletons had erected for their own present and future satisfaction. Seeing Leslie remain fancy free so long, these good people had been tempted to think what a pleasant thing for them it would be if they could only keep her with them altogether, and, as the best means of attaining this desired end, they thought of one Carl Middleton—a nephew of the banker—who had been educated abroad, but was shortly expected home—who should, indeed, have been at home considerably before this time. Of course, he could not but fall in love with Leslie—so Mrs. Middleton argued, in the partial fondness of her heart—and, being a frank, pleasant young fellow, with his due share of the Middleton good looks, it was likely enough that Leslie might fall in love with him, in which case it was a long and happy vista that opened before the astute match-maker's eyes. It will be seen what a bomb-shell to the foundations of this castle in Spain Arthur Tyndale had proved; and also why Mr. and Mrs. Middleton were not properly grateful to Providence for the many worldly advantages that surrounded Miss Grahame's fortunate suitor.

After Mr. Middleton's last remark, there was silence round the breakfast-table for some time. They tried to look and seem as usual, but there was an uncomfortable sense of constraint about them. They each felt, in a different way, that the golden charm of home had been broken—how much or how little no one could tell that a jarring element had entered their life, and that, whatever the future might hold for them, the fair, serene past had ended yesterday. There never were people who, in their domestic life, were more at ease with each other, and it was strange to see how they hesitated just now—each seeming in doubt what to say. Finally, Mr. Middleton spoke again:

"I suppose, Leslie, that I shall see Tyndale some time this morning?"

"He said he would certainly see you," Leslie answered, coloring a little, but otherwise preserving that composure which she had been taught to observe as one of the chief duties of life.

"And what am I to tell him?" asked her uncle half jestingly, yet with a certain amount of tenderness in his keen, brown eyes.

"Just what you please, I am sure," answered Miss Grahame, quietly. "I told him yesterday all that mattered very much."

"So he merely comes to me as a matter of complimentary form?"

"Not exactly that. Of course, he knows that my consent is worth nothing without yours; but then he must also know that objection is out of the question as far as he is concerned. There is not a flaw to be found in Arthur," added the young lady, proudly.

"Well, that is going rather far," said her uncle. "Objection may be out of the question," he added, reluctantly, "but I would not advise you to make a demi-god of him on that account, my dear. Be content that he is a very clever young fellow, as men go—but with plenty of flaws, you may be sure, when you come to know him. And so" (his voice changing a little), "you are really going to leave us?—we are really to lose our little girl!"

"O uncle, don't—don't make me cry!" pleaded Leslie, with something like a gasp in her throat, and a tremulous, beseeching glance in her eyes. "I made up my mind this morning that I would not be sentimental or foolish, and that I would look at things from a practical, common-sense point of view. There is nothing whatever to be melancholy about. People are married every day."

"That is very true," said Mr. Middleton, "and, according to the same argument, a good many of them die, too; but somehow we don't get used to it."

"George!" cried his wife, "what a comparison!"

"I am trying to teach Leslie logic, my dear," said George. "You know I never succeeded in teaching it to you. It seems that it is a settled thing, then, that we are to kill the fatted calf," he went on rather hastily perhaps to do away with the impression of his last remark. "I hope, however, Tyndale doesn't mean to take possession of you at once, Leslie. He'll spare you to us for some time to come, eh?"

"I have not asked him any thing about it," answered Leslie; "but I shall not think of being married before the autumn. I" here she hesitated a minute "I have been thinking of something that I should like to ask you, uncle and you, aunt."

"We are all attention," said Mr. Middleton, elevating his eyebrows as he glanced up, for such a grave preface was very unlike Leslie.

"You may think it very foolish, and you may even think it very unreasonable," said Leslie, looking first at one and then at the other, "but, indeed, I have considered it seriously, and I should like it very much, if you have no objection."

"My dear," said Mrs. Middleton, "you know that you could scarcely ask any thing which we would not be glad to grant. But, of course, we cannot know what you want unless you tell us."

"No—of course not," said Leslie, laughing nervously. "The fact is," she continued, "I am afraid you will disapprove of my request; but, indeed, I have set my heart on it. How stupid I am!" she went on with a burst of impatience. "I have made you think all sorts of things, when all that I want is to ask you if I may invite one of my sisters to come and see me."

It certainly sounded like a moderate request, yet one more astonishing, and, in fact, more dismaying, could scarcely have been made. Mr. and Mrs. Middleton looked at each other silently, while Leslie—after a pause—continued:

"You see I have thought so often of poor mamma and of the girls—my sisters—whom I have never known. Only the other day I was reading over mamma's letters, and my heart smote me to think what my life is and what theirs has doubtless been. Of course, I could do nothing for them while I had no home of my own; but—but I shall soon have that, and I should like to know something of them, so as to see how best to benefit them."

"No home of your own, Leslie!" repeated Mrs. Middleton. "It seems to me that is a hard thing to say to us."

"Dearest aunt, don't you understand?" said the girl, earnestly. "What I mean is, that I could not ask you to take them as you took me. You would have thought it only kindness to me to refuse. But, you see, my engagement seems such a good reason to offer for asking one of them to come, that I thought you would not mind it for a little while. We could see what she is like, you know, and—and if she is nice, I am sure it would be very pleasant for her to live with me until she married, or something of that kind."

Again Mr. and Mrs. Middleton looked at each other—this time despairingly. They both saw plainly the nature of the plan which this foolish girl had been building, and they both saw, also, the hopelessness of opposing it. Still, in their different ways, each of them tried a little argument.

"The idea is very natural, and does you credit, my dear," said Mr. Middleton, "but I think you ought to consider that you may be preparing a great deal of trouble for yourself, by opening any closer communication with such—such people as those."

"What kind of trouble?" asked Leslie.

Mr. Middleton looked annoyed, and pushed his cup rather sharply away.

"I thought you knew that your mother's second husband was an adventurer," he said.  
"Neither he nor his daughters are fit associates for you."

"But I don't want to associate with him," answered Leslie, simply; "and, as for his daughters, they are my sisters. I can't alter that fact, however much I neglect them. And their father's character makes me all the more anxious to do something for them."

"But you may do yourself great injury," urged Mrs. Middleton. "People who remember your mother's second marriage will talk very disagreeably; and Mr. Tyndale may very naturally object to such a connection."

Leslie drew herself up like a queen—her fair skin flushing with a tide of blood, which well deserved the poetic epithet of "generous."

"You are very kind to think of me as you always have done, auntie," she said; "but I care nothing for what other people may say; and, as for Arthur—he will not be likely to marry me unless he is willing to receive my sisters into his house."

Mrs. Middleton moved uneasily. Nothing could have been more trying to her than to see such an idea as this take possession of Leslie's mind.

"My dear," she said, gravely, "can you not trust your uncle and myself when we assure you that these are not people with whom you should burden your life? You have no idea what manner of man your mother's second husband was; and these girls are not only his daughters, but they have been his associates, *and the associates of his associates*, for years. Leslie! promise me to give up such a foolish scheme."

"But," repeated Leslie, "they are my sisters. If I can save them from such a life, ought I not to do it?"

"Not to the injury of your own life," answered her aunt, quickly.

"My life is made," the girl returned, with the rash confidence of youth. "They might annoy, but they could not injure me; and annoyance I am ready to risk."

"But, my dear child—"

"There! there!" broke in Mr. Middleton, impatiently, "don't you see that she has set her heart on it, and that no words are going to do any good? You've spoiled her, Mildred, now take the consequences, and write and ask the girl to come. I suppose you don't want both of them?" (looking interrogatively at Leslie).

"No," she answered; "I have thought it over, and decided that I should prefer the elder—the one who writes to me occasionally, and is nearest my age. Her name is Norah—the other is Kate."

"And it is Norah you want?" asked Mr. Middleton, in exactly the tone he might have employed if he had said, "And it is the bay horse you want?"

"Yes, Norah, if she will come."

"There is very little doubt of that," he said, grimly. "I only hope you may not wish the thing undone after it is irrevocably done," he went on, as he rose to leave the room. "But you can write for her, and your aunt will write, too, no doubt. Meanwhile, I will go and read my paper till Tyndale comes. I hope he won't prove a laggard in his wooing, for I have an appointment at the bank in an hour."

## CHAPTER II.

"This is her picture as she was:  
It seems a thing to wonder on,  
As though mine image in the glass  
Should tarry when myself am gone."

MR. TYDALE did not prove a laggard in his wooing. Before Mr. Middleton had finished his paper—in fact, before he had succeeded in dismissing Leslie's troublesome request from his mind, so as to satisfactorily master the rates of exchange and the political intelligence—the library-door opened, and a gentleman was ushered in by Robert, who knew the gentleman's

business quite as well as he knew it himself. He was a handsome young man of six- or seven-and-twenty, fair-haired, and silken-mustached, with a complexion like a girl's, violet eyes, and a slender, elegant figure, which he carried with remarkable grace.

Mr. Middleton met him cordially. Because Arthur Tyndale was not the husband whom he would have chosen for his pretty Leslie was no reason why the fortunate suitor should not receive at his hands all the consideration which was his due—and a good deal of consideration was esteemed in society Mr. Tyndale's due. He not only represented one of the oldest names in the State, but he had come into a large property at his majority, which, as yet, had been very moderately converted into ducks and drakes. Tempted, as few men are tempted, by the union of perfect liberty, wealth, and good looks, he had preserved a very clear record—the record of a thorough-bred gentleman and an unexceptionably "good fellow"—in the face of the world; and, altogether, as Mr. Middleton had already admitted, with some degree of reluctance, there was nothing with which the most carping guardian could possibly have found fault. No one was better aware of these facts than the gentleman himself, in consequence of which his manner was perhaps a little too well assured in preferring his suit. Not that he exhibited any offensive self-confidence—he had too much high-breeding for that—but he was not entirely successful in wholly banishing a certain consciousness of safety, which was a trifle irritating to his companion. All objection being out of the question, however, the matter was soon settled, due congratulations were uttered, hands were shaken, and then Mr. Tyndale was at liberty to betake himself to the drawing room, where Leslie was awaiting him.

She was standing when he entered by an open window, looking absently out over a green square, in the tall trees of which a multitude of birds were singing, while children played and nurses gossiped along the shaded walks, and a stream of pedestrians passed continually through the wide iron gates. Hearing his step, she turned, with something even brighter than the May sunshine on her face.

"Is it all settled?" she asked, smiling, as he approached; for she knew perfectly well what his answer would be.

"It is all settled," he answered, taking her into his arms and kissing her. "You are mine, Leslie!"

"Am I?" asked Leslie, drawing back, as if half inclined to dispute the assertion. But then she laughed and yielded to his eager embrace. "I believe I am," she said, answering her own question with a slight sigh.

"Are you sorry for it?" he asked, quickly.

"Ah, Leslie, surely not! Surely you believe that nobody has ever loved you half so well as I! Wait until I have proved it to you; wait until I have put it to the test and made you believe it by other signs than mere words; and then tell me, if you dare, that you are sorry for having come to me!"

"Did I say I was sorry?" demanded Leslie. "You should not take things so much for granted. If I sighed a little it was only because my freedom is the best thing I have ever possessed; and I don't like the thought of giving it up."

"Do you think you will be giving it up to me?" he asked, smiling. "I think time will prove that you have only gained another slave."

But, like a true daughter of Eve, Leslie shook her head.

"Suppose I don't want another?" she said. "I have had slaves enough. By way of variety, I think I should like to be domineered over a little. Just a little, Arthur; not enough to be disagreeable."

"I can safely promise that it will be exceedingly little," said Tyndale, laughing. "You were born queen-regnant, my Leslie, and so I think you will die. At least"—shrugging his shoulders—"I am sure I have not the wherewithal to make a tyrant even of the mildest type. My constitutional indolence rather inclines me to prefer being henpecked. It would be a pleasure to be put in leading-strings by such fingers as these."

He lifted her small, white, lissome hands as he spoke, but before he could carry them to his lips Leslie took them into her own possession, and, placing one on each of his shoulders, repeated, with a very gracious sweetness, the charming words in which Portia makes her self-surrender:

"... the full sum of me  
Is sum of something; which, to term in gross,  
Is an unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpractised:  
Happy in this, she is not yet so old  
But she may learn; and happier than this,  
She is not bred so dull but she can learn;  
Happiest of all is, that her gentle spirit  
Commits itself to yours to be directed,  
As from her lord, her governor, her king."

What Tyndale's answer was, it is not difficult to imagine. The lips which had uttered these words were very near his own, and he was very much in love. In truth, it was a new side of her character which Leslie was showing him just now—a more charming side, he thought, than he had seen yet. She had not been won without difficulty—this fair, proud maiden—she was not a woman to drop like a ripe cherry into any man's hand; but he felt more than repaid for all that she had cost him as the fair, graceful head went down on his shoulder.

But it is scarcely worth while to dwell on this part of the interview. Everybody agrees in considering "engaged" people very tiresome. To the general mind there seems something especially stupid in felicity which is accomplished and secure. It is likely that we might even weary of *Romeo* and *Juliet*, of *Max* and *Thekla*, if the course of true love had, in either case, run smooth. The reader can afford to be patient, however, with the bit of tame happiness undisturbed by doubt, untortured by agony—which has just been sketched. As far as one, at least, was concerned, it was very nearly the last of cloudless sunshine.

For, before long, Leslie began to bestow confidence and claim sympathy from her lover, on the score of her late discussion with her uncle and aunt. The matter was laid in all its bearings before him, and then she asked pathetically if he thought she had been unreasonable or unkind in pressing her point.

Mr. Tyndale's reply was prompt and satisfactory. He agreed with her in every thing—though his sympathy partook largely of the nature of a blind faith, since he evidently had conceived only the vaguest possible idea of the whole question. Step-sisters, were they?—no, half-sisters. Well, at all events, she was perfectly right to do all she could for them. As for their father being an adventurer—what did that have to do with the matter? A great many very good people had disreputable fathers; and, indeed, adventurers were sometimes amazingly pleasant fellows—Mr. Tyndale could certify to that from personal knowledge. Besides, were not their friends the Middletons just a trifle narrow-minded and old-fashioned in their ideas? Perhaps the gentleman in question only lived rather a fast life, as gentlemen often did abroad and at home, too, for that matter.

Leslie was much comforted by these liberal opinions; but over the latter theory she shook her head.

"I am afraid the father is certainly a very dreadful person," she said; "but still, his daughters are my sisters, and I am so glad—so very glad that you agree with me about them."

"Of course I agree with you," said Mr. Tyndale, secretly a good deal bored, for he had not come to talk over disagreeable family questions with his pretty lady-love. "It is never good style to cut one's relations unless they are absolutely disgraceful. Now, these may be very charming girls, despite the fact of their father being a *chevalier d'industrie*—for, I take it, from what you

say, that is just about what he is. Fortunately, he is not related to you, so it will be easy enough to drop him."

"Oh, certainly," answered Leslie, hastily—having never had the least intention of taking him up in the first instance. "It is such a relief to find that you are not prejudiced, as some men would have been, Arthur," she went on. "Aunt Mildred really made me quite uneasy. She said you would be sure to object to such a connection."

"My darling, a man who has seen as much of the world as I have has no prejudices," said Mr. Tyndale, superbly. "And as to objecting to the connection—I am afraid I should not be sufficiently orthodox to object to Old Nick, if I had to take him along with you."

"I am very much obliged to you for the association of ideas."

"I only wanted to put it as forcibly as possible. It would be hard lines if any of us were accountable for our relations much less for anybody whom our relations may take it into their heads to marry! There never was a man more cursed with disagreeable relations than I have been," he pursued, frankly. "Except Max, I really don't think there's a decent one among the whole rank and file."

"But none of them are *chevaliers d'industrie*?"

"No—they rather go in for the heavy, respectable line. But I have seen a good many *chevaliers d'industrie* whom I would take, ten to one, so far as agreeable qualities go."

"What a pity your friends could not hear you!" said Leslie, laughing. "Disagreeable relations must be exceedingly unpleasant, however. Fortunately, I have never been tried by them. I often wonder what my sisters are like," she went on, musingly. "They may be nice—mamma came of very nice people, you know. Then Norah's photograph is certainly very pretty. Don't you feel prepossessed toward pretty people? I always do. *A propos*, I must show you her photograph, and see what you think of it."

"Never mind just now," said Tyndale, who, being comfortable, felt indolent. "I don't mean to be ungrateful but you can show it to me any time, you know; and I care little for the photograph of any woman under the sun, while I have you beside me."

"That is very complimentary," said Leslie; "but still I want you to see Norah's likeness. You are one of the few people whose judgment I can trust with regard to beauty; and I think she is beautiful."

"Is she?" asked he, carelessly. "Well, if it must be—where is the picture?"

"It is hanging in my room. Ring the bell, and I will send for it."

Tyndale rang the bell; but, after a message had been dispatched by Robert to Miss Grahame's maid, he entered a feeling protest against the proceeding.

"Cannot this wait?" he asked. "It is not often that Fate gives us such a happy hour as this—why should we bring the every-day things of life to jar upon it? Why can't we fancy ourselves in paradise or Arcadia, where sisters and step-fathers never come?"

Some women would have been offended by the frankness of this speech; but Leslie only laughed—laughed and extended her hand to Maria, who entered at that moment with a photograph mounted and framed in velvet and gilt.

"I think the truth is, that you are terribly bored," she said, after the maid was gone. "Still, if you desire it, we will not talk of the matter any more. But you must look at Norah's picture for all that."

She held up the picture as she spoke, and bending slightly—for he was rather near-sighted—Arthur Tyndale saw the face stamped thereon with what Mr. Collins calls "the stern justice of photography."

It was not a very stern justice in this instance; nor was it a face which, having seen once, any man would be likely to forget—and Tyndale, as it chanced, had cause to know it well. He was a man of the world, and, according to the fashion of his class, had himself pretty well in hand against awkward surprises; but the awkwardness—the terrible unexpectedness—of this, threw him completely off his guard.

"Good Heaven!" he said, before he knew what he was about. "Why, it is Norah Desmond!"

"What! do you know her?" cried Leslie, in uncontrollable amazement. "Of course, it is Norah who else should it be? But do you know her, Arthur?"

"Is *she* your sister?" asked Tyndale, hurriedly—his fair skin several shades fairer than it had been the minute before. "*She*—this girl?"

"Of course, she is my sister," repeated Leslie, more and more astonished. "Do you know her? have you seen her? You must have seen her to recognize her picture. But where was it? How strange it seems that you should know her!"

"Yes very strange!" said he, with lips that slightly quivered. "But coincidences happen very often, you know, and—and you are sure there is no mistake, Leslie?" he cried, again. "You are sure this is the likeness of your sister?"

"What possible mistake could there be?" asked Leslie. "Norah sent me the picture as her likeness. I have never seen her, however. If you have, you ought to know whether or not it is she."

"Yes, it is she," he answered—looking at the pictured face before him, and, hating its brilliant fairness with all his heart, he still could not deny that it was she.

"But you have not told me yet how you met her or when or where!" said Leslie, eagerly. "Of course, it must have been abroad; but tell me all about it. How strange it seems that you should have seen her and not know that she was my sister! Tell me all about it, Arthur!"

"Don't be impatient," said he. "I—I will tell you." Then he stopped a second, as if to clear his throat, and reviewed the situation in his mind. It was rather a desperate one; and, seeing only a single avenue of escape, he determined to lie, with a readiness of resource which would have done credit to the hero of a French play. "It does not follow that I know Miss Desmond because I recognize her likeness," he went on. "Any man who has been to Baden-Baden, or to Homburg, might do that. She is somewhat of a celebrity at all those places."

The significance of his tone was more marked than his words. The bright blood sprang into Leslie's face, and her eyes opened on him with a look for which he was not prepared—a look that almost made him sorry for having implied so much.

"What do you mean?" asked she, somewhat haughtily. "I confess I do not understand."

"Don't look that way, my darling," he answered, hurriedly. "I only mean—that that Miss Desmond is a very fast woman. And that I was—that I am—exceedingly surprised to find that she is your sister."

"Norah! are you sure it is Norah?" cried Leslie. And then—as she, too, felt that the face before her was not one to be mistaken—"O Arthur, how sorry, how very sorry I am! But think what a training the poor girl has had!" the eager, loyal voice went on. "No mother, and such a father! Is it any wonder that she should be fast?"

"I do not think that I have expressed any wonder at the fact," said Mr. Tyndale, quite dryly.

"I am so sorry!" Leslie repeated. For a minute she could say nothing more. Then she went on quickly—too much preoccupied to notice his face very closely—"I am so sorry, too, that you did not know her! You could have told me so much about her; and I feel as if I should like to know something before she comes."

"Before she comes!" Tyndale could do no more than utter just that. "Before she comes, Leslie! Do you mean that you are still thinking of bringing that girl here—after what I have told you?"

His tone took Leslie by surprise, and did not please her. She had a spirit of her own, and Arthur Tyndale saw a flash of it then.

"Why do you suppose that I should not be thinking of it?" she asked. "I have told you that Norah is my sister, and that I mean to ask her to come and visit me. You have told me nothing concerning her which need alter that intention."

"I have told you that she has a very fast reputation," he said, quickly—almost sharply.

"And when did a fast reputation become such a crime in your eyes?" she inquired.

He colored a little. Only a few weeks before, he had been flirting desperately—in the vain hope of making Leslie jealous with a pretty widow, whose escapades were so many and so flagrant that she required all the bolstering of wealth and family position to maintain a foothold in society. A ready reply rose to his lips, however—a true enough reply, too, since of the many men who like to flirt with fast women, only a small proportion like to marry them.

"It was always a crime when it came in contact with *you*" he said. "If there is one thing I desire on earth, it is to keep such women at arm's length from you, Leslie. But it will be impossible to do that if you persist in asking this sister of yours here. Leslie, my darling, trust me in the matter, and promise not to do it!"

If Leslie had been a shade less stanch in her resolve, he would probably have succeeded then, for his handsome eyes pleaded even more powerfully than his words. But the girl was true as steel to her generous purpose, and she did not yield.

"Arthur, dear, don't tempt me," she said. "Somehow I feel as if I *must* do this as if I must give Norah at least one chance in life. You can't tell how much I want to do it if only for poor mamma's sake."

"You owe a vast deal to the mother who left you behind her without a regret," he said, bitterly.

"I do not think she left me without a regret," answered Leslie, flushing. "But, even if it were so, it would not alter my duty."

"That is to say, your inclination."

"I am sorry you think so," she replied, half proudly; "but you are mistaken. If I consulted my inclination, I should do exactly what you wish. Even now"—then she stopped and hesitated a minute—"tell me frankly, Arthur," she went on, "you are a man and should know best. The charge you have brought against my sister is a very indefinite one. Is there any reason why she should not be invited to my uncle's house?"

She faced him with her clear, candid eyes, and seemed to demand an answer as straightforward as her question. It is humiliating to confess, but, with every inclination to continue the course which he had so gallantly opened, Mr. Tyndale found himself compelled to speak the truth.

"There is no reason," he said, "unless you consider what I have already mentioned as a reason."

But Leslie, as if relieved, shook her head and laughed.

"How terribly strait-laced you have become all at once!" she said. "It is such a sudden thing that I think it must be an acute attack, and I can trust Norah to cure you. Poor Norah! Why is that so terrible in her, which is so charming in Mrs. Sandford?"

Tyndale muttered something not very complimentary to Mrs. Sanford under his breath. Then he made one final effort.

"Leslie," he said, gravely, "do you mean to say that you are going to disregard the first—the very first—request which I have ever made to you?"

Leslie looked at him with a sudden keenness in her soft gray eyes which he did not quite fancy. She was not by any means a fond, foolish girl to be hoodwinked at a man's pleasure, but a clever woman, who had not lived twenty-two years in the world for nothing. It struck her just now that there was an undue amount of eagerness and interest in Tyndale's manner.

"You force me to believe that there is something more in this than you have told me, Arthur," she said. "You have not heretofore counted fastness so terrible a crime that it alone should influence you so strongly against my sister. Again I ask—in fact, I demand—why you object so much to her coming?"

"I have told you why," he answered. "You need not fear that I am concealing any thing from you. If you do not trust me—"

"It is not that I do not trust you—trust you fully and entirely," she interrupted, with a sincerity which made him wince. But you think of me, Arthur, while I think of Norah—poor Norah, who has never had a chance out of that wild Bohemia where she was born. I cannot give up the hope of doing her some good, even"—she paused just here—"even if the issue involved giving up *you*."

"You could face that alternative with due philosophy, perhaps," said he, bitterly. Then he added suddenly and passionately: "But it will never involve that, Leslie—never, so help me God, so far as I am concerned!"

It was a strange, vehement oath to take in such a connection, and sounded almost as if he wished to bind himself by something which even himself could not break.

### CHAPTER III.

"Ay, there are some good things in life that fall  
not away with the rest,  
And, of all best things upon earth, I hold that a  
faithful friend is the best.  
For woman, Will, is a thorny flower: it breaks,  
and we bleed and smart;  
The blossom falls at the fairest, and the thorn  
runs into the heart.  
And woman's love is a bitter fruit; and, however  
he bite it, or sip,  
There's many a man has lived to curse the taste  
of that fruit on his lip.  
But never was any man yet, as I ween, be he  
whosoever he may,  
That has known what a true friend is, Will, and  
wished that knowledge away."

ON the evening of the same day, Mr. Tyndale dined at his club. This was not a sufficiently remarkable occurrence to be worthy of note, if it had not chanced that he had been invited to dine with the Middletons, and had declined, on the score of a previous engagement. Yet, at seven o'clock he was sitting down to dinner quite alone—facing rather moodily a deserted dining-room and a solitary servant; for most diners at the club had vanished before this time. Although he was alone—and had finished his dinner, too—the table where he sat bore another cover, at which he now and then glanced with an expression half vexed, half expectant. Plainly he had anticipated a companion, and quite as plainly this companion had not arrived.

"Is there no sign of Captain Tyndale yet?" he asked impatiently of the servant, who, hearing a carriage stop at the door, made a short excursion of curiosity to the window.

"Captain Tyndale has just arrived, and is coming in, sir," was the somewhat unexpected reply; and, as Arthur glanced up quickly, the person thus indicated entered the room. A tall, handsome man, with clear, bold features, mustaches so long that they looked as if they ought to be very much in his way, dark eyes more keen than brilliant, a close crop of dark hair, and the weather-beaten look of one on whom many suns had shone and many rains fallen. He came forward, and, sitting down in the vacant chair opposite Tyndale, laughed good-humoredly.

"I am amazingly punctual, am I not?" he said. "Is that what you are looking so glum about?—or is' it the heat? By Jove! it is infernally warm! I never felt any thing like it out of Algiers."

"When one asks a man to dine at seven o'clock," said Tyndale, "one does not usually expect him at half-past that hour."

"I am very sorry," said the other, apologetically. "I really meant to be on time—but what can one do against Fate? I met Mrs. Sandford in her pony-phaeton an hour ago, and she insisted on taking me round the park. I whipped up famously, I can tell you, when I found what the hour was; but it hasn't been two minutes since she dropped me at the door."

"Oh, if it was a case of *la belle veuve*, I can readily excuse you," said Tyndale, with a laugh. "She is one in a thousand for making a man forget time. — Have claret, Max? — Handsome, isn't she?"

"Thanks—yes," said Max, alluding to the claret. "Well, no I don't think I should call her particularly handsome," he said, alluding to Mrs. Sandford. "Her complexion is good, and she has a great deal of style—not much else, that I can perceive."

"That is half the battle."

"Of course—with a certain class of men. Not with you and me, Hal."

Max Tyndale had called his cousin "Hal" ever since they were boys, for no earthly reason that any one could discover, except that it was not his name. He looked up now and laughed, raising his glass of iced claret to his lips.

"Not with me, certainly," said Tyndale. "Still, she is a pretty woman, and very good company, as the phrase goes."

"Charmingly free and easy company, at any rate," said Max, dryly. "We advanced toward intimacy with seven-league boots this evening. It is convenient, at least, to meet a woman who takes all the trouble of making acquaintance off one's hands. She told me all about herself with engaging frankness; and asked so much about my affairs, that I really anticipated her inquiring how much a year I spend on cigars."

"Probably she did not take sufficient interest in that subject."

"So I supposed, from the fact that she did not ask. She made up for the omission, however, by inquiries sufficiently minute concerning you."

"That was kind of her," said Tyndale, in a tone of only half-veiled contempt.

"So I thought—considering all things! She was particularly anxious to know if you are engaged to Miss Grahame."

"And you told her?"

"That I knew absolutely nothing of your affairs."

"She didn't believe you, Max."

"No, I don't suppose she did," said Max, philosophically. "Women rarely do believe the truth. That was good advice Satan gave Festus—you remember it, don't you?"

"I can't say that I do," answered the other, carelessly. "If I had been able to catch a glimpse of you any time last night or to-day," he went on, "you might have gratified Mrs. Sandford's curiosity by letting her know that I *am* engaged to Miss Grahame."

Max Tyndale started, changed color—a fact which was apparent even through his bronzed skin—and looked keenly at his cousin.

"Is that a fact, Hal?" he said.

"Yes, it is a fact," Arthur answered. "Do you remember that I had an engagement to ride with her yesterday afternoon? Well, we went, and before we got back the matter was settled."

"I knew, of course, that it was coming," said Max, looking at his claret. "But somehow I did not expect it quite so soon. Things always come unexpectedly, though, don't they? By Jove!" (with a slight laugh), "how Mrs. Sandford would have been astonished if I had been able to give her the news!"

"You take it coolly," said Arthur, a little piqued.

"*Parbleu!* my dear fellow, how else should I take it—especially when you set me such a good example?" said the other, opening his dark eyes quickly. "Rhapsodize a little, and then I shall know how to be a little more effusive."

"Nonsense!" said Arthur, shortly. "Whatever a man feels, you know that, if he has a grain of sense, he *never* rhapsodizes. I don't care a fig for your effusion; but you might acknowledge that the man whom Leslie Grahame accepts is somewhat luckier than the most of his fellows."

"That is easily acknowledged," said the other, heartily. "I congratulate you honestly on your luck! In all my wanderings about the world, I have never seen a more charming woman than Leslie Grahame."

"I think she is charming," said Arthur. "My opinion just now is not worth very much—being that of a man in love—but I remember how much her grace and refinement struck me when I met her first. I could sooner cut my throat than marry a fast woman or a flirt!" he added, suddenly, and, as it seemed, savagely.

Max shrugged his shoulders. He supposed his cousin was thinking of Mrs. Sandford.

"They serve very well to pass the time," he said. "One would not think of comparing them with such a woman as Miss Grahame, though."

"Leslie suits me exactly," said Tyndale. "I really never expected to find a woman who would suit me half so well. Without being beautiful, she is exceedingly pretty. Without being intellectual, she is clever. Without being an angel, she is amiable; and without being a vixen, she is high-spirited. — What are you laughing at, Max?"

"Excuse me," said Max. "It only struck me, my good fellow that if you had said at once, 'She is perfection,' it would have shortened the matter."

"But she is *not* perfection, nor, thank God, likely to be!" said Arthur, irritably. "Why do you misunderstand me? I am not rhapsodizing like a fool—I am telling you sanely and sensibly why Leslie Grahame suits me better than any other woman could. Even you—who are not in love with her—can't say that I exaggerate."

"I don't say it," answered the other, slightly blushing. "I think you are perfectly right. I think Leslie Grahame is all that you have said and more besides!"

"Thank you!" said Tyndale, gratefully. "Well, acknowledging all this, ask yourself if it is not the devil's own luck which puts my possession of it in such jeopardy that a day—an hour—may part me from Leslie Grahame forever!"

Captain Tyndale was in the act of filling his glass, but he put it down to look at his cousin. Had the wine mounted to his head? The suspicion crossed Max's mind, but the eyes which met his own, though rather gloomy, were perfectly sober.

"You think I am jesting," Arthur said, as he met his glance. "You are mistaken. I am in earnest—so earnest that I mean to make a clean breast of every thing, and ask your advice concerning the cursed predicament in which I find myself."

"All right," said Captain Tyndale, falling into the familiar phrase half mechanically—for he was strangely puzzled by Arthur's tone and manner. "Will you fill your glass? No? Then let us go out on the balcony and smoke a cigar. We can talk at our leisure there; and I confess I am stifling here."

"It *is* hot," said the other, loosening his cravat with a jerk. "I never felt such weather in May before. At least, there's darkness and fresh air here," he went on, stepping out on the balcony of which his cousin had spoken. "Bring a chair out, Max, and let us be comfortable. Have you any engagement?"

"None of any importance," answered Max, coming out laden with a chair. "I think my lionhood—is that expression correct?—we say bellehood, you know—must be over. I have only received about half a dozen invitations this week."

"It is the season which is over," said Tyndale, striking a match and lighting his cigar. "People are getting languid with the warm weather—even too languid to lionize a captain of chasseurs who won the cross of the Legion in Algeria and a broken head at Gravelotte."

"Stuff!" said the captain of chasseurs, lighting his cigar in turn.

It may have been stuff, but it was true, nevertheless. Max Tyndale—who had served for several years in the French army—deserved a great deal of credit that his head had not been

wholly turned by the amount of lionizing which society had showered on him during the season now closing. Of course it was not only because he had received the Cross of the Legion in Algiers, or that he had distinguished himself by so much personal gallantry during the Franco - Prussian War, that he had won his grade where a soldier likes best to win it— on the field of battle. These things make a man respected among men, and, in a degree, admired among women, but they do not of themselves win for him that capricious homage of society which may be despised by the wise, but the subtle flattery of which even the wisest are not always able to withstand. There must be other gifts— personal gifts— to make the hero of battle-fields also a hero in drawing-rooms. These gifts Max Tyndale possessed at least, in a measure. He was handsome, sufficiently accomplished, and unmistakably thorough- bred, besides which he had that graceful ease of manner— especially with women— which some men bear like a seal of distinction; and yet there was nothing of the carpet-knight about him. In truth, the principal reason why he had been little spoiled by the flattery and attention so freely paid him, rested in the fact that he cared absolutely nothing for any triumph which society could give. His heart was in sterner conflicts, and bent on more tangible rewards. Ambition was his mistress at present, and she left him little leisure or thought for any other.

With regard to worldly circumstances, there was a great difference between the two cousins. Arthur Tyndale had inherited, as sole heir, the accumulated wealth of several generations. Max had his pay, and perhaps a few hundreds besides— certainly nothing more. It is doubtful, however, if this difference weighed for a moment in the thoughts of either. They were not men to think or care for such a barrier. The same blood beat in their veins, and, apart from kindred ties, they liked each other sincerely, so it mattered very little that one was a millionaire and the other a mere soldier of fortune. Whatever their other faults, wealth in their eyes had none of the glamour with which more vulgar natures regard it. "Every thing is as it should be," Max told his cousin once. "You are the head of the house— I am only a 'cadet.' Don't think that I envy you an acre of your land, or a centime of your fortune. On the contrary, I am heartily glad that there is somebody to keep up the old name in due state. We're both Tyndales—that is enough for us."

It had been enough to draw them together very warmly when they had met a few years before— it had been enough, also, to bring Max on a furlough to America, when he was sick in body, mind, and heart, after the failure of the French cause. Arthur's almost affectionate kindness, the petting of women, and the liking of men, had, however, gone very far toward enabling him to recover his old tone. As he sat opposite Tyndale at the dinner-table, which they had just quitted, he had not looked as if his hopes or thoughts had in any sense gone into exile at Chiselhurst, or kept anxious watch with M. Thiers over the oftentimes-born republic.

Considering that they were in the heart of a busy city, the street which the two young men overlooked from their balcony was rather a quiet one. Few pedestrians passed, only now and then a carriage; gas-lamps shone through the heavy foliage of green trees, and the serene starlight was able to assert itself quite well. The club-house was blazing with gas, but somewhat empty. Now and then came the clink of billiard-balls, or the sound of voices; but there was little to remind them of the neighborhood of others.

"I am all attention," Max at last suggested, when he found that his cousin kept silence after some time had passed.

Even then, Tyndale did not speak immediately. He took his cigar from his lips, and knocked off the ashes before he said:

"Of course it is a woman!"

"So I supposed," said the other, coolly. Then, after a pause, "Has it any thing to do with the pretty widow?"

"If you mean Mrs. Sandford," said Tyndale, contemptuously, "I should think you could tell for yourself that she is not the kind of woman a man ever gets into serious trouble about."

"There is still another, then!" said Max. "Upon my word, you would make a good

Turk, Hal! Suppose you emigrate to Constantinople—or perhaps Salt Lake might serve your purpose, since it is nearer home!"

"This is no jesting matter," said Tyndale, half vexed. "If you can keep serious, Max, for ten minutes, I wish you would. Do you remember—when I was in Paris two years ago—hearing me speak of a girl I had met at Baden? An Irish girl. Norah Desmond was her name."

"Really, my dear fellow, you spoke of so many girls," said Max, in a puzzled tone, "I am not sure that I remember this special one. What about her?"

"You must remember her," said the other, pettishly. "You never heard me speak of any other as I spoke of her, for I was a confounded fool about her just then. She was certainly the prettiest woman I saw abroad, as well as the most fascinating."

"I think I do remember something about an Irish girl," said Captain Tyndale, after a pause. "Her father was a sort of Robert Macaire, wasn't he?"

"Exactly! A more disreputable person you can't conceive; but you might have thought him a crown prince, from the way his daughter carried herself. She had the pride of an archduchess, and the temper of the devil!"

"An interesting combination!" said the captain of chasseurs, dryly.

"By Jove, you might have said so if you had seen her!" answered the other, with sudden enthusiasm. "I would match her against any woman on the Continent for turning a man's head in the shortest possible time—if she had a mind to do it."

"She seems to have had a mind to turn yours."

"I think she had," said he, coolly, "and she succeeded—after a fashion. We had a fine flirtation for a month or two, and, when at last I was obliged to come home, I should be afraid to say to how much or how little I bound myself."

"That's unlucky!" said Max, still speaking very dryly.

"It's the devil's own luck!" repeated his cousin, fiercely—for, it is astonishing how people anathematize luck, or the devil, or any other convenient abstraction, when the consequences of their own deeds begin to be unpleasantly felt.

"She is not likely to trouble you, though—is she?" said Max. "A woman like that would be very apt to keep her distance—even if the Atlantic was not between you."

"But the trouble exactly is, that the Atlantic will not be between us very long," said Arthur, gloomily. "Max, imagine if you can, what I felt to-day when I heard that Norah Desmond is Leslie Graham's sister!"

"What!"

"There is no possible doubt about it; and she—Leslie—has written for her to come here!"

"The devil!" said Captain Tyndale.

"I think it must be the devil—and all his fiends to boot!" responded the other, grimly.

There was a minute's silence before Max recovered himself enough to speak.

"You are sure this is not a jest, Arthur?" he said, then. "I confess I scarcely understand it. How could Miss Grahame have a sister of whom you never heard?"

"That is easily explained," Tyndale answered—and he explained it in a few words—after which he added: "On my soul, Max, I have not an idea what to do. The whole affair looks to me desperate. Turning it over in my mind, as I have been doing all day, I see not the least clew out of the difficulty."

"Stop a minute," said Max, "and let me make it clear in my own mind. I had not a thought it was so serious as this, or I should have paid more attention. In the first place, are you engaged to the girl?"

"To Norah? I suppose I was engaged to her when I left Europe."

"And you have never broken it off?"

"Well—no." Then, after a pause, "You see it was this way: I came home in the autumn of '69, with an understanding that I was to go back for her the next spring. I was very much in

love, of course, and kept up a correspondence for some months— confound it, Max, no doubt she has every one of those letters yet!"

"She must be a fool if she has not. Never mind the letters— go on."

"That winter I met Leslie Grahame—I had not been here for years before, you know—and, from the very first, I saw she suited me as no woman ever had suited me before. I had been a mad fool about Norah Desmond, but I knew all the time she was no wife for me— setting aside the unpleasant fact of her disgraceful father."

"A very unpleasant fact, I should think!" commented Max, in whose conception family pride was second only to professional honor.

"In a short time I recognized the folly of the whole thing, and made up my mind to end it. But that was not very easily done. I stopped writing, but I could not resolve to take any more decisive step. People talk of bearding lions, but, by Jove! I would rather beard a dozen lions than Norah Desmond, when her Celtic pride and temper are fairly in arms. So, the spring of '70 came on. She wrote once or twice to ask if I was ill, or why I had not written. I did not answer the letters, and they stopped."

"Well?" said Max, as the voice stopped also.

"Well, the war came on in the summer, and cut off communication, you know. I can't say that I was sorry for it; and, from that time, I heard nothing of Norah— until to-day. Then Leslie fired the whole thing upon me like a mine of gunpowder."

"It is certainly an awkward state of affairs," said Captain Tyndale, after a pause of some duration, during which he had smoked like a furnace, and, it is to be supposed, reflected like a sage. His cousin had not a very sensitive ear, or he might have detected an accent of contempt in the tones of his voice, despite its studied modulation. In truth, it had been a sorry story, and this cool, clear-headed soldier was the last man in the world to sympathize with its mingled weakness and cowardice.

"It is worse than awkward," said Tyndale. "There is no telling what will be the upshot of it, for a prouder woman than Leslie Grahame does not live; and I could see plainly enough this morning that her uncle was not by any means anxious for my alliance. If I had only known this yesterday—"

"You would not have asked Miss Grahame to marry you?"

"I should have deferred doing so, at all events, until I could have had some understanding with that"— a gulp—"that girl in Europe."

"She will certainly come, I suppose?"

"You may count on that" (savagely). "She will come, if only for the pleasure of discomfiting me."

Captain Tyndale took his cigar from his lips, and rolled a whole cloud of smoke from under his mustache before he spoke. Then he said:

"It is an ugly business, and you are in for it emphatically. Frankly, I see but one course for you— though I am not at all sure you will adopt it."

"And that—"

"Is to go to Miss Grahame and make a candid statement of the whole affair. If I know any thing of women, you may save yourself by that move, and by that only."

"You may know something of women," said his cousin, coldly, "but you don't know any thing of Leslie Grahame. She would never forgive such a wound to her pride."

"Is the wound likely to be less severe when she finds that you have been playing the role of accepted suitor to her, while you were engaged to her sister?"

"Suppose she never knows it?"

"I have only judged by what you told me, but I should not think such a woman as you have described could readily be induced to forego so good an opportunity of revenge."

"We shall see," answered Tyndale. "I—I think that I may induce her to see that her best policy is silence."

"Cynics tell us that every woman has her price," said Max, carelessly. "Of course, you know best whether or not Miss Desmond has hers. Only, I warn you, it is a perilous game you are going to play."

"At all events, it is better than throwing up my hand, as you advise."

"I didn't advise that, exactly; but I do advise you to avoid a course of temporizing which can only end by placing you in a more hopelessly false position than you occupy at present."

"We shall see," said Tyndale, sullenly.

"When the whole thing comes out, as it sooner or later must, it will lay you open to a very serious charge of dishonor," said his cousin, a little sternly, as it seemed.

"It — is not likely to come to that, I trust," said Tyndale. "Anyhow, there is nothing to do but to let things drift. When the tug of war comes, I can rely on you for aid— eh, old fellow?"

"You know that," said the other.

But in his heart he wished the aid had been demanded in a better cause.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"So, wouldest thou 'scape the coming ill,  
Implore the dread Invisible  
Thy sweets themselves to sour!  
Well ends his life, believe me, never  
On whom with hands thus full forever,  
The gods their bounty shower."

IT is doubtful whether the self-constituted jury of society was ever more unanimous in rendering a verdict of approval than when Leslie Grahame's engagement to Arthur Tyndale became publicly known. "What an excellent match!" people said with one accord. "How very suitable in every particular!" Even the young ladies who had cast their nets unsuccessfully for the fish who had landed himself at Leslie's feet, acknowledged that, if matches are ever made in heaven, this special match bore every mark of celestial appointment. Both the parties concerned were so young, so handsome, so charming, and so wealthy, that it was like the ending of a novel or a fairy-tale, where everybody is paired off with such a delightful balance of personal and worldly gifts.

A few days after the engagement became an accomplished fact, and while people were still talking of it in the few informal gatherings which they permitted themselves during the languid heat which had come upon them, the Middletons held a family council to decide where their summer should be spent. Somewhat to the surprise of her uncle and aunt, Leslie cast her vote for the neglected shades of Rosland—a pleasant country-seat, conveniently near the city, which they had not seen for several years.

"I am tired of watering-places, and summer traveling, and summer sight-seeing," the young lady said. "No, uncle, I don't think that the mountains, or the sea, or Canada, or the lakes, will tempt me. I have a fancy to go back to dear old Rosland and spend the summer in the luxurious *dolce far niente* which, after all, one can only enjoy under one's own vine and fig-tree. Besides, I know that you and Aunt Mildred are tired of dissipation, and would like a little quiet once in a way."

"We are anxious to consult your wishes, my dear," said Mrs. Middleton. "Of course it would be pleasant to go to Rosland; but I am afraid you will find it very dull, Leslie. You know you have not been there since you were grown."

"It is for that very reason I want to go," said Leslie. "I used to be so happy there; and, as for being dull, I want to be dull. I am tired of dissipation. And, if Norah comes, we must have some settled habitation in which to receive her."

"That does not follow. She will probably not arrive until July; and she could join us if we were at a watering-place, or accompany us if we were traveling."

"She might not like to do either."

"No—she might not like it," said Mrs. Middleton, slowly. She had not thought of Miss Desmond in connection with their summer plans before; but, thinking of her now, she began to agree with Leslie that Rosland would, after all, be the best place for them. There was no telling what sort of a creature this Bohemian girl might prove to be, and, in view of possible contingencies, a quiet country-house was the safest and most desirable retreat. "If she *is* what she *may be*, it would do incalculable harm to Leslie to introduce her into society!" thought the most refined and fastidious of *châtelaines*, with an unconscious shudder at her own share in such an affliction.

"But what will Mr. Tyndale think of your burying yourself at Rosland?" she asked, at length. "Of course we shall be very glad to see him there; but no doubt he expected to join our party at some gayer place."

She spoke this very innocently, when, glancing up, she saw a gleam in Leslie's eyes, and a smile on her lip which threw a sudden ray of light on the young lady's unexpected pastoral fancy.

"Have you forgotten who is our next neighbor there?" she asked, with a laugh. "No, I don't mean the Covingtons"—as Mrs. Middleton's lips unclosed—"I mean *on the other side*. Have you forgotten that our grounds adjoin those of the Tyndale place? Arthur and I have talked it all over. We are both tired of the gossip and flirtation that make up watering-place life, and he has not been down to look at his old home since he was a boy. So we are going to enjoy our summer in a sane, sensible, Arcadian fashion for once."

"I don't see why you could not have said as much without all this discussion, then!" remarked Mr. Middleton. "It seems, Mildred, that you and I may resign ourselves to the role of puppets, Mr. Tyndale being graciously pleased to pull our strings through this young lady, who, like all the rest of her sex, must needs double fifty times about her point when she might save trouble by making straight for it."

"I was not doubling," answered Leslie, indignantly. "I said from the first I wanted to go to Rosland—didn't I, Aunt Mildred?—I was not obliged to remind you that the Tyndale place was next ours. You might have remembered that without my aid. If you are anxious for a watering-place, uncle, you may go by yourself, I am sure. Neither Aunt Mildred nor I will interfere."

"I have no doubt that the new lover has quite banished any need of the old uncle," he replied, with a Timon-like accent, which was not a striking success.

But Timon himself could scarcely have resisted the glance with which Leslie returned this thrust. The soft, gray eyes looked so pretty and reproachful that it was no wonder the matter ended by a kiss on the spot, and a letter written an hour later to the house-keeper at Rosland, announcing the intended arrival of the family.

"How delightful it will be!" said Leslie, on the same afternoon, to her lover. "I don't think you appreciate half how delightful, Arthur; but then you have not been down in that lovely country for so long! You have no idea what a beautiful old place Stafford is. And, taking a short path through the woods, it is not more than a mile from Rosland!"

"It really seems providential altogether," Tyndale said, reflecting the brightness of her face, as, indeed, few men could have helped doing. "Strafford has passed so entirely out of my life these latter years, that if it had not been an old family place I should have put it in the market long ago. It has served to sink money on as far back as I can remember," he added, with a laugh; "and if you like it, Leslie, the odds are that still more will be sunk on it before long."

"I do like it," said Leslie, "more than I can tell you. I have never been in the house since I was a very small child; but the grounds, with their deep glades and old mossy oaks, are beautiful. Whenever I read of fauns, and dryads, and sylvan fairies, I always think of Strafford. They all find a home there, I am sure."

"Do they?" said he, smiling. "Did you use to know them? To think of your pretty, childish feet wandering alone about the woods of Strafford! Ah, my Leslie, what a lucky fellow I am to have met you—in time!"

"In time!" she repeated. "Why do you say that?"

"Why should I not say it, when somebody who deserved you better might have won you if I had been a little later in coming back to America?" he answered, quickly.

"That is not very likely," said she. "Fate was saving me up for you. I know that now! Whenever I used to feel the least inclination to fall in love with anybody, something in my heart would draw back and say, 'Not yet.' You see, it was waiting for you, and did not mean that my life should contain any thing which you or I need regret."

"My Leslie!" he said, with a sort of passionate fondness; but none the less a flush came over his face, which Leslie, if she had seen it, would not have understood. It was a flush of reproachful shame to compare the heart given him with the heart he had to give. Men of the world do not often feel such twinges as this; but, despite his worldly training, Tyndale felt it now—felt it because he was conscious that he possessed this heart only on sufferance, and because he knew that a possible conviction awaited him, which would make every fond word Leslie now uttered turn to gall in her memory. "Tell me about Strafford," he went on, after a moment, anxious, perhaps, to change the subject. "I have only the vaguest recollection of it. Isn't there a pond somewhere about the grounds? It seems to me I remember catching trout out of a pond."

"Yes," said Leslie, "but you should not call it a pond—it is a lake, and such a lovely one! Don't you remember how still, and clear, and deep the water is? how the grounds slope down to it on one side, and what dark, solemn pines are on the other? Then, the water-lilies—O Arthur, how could you forget the water-lilies?"

"I had not much of a soul for water-lilies in those days," said he. "I have a much more vivid remembrance of the trout. The river is near at hand, too, isn't it?"

"Nearer to Rosland than to Strafford, but near enough to both. We always keep a boat on it."

"And we will put one on the pond—I beg pardon, the lake. Then we can row, and fish, and talk, and read 'The Earthly Paradise,' and, in short, make an earthly paradise of our own."

"I don't like the comparison," said Leslie. "Paradise had a serpent, you know; and every paradise, since that time, has been furnished with the same drawback. Now, ours will not have any; so we will not call it by the fair but fatal name."

"No, we will not," said Tyndale; but again a wave of color swept into his face, for he was thinking what a serpent in this earthly paradise Norah Desmond might prove, if she chose. "Max has promised to go down with me," he went on, after a pause. "I don't think he will find it dull, for there will be plenty of shooting and fishing for him."

"What a nice *partie carrée* we shall make when Norah comes!" said Leslie, gayly. "Perhaps Captain Tyndale will even be obliging enough to fall in love with her."

"I don't think that at all likely," said Arthur, grimly. "Max has no fancy for that kind of woman, and Miss Desmond flies at higher game than a soldier of fortune."

"How do you know that?" asked Leslie, a little curiously.

"Oh, anybody could tell so much by looking at her! I never saw her that she was not surrounded by what the English call 'tip-top swells.' She is amazingly beautiful, you see, and has a way with her that is positively fascinating."

"It must have been striking to impress you so much merely at sight," said Leslie.

She said it with the utmost innocence of intention and manner, but Tyndale shot a keen and slightly uneasy glance at her. We all know the proverb about a guilty conscience; and it was

never better exemplified than by this young fellow, who had already woven about himself the tangled web of a very embarrassing deception. He was spared reply, however; for just then a carriage drew up at the door, and Leslie, bending forward to glance through the open window at its occupant, uttered an exclamation.

"Here is Mrs. Sandford!" she said. "What is it the Italians say when they mean 'well sent'?"

"I would rather inquire what they say when they mean 'ill sent,'" Tyndale answered, frowning and flushing impatiently—for his fair skin flushed at the least provocation.

"That woman, Leslie, if you will excuse me—"

"But I won't excuse you," interrupted Leslie, laughing. "You must stay and bear your share of the infliction, if you look at her visit in that light. I am sure that a month ago you would have considered it in any other. How does a man dare to talk of a woman's inconstancy, I wonder?"

"I never did," said Tyndale, shrugging his shoulders. The gesture was significant, and implied that he had rather been obliged to find the contrary fault with women that, as a rule, they had been inconveniently constant to him. "By Jove!" he went on, walking to the window, "Max has been nicely caught. He was passing along the street, when Mrs. Sandford stopped him; and now she is bringing him in, whether he will or no."

"I am glad of that," said Leslie, in her fresh, cordial voice. "I like your cousin so much, and he comes so seldom of late! Aunt Mildred and I were regretting it only yesterday."

"Max has very little fancy for society," said Tyndale, feeling an obligation to apologize. "He has still less fancy for Mrs. Sandford," he added, "but she seems to be making a dead set at him."

"That must be very awkward."

"Amazingly so to a man like Max, who likes to place women on a pedestal, and keep them there. I think he dislikes fast women even more than I do," the speaker pursued, reflectively.

"Do you dislike fast women?" said Leslie, arching her brows. "How necessary it always is to state our opinions if we wish them known!"

To this shaft of gentle satire Tyndale had no opportunity to reply, for at that moment Mrs. Sandford entered the room, followed by the tall, soldierly figure of Captain Tyndale. The first impression which she made on the mind was style—the second, complexion. She was dressed in black, not that which is sacred to mourning, but a light and becoming mixture of grenadine and lace, brightened by delicate mauve ribbons, which set off a complexion that might have moved the envy of a girl of sixteen. Color was her strong point, together with a pair of large blue eyes, which she had an artless and infantine way of opening to their fullest extent. She opened them now, as she came forward.

"What a lucky creature I am to find you at home!" she said, meeting Leslie with an effusion which sometimes tried Miss Grahame's courtesy severely. "I came to beg you to go to drive with me—the afternoon is so charming! but, since you are engaged, I shall not press the point; and, indeed, this cool drawing-room is pleasanter than the dusty avenue. You see I have brought Captain Tyndale in with me. I told him that, if we were *very* good, perhaps you would give us some iced tea and bread-and-butter."

"You shall have as much as you please of both," said Leslie, turning with a smile to greet Max; and then Mrs. Sandford, wakening to a consciousness of Arthur's existence, put out a delicate, gloved hand to him.

"I thought that I was not to have any recognition at all," he said, taking it with a very effective air of reproach.

"I am not sure that you deserve any," answered she, opening the blue eyes, if possible, still wider. "When one neglects his old friends, as you have done, he deserves nothing better than to be neglected in turn. Even an engagement is not an excuse for *every* thing!"

"It ought to be, then," said he. "Come, you must let me make my peace! I really cannot afford to quarrel with you—we have been friends too long."

"Perhaps some day I may like you as well as ever again," said she, nonchalantly, but at present you are hopelessly out of my good graces. It is not only on account of your atrocious neglect; but I forswear engaged men on principle. They are *always* stupid."

"I am sure nobody could be stupid with you," said Tyndale, falling into his old habit of flattery. Men always flattered Mrs. Sandford. It was not only the easiest way of entertaining her, but it was an incense with which she soon made it patent that she could not dispense.

"Oh, what a mistake!" cried she, laughing—Tyndale, who had of late grown very fastidious, thought what an empty laugh it was, and how wide she opened her mouth—"any amount of people are stupid with me. I wish I did know how to keep them from being so—I should not be bored to death half of my time, then! It would be better than an invisible cap, or a wishing-carpet, or any thing of that kind. Oh, dear, what a charming place this is!" she went on, sinking down on a sofa, and looking about her. "No wonder you find it difficult to tear yourself away. Leslie, dear, will it inconvenience you to order some tea? This warm, dusty weather makes one feel horribly in need of refreshment."

Mrs. Sanford's manners were certainly very free and easy, but Leslie was accustomed to them; so, she rang the bell and ordered the tea—of which it may be said that a large amount was always made in the morning, and set away in ice to cool in the most thorough manner by evening. It was soon served, together with the bread-and-butter which Mrs. Sandford had promised Captain Tyndale.

"If you don't like this, you shall have some iced claret," said Leslie, turning, with a smile, to Max.

"Why should you think I don't like it?" said he. "I am a Frenchman, it is true, but I can drink something besides *café noir* and absinthe. Those are what Americans take to be a Frenchman's favorite beverages—are they not?"

"I don't think we do you so much injustice," said Mrs. Sandford. "I, for one, always associate the idea of a Frenchman with champagne. Something light and sparkling, and altogether charming, you know."

"There, Max!" cried Arthur, laughing. "Never say again that nobody compliments you, my good fellow."

"I should not think of appropriating such a compliment," said Max. "In the first place, I am only half a Frenchman, and, in the second place, even that fund of vanity, which always stands a man in such good stead, fails to countenance the idea that I am either light, sparkling, or altogether charming."

"Perhaps you are not the best judge of that," said Leslie, smiling.

In this way they laughed and talked, while they drank the liquid amber, which was called tea, and ate the light wafers that passed under the name of bread. Mrs. Middleton, who entered the room soon after this, thought what a pretty picture they made, gathered in the neighborhood of a large bay-window, through which a flood of golden sunlight was streaming into the room, gleaming about the tea-equipage, touching the mirrors and pictures with a glow of crimson brightness, and outlining Leslie's graceful head like a figure in a pre-Raphaelite picture. Outside the window, the roses were climbing and clustering, and loading the air with summer sweetness. In the street, above the roll of carriages, and the fast-trotting tramp of horses' feet, sounded the sweet strains of a German band, playing a Strauss waltz; Mrs. Sandford looked up, and gave one of her effusive exclamations:

"O my dear, dear Mrs. Middleton, think how charming!" she cried. "You are all going into the country to spend the summer, Leslie tells me, and I am obliged to go down to that very county, to visit some relations who think that I have neglected them shamefully. I thought that I was going to be terribly bored; and it is an intense relief to know that I shall have such delightful neighbors. But you must not be surprised if you see me at Rosland perpetually."

"We shall be very glad to see you as often as you can come," said Mrs. Middleton, hospitably. She had no particular fancy for Mrs. Sanford, but everybody received her, and she was, as Tyndale had once said, "good company"—that is, she was always in a good - humor, and always to be relied upon in any social emergency.

"Oh, how delightful!" repeated that enthusiastic lady. Then she turned to Tyndale. "I shall be so glad to see your place," she said. "My cousins, who live in the neighborhood, tell me that it is beautiful. Don't you mean to give a ball or something of the sort when you go down as a house-warming, you know?"

"I really had not thought of it," said he.

"Oh, but you ought—if only to show people how charmingly you mean to live! I must speak to Leslie, and make her persuade you to do it. Mrs. Middleton, don't you think he ought? People who have pretty, old places, and don't use them, should be obliged to give them to people who would. I agree with the socialists *that far!*"

"Suppose you take Strafford off my hands, then?" said he, laughing, but scarcely concealing the fact that he was exceedingly bored. He looked round for Leslie, but, when Mrs. Middleton's appearance had relieved Miss Grahame from the duties of hostess, she had taken Captain Tyndale out into the garden.

"I think I have heard you say that you like roses," she said to him. "Come and look at ours. They are in their glory."

He assented willingly—as, indeed, he would have been apt to assent to any thing which she proposed. Leslie was not at all aware of the peculiar regard which this somewhat impassive soldier entertained for her. She might have been flattered if she had known that she embodied to him more of the gentleness and refinement, the sweetness and grace of womanhood, than he had ever met before in the whole course of his life. Like most men of his class—men of active pursuits and refined tastes—he had little fancy for the order of women technically called "loud." He had flirted with them, talked of them, toasted them, perhaps—but, all the same, he had his ideal, with which not one of these modern heroines had a single attribute in common. This ideal was one that in the masculine mind has no doubt existed since the days of Adam—a gentle, graceful, feminine abstraction, hedged about with a divine atmosphere of high - breeding and heavenly virtues. To this ideal Miss Grahame approached very closely, and she had consequently proved very attractive to him—so attractive, indeed, that if Arthur Tyndale's suit had not been very far advanced before his cousin came on the scene, there is no telling how soon Max might have laid his laurels of Algiers and Gravelotte at Leslie's feet.

Neither is it possible to tell what success he might have won. The mind grows dizzy in considering what toys of circumstance we are—how absolutely and entirely the whole course and meaning of our lives seem to hinge on the idlest turns of chance. Thinking of these things, we feel like children in the dark, fearing to take a step in any direction lest we should encounter some unforeseen disaster, or avoid some great good. If Max Tyndale had come into Leslie's life before his cousin, and had gained, perhaps—for many unlikelier things have happened—his cousin's place in her heart, one thing at least might have been predicted, that, although society would have been more chary of its compliments, and Mr. and Mrs. Middleton probably less suave in their consent, Leslie herself would never have had to fear the dissimulation which Arthur Tyndale had already displayed, nor the treachery which he might yet display.

Such thoughts as these were very far from her mind, however, as she walked down the garden-paths, pointing out her favorite roses to Max, and laughing over his lamentable ignorance of rose-nomenclature.

"I confess that I don't know much about the names of flowers," he said, at last, with unnecessary candor. "It always seemed to me a matter of very small importance. They are meant to be sources of enjoyment—not occasions of study, or weary exercise of the memory."

"But it is not weary to people who love roses to remember that this is a Malmaison, and that a Noisette," said Leslie, smiling. "When will those who don't like certain things comprehend

that others may like them? Now, *I* should think there was nothing in the world half so tiresome as military tactics!"

"But that has use in it," said he.

"And do you think there is no use in flowers because one does not often 'brain a tyrant with a rose'?"

"There is use in them, as there is use in music and poetry," said Max, who, it must be confessed, was rather utilitarian than aesthetic in his bias. "The world would be a much darker and narrower place without them."

"While with them, what a bright and happy place it is!" said Leslie, lifting her fair face to the sunset glow. "Do you know," she went on, suddenly, speaking almost wistfully, "that I sometimes think I have too many of the good things of life for one person? Sometimes it strikes me that I must surely have some one else's share of prosperity besides my own. I have never had a trouble—nor the least shade of a trouble—in my life; and now I am so very happy!"—she spoke with the simplicity of a child—"surely it is not right—I mean, surely it is more than. I deserve."

"I think it is quite right," said Max. "Nobody ever deserved the good gifts of Fortune more than you do, and hereafter I shall think better of the jade for having shown so much discrimination for once."

"You are jesting, while I am in earnest," said she, looking at him with her soft gray eyes. "You cannot tell how often I have thought of this, lately. Every thing about my life is so bright—surely too bright to last! I cannot dismiss the idea that some trouble must be in store to counterbalance it all."

"You are wrong to indulge such thoughts," said Max, seriously. "You are darkening the present sunshine by forebodings of clouds that come soon enough in every life."

"I never had such forebodings before," said she.

He was on the point of answering, "Because you never before put your happiness into the keeping of another," but he restrained the words in time. It was true enough; but why should he say it? Why should he put the fact—which might yet be a grim one—plainly before Leslie? He could not, however, help wondering if any subtle distrust of Arthur caused the foreboding to which she alluded; and, strangely enough, Leslie—with a woman's quick instinct—turned to answer the suspicion.

"I don't think any woman ever had better assurances of happiness than I have," she said. "And it is because I am so particularly—so exceptionally—fortunate, that I feel in this way."

"I understand," said Captain Tyndale. "It is natural enough. And yet, if I might venture to advise, I would beg you to enjoy the present and let the future take care of itself, since you cannot—like the Greek king in one of Schiller's ballads—throw a ring into the sea as a propitiation to the gods."

"Perhaps my propitiation might be rejected, as that of poor Polycrates was," said Leslie, smiling. Then she added more gravely: "We are both talking like heathens. Of course, I know who gives both good and ill fortune; and, while I am grateful for the first, I trust I should neither despair nor rebel under the last."

"I am sure you would not," said Max. "If I put my heel on that lily," he said, pointing to one in a bed near by, "it would be none the less sweet after it was crushed. Such is the nature of lilies."

Leslie laughed a little. "You are very kind," she said. Then, feeling that the conversation was becoming too personal, she changed it with her graceful tact. "I am old-fashioned enough to love these pure white lilies," she said, stooping to pull one. "Our neighbor, Mrs. Moncure, who has a great many varieties of new - fashioned Japanese lilies, quite scorns them."

"As I should probably scorn the Japanese lilies, if I saw them," said Max. "Who cares for those gaudy, striped things? One might as well have a tulip or a peony. But the lily of tradition

and of poetry—the flower of the Annunciation—the *fleur de lis* of France—the emblem of purity and fragrance—the symbol of the saints—one cannot love that too well."

"So I think," said Leslie. "And I am glad that there is one flower about which you know how to be enthusiastic," she added, "though I fancy it is not so much the flower as its associations that please you. Now, shall we go back to the drawing-room? Perhaps Arthur has finished his flirtation with Mrs. Sandford by this time. It is a good thing that I am not jealous, is it not?"

"A very good thing," he answered. But, as they turned their steps toward the drawing-room, he could not help wondering whether a real cause for jealousy would not shatter this sweet, placid calm. His heart misgave him—or, to speak more correctly, his judgment warned him concerning the probable result of Arthur's meeting with Norah Desmond. "Unstable as water," seemed in Max's mind a text specially suited to his cousin; and, like most men of cool, determined character, he felt something closely akin to contempt for the other's shifting vacillation. "If I have any influence over him, he'll keep straight with regard to *this!*" he thought. Much as she liked him, Leslie had little idea what a champion had buckled on armor in her behalf.

## CHAPTER V.

"A woman in whom majesty and sweetness  
Blend to such issues of serene completeness,  
That to gaze on her were a prince's boon!  
The calm of evening, the large pomp of noon,  
Are hers; soft May morns, melting June  
Hold not such tender languishments as those  
Which steep her in that dew-light of repose,  
That floats a dreamy balm around the full-blown  
rose."

MAY and June passed—burdening the earth with their wealth of fragrant bloom and it was on one of the earlier days of July that Miss Grahame's pony-carriage drove up to the station of Wexford, distant seventeen miles from Alton, just before the down express was due at 6.40 P. M. The Middleton household, with all its belongings, had been domesticated, for a month or more, at Rosland; but the day before this, Mr. Middleton had gone up to the city to meet Miss Desmond, who telegraphed an announcement of her safe arrival on American shores.

"Jump down and go round to their heads, Guy," Leslie said to the groom, as she checked her horses. "I hear the train coming, and Romulus is always foolish. S—oh steady, sir!"

She pulled in the reins sharply—it was surprising how much vigor was in those slender wrists—as one of the ponies threw up his head nervously; but Guy—a lithe, half-grown boy—was on the ground and at their bits when the engine, with its long train of vibrating cars, came shrieking and whistling, like a lunatic fiend, around a curve.

As it drew up with one short, defiant snort before the station, not a few dusty women and linen-coated men looked out, with that interest which any passing event always arouses in the traveling mind, at the pretty, low-swung phaeton, the white ponies handsomely set off by blue reins, and the graceful girl, whose fresh, summer costume was not concealed by the carriage-wrap drawn partly over it.

"Oh, how charming! Shouldn't you like to have it?" said one or two enthusiastic young ladies, referring, in a lucid way, to the phaeton and ponies.

"Very neat turnout!" said one or two men, approvingly.

"Amazingly pretty girl, by George!" added several others, staring at the delicate face, which was half turned away from them.

For, unconscious of the admiration which her equipage and herself were exciting, Leslie was gazing eagerly along the platform for the appearance of her uncle and his companion. She could with difficulty realize that she was about to meet the sister whom she had never seen, and her heart was beating nervously. What would she be like? Had she (Leslie) done well or ill? Another minute would decide something at least.

"Do you see any signs of them, Guy?" she asked of the groom, who was in a better position for observation than herself.

"Yes'm— yonder comes master," he answered.

Leslie's heart gave a leap— into her throat, it seemed— as Mr. Middleton, with a lady on his arm, emerged from the fluctuating crowd around the cars, and advanced toward her. She stepped from the phaeton, and, even at that moment— so quick is the feminine eye—she saw that her sister was tall, and walked with remarkable grace.

"Well, Leslie, here she is!" said Mr. Middleton, as they met. "I suppose there's no need to introduce you to each other."

"I should think not, indeed!" said Leslie, with her sweet smile. "Norah, how glad I am to see you, dear!"

She put out both hands as she spoke: her whole heart seemed quivering on the lips that touched the fair face slightly bent toward her. Absorbed in her own emotion, she did not feel what Mr. Middleton observed that the eager warmth of her greeting was rather received than returned.

"Thanks— you are very kind," said the stranger, in a voice which, though musical, was slightly cold. "I hope we shall like each other."

"I am sure of it," said Leslie, quickly. "You must not 'hope' such a thing, because to hope implies a little doubt. Come, put her in the phaeton, uncle. I brought it because I wanted her all to myself. The barouche is here for you."

"That is a good thing," said Mr. Middleton, as he assisted Miss Desmond into the luxurious little carriage. "Things always happen, and people turn up, just when they are not expected," he went on, philosophically. "To my surprise, I met Carl in the city. He came down with us, and is looking after the trunks just now."

"Carl!" repeated Leslie, astonished at this off-hand announcement. "But I thought Carl was in Germany?"

"So did I, until I met him in Alton," answered Mr. Middleton. Then, as the train moved off, he glanced round. "Here he comes," he said, carelessly. This indifference was his way of showing the vexation he felt at the neglect which had so long delayed that coming.

Leslie turned also. A young man in a gray traveling-suit and cap was advancing down the platform, with the light and peculiarly springy step that few men retain after twenty-three or four— a good-looking young fellow, with a rich dash of auburn in his brown hair and eyes and brows that might have been painted to match. He wore no beard, and his flexible lips curled upward at the corners, as those of a laughter-loving nature always do, while there was a gleam of fun in his eyes which often tried the patience of soberly - disposed people very severely. This was the lighter side of Carl Middleton's character, however. That there was another, those who knew him well were thoroughly aware. The dash of red in his hair, together with one or two straight lines between the brows, were sufficient indications of the passionate though somewhat volatile vehemence that always accompanies the mercurial temperament, in feeling and action.

"You are surprised to see me, are you not?" he said, after the first greeting between Leslie and himself was over. "You didn't imagine that I had been Miss Desmond's traveling companion? Uncle George's face was a study when he met us in Alton this morning!"

"Did you come over with Norah?" said Leslie, with surprise. "You are certainly the most incomprehensible person! Why did you not write to say that you were coming, or why did you not telegraph when you arrived?"

"Why should I have done either?" asked he. "Here I am all right, and I did not expect anybody to meet me. I made up my mind to sail at an hour's notice. By Jove, Leslie!— may I say

how much you are improved ? I should have come home a year ago if I had known you were as pretty as this!"

"Should you?" said Leslie. "It is a good thing you did not know it, then; I am sure you must have enjoyed the year much more in Europe than you would have done here. You have improved, too, since you were a red-haired boy, and the torment of my life," she added, smiling. "I am very glad to see it, and very glad to see you, too; but I must really go now, for I cannot keep Norah waiting while we exchange compliments. That can be done at our leisure when we reach Rosland."

"And how am I to reach Rosland?" he asked, as he assisted her into the phaeton, where Miss Desmond was seated, leaning back on the low seat, and looking meditatively at the ponies.

"You are to go in the barouche with uncle," answered Leslie, gathering up her reins. "Come, Guy!"

"May not I play tiger for once?" asked Carl, holding Guy back at arm's-length, much to that bebuttoned individual's surprise.

"No, you may not," answered Miss Grahame, decidedly. "You are to go with uncle; and I have no doubt that the freedom to smoke a cigar will amply console you for the loss of our society."

"You think so because you don't know how much I should enjoy your society," said he. But he released Guy, who was in his seat in a moment.

"We'll be along, Leslie, as soon as the servants have managed to dispose of Miss Desmond's trunks," said Mr. Middleton, who was standing by the barouche.

Leslie nodded, and, flicking Romulus and Remus lightly with the whip, the phaeton bowled easily down a green country lane, leaving Carl standing with his cap off watching them as they drove away.

Then it was that Miss Grahame began to be conscious that her companion had not spoken since their first greeting; and, anxious to avoid any thing like awkwardness, she plunged at once into conversation falling, of course, upon an undeniable commonplace:

"I am afraid you have had such a warm, dusty day for traveling."

"It has not been agreeable," answered her companion, in the same musical voice which had struck her in its first utterance—a voice that spoke English with a slightly foreign accent—"but summer traveling never is agreeable, I fancy. One must always expect heat and dust."

"But at least I hope your ocean-voyage was pleasant?"

"Yes very. I always enjoy the ocean. There is nothing like it in the world, I think."

"So do I—though I have never seen very much of it. And it was pleasant that Carl should have crossed with you! I hope he found you out soon—I mean, found out who you were?"

"He did not need to find me out," was the quiet but very unexpected reply. "We knew each other before. It came in his way to do papa some slight favor in Paris last spring; and so I had already met him."

"Met him!" exclaimed Leslie "met Carl!" She was so taken aback by this third surprise, that for a minute she could say nothing more. Then she added, on the first impulse of astonishment: "How very extraordinary!—I mean how very singular that he should never have mentioned it."

"I am not sure that it was singular," said Miss Desmond, indifferently—though an increase of color rose into her face—"the fact may have escaped his mind as one of slight importance, or he may not have considered us in the light of very desirable acquaintances. Certainly we are not people of whose social countenance any one is likely to boast."

"Norah!" said Leslie, almost indignantly. A tide of blood came into her face, a thrill of reproach into her voice. "How can you speak so!" she went on quickly. "It would be unjust to Carl if you meant it in earnest. Even in jest, it is unjust to yourself."

"I beg your pardon," said the other. "I forgot that you did not understand how we

Bohemians feel. I forgot, also, that Kate's last injunction was to beg me not to shock you. 'Remember that you are going among respectable people,' she said, and 'try to be respectable too.'"

"Try to be respectable!" repeated Leslie, smiling—it was impossible not to smile at the humor in Norah's eyes, as she uttered the last words—"but are you not respectable already? If you are not, pray tell me what constitutes respectability."

"A gig, does it not?" asked Miss Desmond, quite innocently. "You know Carlyle says so. I suppose your phaeton—how pretty it is, by-the-by!—might come under that head."

"Let us hope so, at least," was the reply. "Then we shall be able to esteem ourselves safely respectable for the time being. Not but that respectability is a very good thing in its way," Miss Grahame pursued, reflectively thinking, perhaps, that it would be as well to give a slight admonition to her companion "and women in especial are apt to fare very badly if they venture to disregard its codes. You look as if you thought that a very stale commonplace. So it is; but many stale things are true things none the less. Now, I am not easily shocked, dear, but I hope you will forgive me when I say that many other people are."

There was so much of gentle wistfulness in this last sentence that it would have been impossible for the most irascible person to be provoked by it; and Norah Desmond only smiled.

"I suppose you are thinking of your own people," she said. "Well, I shall try not to shock them. Bohemian though I am, I can play *grande dame* when I like."

"I think Nature intended that you should play it all the time," said Leslie, with a glance of involuntary admiration at the beautiful face, which was also a proud face.

"No," was the careless reply. "Nothing cramps and wearies me more. I am like my father, who seems to have something of the gypsy in him—something which always has made him unable to endure the pressure of conventional respectability very long."

"I hope she will not say any thing like that to Aunt Mildred," thought Leslie, half amused and half dismayed to imagine the manner in which Mrs. Middleton would regard such a declaration, as realizing her worst fears of what Mr. Desmond's daughter might be. A slight sensation of foreboding began to come over Miss Grahame as she appreciated more clearly than she had done before the nature of the jarring elements she was about to bring together. What would be the end of it? Would Norah gracefully conciliate the prejudices which were already in arms against her, or would she openly brave and defy them? With all her anxiety that the former course should be adopted, Leslie could not bring herself to offer a stronger hint than she had already uttered. And so it was that, for a little time, silence fell. The ponies trotted along a level stretch of well-shaded road, with the slanting gold of the sunlight streaming in serene glory through the brown trunks of the trees, and on the green depths of the foliage, while Guy, sitting bolt upright in his tiny seat, absorbed in the contemplation of his buttons, took a short nap, and nearly fell off before Miss Desmond spoke again:

"I had no idea you lived in the country. I thought your uncle had a house in the city—Alton, isn't it?—where he met me to-day."

"We do not live in the country," Leslie answered. "We have only come down to Rosland for the summer. Our home is in Alton."

"Ah, I see!—you are at your country-house *à la grand seigneur*. But have you much of a neighborhood? Pastoral seclusion may be exceedingly elegant, but it is also very apt to be dull, I think."

"There is something of a neighborhood—enough, I hope, to keep you from being dull."

"I was not thinking of myself," was the quiet reply. "All modes of life come alike to me. I fancy I have run the gamut of them, from highest to lowest. Consequently, I have learned a very useful philosophy, which enables me to be resigned to any thing and surprised at nothing." Then, as they drove by the palings of a green park, full of massive old trees, through which the chimneys and gables of a house were visible, she added, "That looks as if it might be a pretty place."

"It is a pretty place," said Leslie, with the guelder - rose color deepening on her cheek, "the prettiest in the country, I think, though there are several more handsome, and many better kept up."

"Who is the owner?" asked Miss Desmond, lifting her veil for the first time and leaning forward.

"A person of whom you have heard," answered Leslie. "This is the Tyndale place, and belongs to Arthur—the Arthur of whom I have written you."

"Ah!"

It was a quick interjection, uttered more to herself than to her companion, but Leslie thought that it denoted interest, and went on:

"The house is picturesque, as you see, and quite old—that is, for any thing American. No doubt *you* would think it very modern. It has been in the family for several generations, and came to Arthur when he was a mere boy. He had not seen it for years until this summer; but he has been so much surprised and delighted by its beauty that I think it will be his principal home hereafter."

Miss Desmond made no reply. It would have been only courteous, it seemed, if she had evinced a little interest in the subject thus introduced; but she gave no response by word or look to Leslie's speech. All her admiration of the Tyndale place suddenly appeared to vanish. She leaned back without another glance toward it, but she did not draw down her veil, and so it was that, for the first time, Leslie saw what she looked like.

Now, as a general rule, it would be doing a woman gross injustice to judge of her looks when she has just ended a long and fatiguing journey; but there are particular cases, as well as general rules, and it will be readily admitted that, if a woman is found to bear such a severe test with even moderate success, it may be safely predicated of her, as of Olivia, that her beauty "is in the grain, and will endure wind and weather." This test Norah Desmond stood triumphantly. Even Leslie, with that greatest medium for flattery of our day—a painted photograph—in her mind, could not think that she had ever seen a more beautiful face than the one beside her. It was not only the regular, clearly-cut features, the skin white as milk and smooth as marble, the scarlet lips so proudly curved and firmly closed, the rich masses of hair, chestnut in the shade, spun gold in the sun, nor the large, full eyes, also chestnut in tint—as the old chronicles tell us that Mary Stuart's were—which fascinated her so much. It was something deeper and more subtle than the mere loveliness of flesh and blood. Listless as the face looked, it was not cold; quiet as it seemed, it was not tame. On the contrary, it was easy to tell that it possessed, in superlative degree, that mobility of feature which distinguishes the Irish physiognomy; that a magnetism not to be put into words might dwell in the smile of the lips, a something almost akin to majesty shine out of the magnificent depths of the eyes. "I think I shall certainly like her!" Leslie thought, and at that moment the eyes in question turned and met her own.

"Well," said their possessor, quietly, "what do you think of me? Am I as pretty as my likeness?"

"I beg your pardon," said Leslie, quickly. "I did not mean to be rude. But you must be accustomed to staring by this time, I should think."

"You were not rude," said the other. "It was very natural you should look at me. I only wanted to know if you are disappointed in my appearance. Kate said that the photograph I sent you was flattered."

"Tell Kate that she was never more mistaken," said Miss Grahame, warmly. "I thought the photograph lovely, but you—you are far more beautiful than it is."

"Thanks!" said Norah. But she must have been well used to compliments, for her color did not deepen in the least even at those enthusiastic words.

A few minutes later they entered the gates of Rosland, and were bowling rapidly around the carriage-drive to the front of the house.

"It is not much of a place," Leslie said, half apologetically.

"At least it looks very pretty," Norah truthfully answered.

It did look pretty, undoubtedly. There were no pretensions to architectural effect, but home-like grace and lightness everywhere. A green lawn sloped away into a flower-garden on one side, and into shrubbery on the other; a veranda, with arches overrun by creepers, had chairs, books, and work, set out on it, and lace-draped windows behind. The wide hall, with its open doors, looked spacious and airy, there was a fragrance of flowers in the atmosphere, and the sinking sun sent a flood of golden light across the close-shaven lawn to the thick-set hedge beyond.

Leslie reined up Romulus and Remus before the door, and, giving the reins to Guy, turned to her sister:

"Welcome to Rosland, Norah!" she said, eagerly. "I hope we may make you happy, dear! I am sure it makes me very happy to know that you are with us. And here is Aunt Mildred to bid you welcome, too."

This Mrs. Middleton did with a very charming grace and cordiality. Certainly the young stranger who had come so entirely unknowing and unknown among them could not complain that any thing was lacking in her welcome which the most carping spirit of exaction might have required. After many kind greetings had been uttered, and every possible want of tired Nature anticipated, she wag left alone in the chamber to which she had been conducted; and then Leslie came back and stood in a triumphant glow before her aunt.

"Well, Aunt Mildred, what do you think of her?" she cried. "Is she not superbly beautiful?"

"She is very handsome," said Mrs. Middleton. She spoke readily and not at all as if the admission irked her, which it certainly did. "But she is not in the least like your mother, Leslie. I cannot trace the faintest resemblance between the two faces."

"I wish she were like mamma," said Leslie; "and yet she is so lovely that it would be wrong to desire any change in her. Did you ever see such a complexion, or such eyes, or such hair?"

"It certainly is a very striking kind of beauty," said Mrs. Middleton. "As a matter of individual taste, I like something quieter and more refined; but, of course, nobody can deny that she is very fine-looking."

"Fine-looking! She is much more than that," said Leslie, aggrieved at hearing the beauty to which she had done generous homage, damned by such faint praise. "She is perfectly lovely! Wait until you see her better dressed and less dusty."

"I never knew you so enthusiastic before," said Mrs. Middleton, with a smile that was rather deprecating.

"You never knew me before when I had just met a sister whom I am sure I can admire, and whom I hope I can love," answered Leslie, warmly.

"My dear!" said Mrs. Middleton, in an expostulatory tone. She looked at the eager face before her, while a shade of the intense prejudice she felt against the new-comer fell over her own. But she was too wise as well as too high-bred to say any thing which would be "sharp," or likely to wound Leslie. So she smiled again, but more faintly. "Don't be in too much haste to give more than admiration," she said. "Wait until you know something of what lies under that handsome face before you bestow the love of which you speak."

"I think I know something of it already," answered Leslie—in whose excuse it may be said that she was not prone often to the folly of such rash judgment—"I am sure she has a noble character, though it has been warped by circumstances. Please remember that, Aunt Mildred," the eager voice went on. "Please, in judging her, remember how different her life has been from ours."

"But that is the worst thing against her," said Mrs. Middleton, who felt her heart hardening momently. "Do you not see that, though it may be an excuse, it is also a ground for distrust? Leslie, I am so sorry that you have taken a fancy to the girl! Such impulses are always

unwise, but in this instance you may be preparing more of annoyance and suffering for yourself than you can imagine."

"I trust not," said Leslie, in her frank, loyal voice. "But, even if it were so, it was of Norah, and not of myself, I thought, in sending for her. That for which I was and am most anxious is to help her life, to do her good; and if this can be compassed, even at the cost of a little annoyance and suffering to myself, I shall not regret it. I confess, however, that I can see no cause to fear any thing of the kind."

"I hope with all my heart that you may be right," said Mrs. Middleton, with a sigh 'which was imbued with the strongest possible skepticism. "It is certainly too late now to undo what has been done. But where is your uncle? Surely the barouche ought to have been here before this."

"I left him at Wexford with Carl," replied Leslie. "By-the-by, I have been so engrossed with Norah that I have forgotten to tell you Carl has arrived."

"Carl!" echoed Mrs. Middleton, in a tone of incredulous amazement. "Why, Carl is in Europe!"

"Just what I said to uncle," answered Leslie, composedly. "But, of course, that argument fell to the ground when Carl appeared in person. You will be glad to hear that he has grown amazingly, and is really very good-looking."

"Carl!" repeated Mrs. Middleton again, as if she could not credit her own ears. "But what is the meaning of it? Why did he not let us know when he left Europe? How long has he been in America?"

"He came over in the same steamer with Norah, he says. I asked him why he had not written, but he only laughed, and said that he made up his mind at an hour's notice, or something of that kind. Men can do such things, you know. Yonder comes the barouche now, so you can question him at your leisure. As for me, I must go and dress for dinner."

She left the room—Mrs. Middleton offering no opposition—and went up-stairs just as the barouche drove to the door. Pausing a moment to glance over the balustrade, there was a sparkle of amusement on her face which might have puzzled the lady below. It arose from the reflection that she would leave Carl himself to announce the singular and (from a Middleton point of view) unpalatable fact of his acquaintance with the Desmond family, and his incomprehensible concealment thereof.

## CHAPTER VI.

"Go, lovely rose!  
Tell her that wastes her time and me,  
That now she knows,  
When I resemble her to thee  
How sweet and fair she seems to be."

AN hour later, it was a very pleasant and sociable party that gathered around the Rosland dinner-table. There were no guests in the house—for Mrs. Middleton had been careful that none should be invited at the time when Miss Desmond was expected—but there was nothing of the heavy atmosphere which usually pervades a strictly family gathering. Both host and hostess were too well-bred to suffer any of the annoyance which they felt to betray itself in their manner, and Leslie brought all her reserve of graceful tact and social knowledge into action. She had felt a little uneasiness as she dressed for dinner; but a sense of pleasant reassurance came to her as she entered the drawing-room just after the bell rang, and found her aunt and uncle laughing over one of Carl's anecdotes. The frank atmosphere of unclouded good-humor showed her at once how foolish she had been to fear any uncomfortable constraint in people who held the slightest deviation from the strict rule of courtesy equal to a breach of the Decalogue. "Under-bred people always show at once whatever they are thinking and feeling," Mrs. Middleton often said. "Really

well-bred people never do, unless for some good reason. Believe me, my dear, that is, after all, the great distinction between the two classes."

"Well, Leslie, how did you get on with your new sister?" asked Mr. Middleton, turning round as she entered. "I thought as I saw you driving off that the first advances toward acquaintanceship might be a little awkward— eh?"

"I did not find them so," replied Leslie. "I think we got on very well indeed— better than you would fancy, perhaps. But, what did you think of her, uncle?"

"I think she is one of the handsomest women I have ever seen," answered he, frankly. "Beyond this fact I can scarcely say that I have formed an opinion, except that her manner is decidedly cold, and rather calculated to repulse one."

"I am inclined to think that is a form of the antagonism which people who are not quite sure of their social position often display," remarked Carl. "You must blame the circumstances of her life for it. Her manner loses all that hauteur, and is exquisitely charming when she is once thoroughly at ease."

"You seem to know a great deal about her," said Mrs. Middleton, with a slight accent of suspicion in her tone.

"I have seen a good deal of her," said the young man, quietly; "and I have noticed the peculiarity to which I allude. She is too refined to be defiant or self-asserting, so she meets patronage and slights with this proud coldness."

"But we have no intention of either patronizing or slighting her," said Mr. Middleton.

"Granted, my dear sir; but remember, in the first place, that she had no assurance of that fact; and, in the second, that the habit of years cannot be laid aside in a moment. I will wager any thing you please, however, that her manner will be changed entirely when she comes down to dinner. There never was a woman quicker to take a tone from others."

"But is she coming down to dinner?" said Mrs. Middleton, who just then felt more interest in the soup than in Miss Desmond's manner. "Perhaps she may be too much fatigued to appear this evening. —Leslie, do you not think it would be well to send and ask if she would not like to dine in her own room?"

"I scarcely think—" Leslie began, but before she could finish her sentence the door opened, and Miss Desmond entered.

Entered and walked down the long room toward the waiting group with an ease and grace that would not have misbecome a princess—if princesses were always as princess-like as they are generally supposed to be. The repose of her manner was so perfect, and her beauty was so brilliant, that she absolutely dazzled them as she advanced. Even Mr. Middleton put up his eye-glass in amazement. If he had thought her "the handsomest woman he had ever seen," in a dusty traveling-dress, he could almost (save that his age for hyperbole was past) have likened her to a goddess in the filmy draperies and becoming adornment which she wore now. Tired, as she might naturally have been supposed to be, Miss Desmond had evidently been mindful of the fact that first impressions last long, and are very important; hence she had exerted herself to make a toilet in which consummate knowledge of effect was veiled to all, save the most critical eye, by a simplicity that was in itself full of distinction.

"Am I late?" she asked, as she reached the group. "I am really very sorry. I hope I have not kept you waiting long."

"You have not kept us waiting at all," said Mrs. Middleton, courteously. "I am only afraid that we have been selfish in expecting you to appear this evening. You must feel exceedingly fatigued."

"On the contrary, I am not conscious of any weariness at all," answered she simply. "Fatigue—absolute and real fatigue—is something which I have never felt half a dozen times in my life. I hope I do not *look* broken down?" she added, with a smile.

"Don't ask us to tell you how you look," said Leslie. "We might fall into extravagance, and say that you look like Juno dressed by Worth."

"In a manner you would be near the truth, then," said Norah, with her rare laugh. "I cannot flatter myself that I look at all like Juno, but my dress is modeled on one of Worth's designs, though I have been daring enough to make several alterations. Do you know I have an idea of setting up as his rival? They tell me—everybody who knows—that in audacity and fertility of conception I almost equal him. —One should not praise one's self, should one, Mrs. Middleton? But then, you know, such assurances as those might intoxicate the soberest brain."

"Who is Worth—a painter?" asked Mr. Middleton, regarding the young lady through his glass as if she had been a lay-figure or a picture.

There was a general laugh at this, which the appearance of Robert and the announcement of dinner somewhat shortened.

"Take Norah in at once, uncle, before you disgrace yourself by any further display of ignorance," said Leslie.—"No, thanks, Carl—I dislike to sandwich a man, even from the drawing-room to the dining-room. Aunt Mildred is enough of a charge for you."

"Your *fiancée* ought to be on duty," said Carl. "Where is he? I give you warning that, if he is not a wonderfully good fellow, I mean to refuse my consent to this little matrimonial arrangement which you have all got up without consulting me."

"Arthur said he would not come over this evening, since it is Norah's first among us," Leslie answered, when they were seated at table. "I thought it very considerate of him; but if I had known how well she could look even after such an exhausting journey, I think I should have told him that his consideration was unnecessary."

Norah, who was seated in the full light of the dying summer day, looked up at this, her already brilliant color deepening, perhaps, by a shade.

"I wonder if I have not met Mr. Tyndale," she said, quietly. "Has he ever been abroad?"

"He was abroad two or three years ago," Leslie answered. "But, although it is likely enough that you may have seen, it is not likely that you knew him, for he told me some time ago that, although he had seen you once or twice, he had never had the pleasure of knowing you."

"Indeed!" Something like a glow came into the eyes, and the scarlet lips curved as if in faint scorn. "Did he chance to mention where he had seen me?" she asked after a moment.

"I think he said it was at Baden or Homburg," Leslie answered, vexed with herself that she could not avoid coloring, as she remembered in what manner Arthur had spoken of the regal-looking creature before her.

"Strangely enough, my idea was that I had met him at one of those places," Norah said, coolly, noting with keen eyes the flush that dyed the face of the other. "Or perhaps it is not strange, after all. Perhaps my memory is better than his want of memory, and I am right in thinking that I knew him, or some other Mr. Tyndale, at one of those spas."

"It could not have been Arthur!" said Leslie, with a positive air. "He certainly could not have known you and forgotten it—especially since he remembered your appearance perfectly, and recognized your likeness at a glance."

"Mr. Tyndale has a cousin," said Mrs. Middleton. "Perhaps it is he whom Miss Desmond knew."

"I am not absolutely positive that I knew any one of the name," said Miss Desmond, abruptly. "One meets so many people—at least, I do—that I often confound names, and sometimes mistake identities. Perhaps the Tyndale whom I remember was an Englishman, or perhaps"—she lifted her glass of wine to her lips just here—"he may be dead long ago."

"I am inclined to think that it was Captain Tyndale," said Leslie, meditatively. "He is Arthur's cousin, but he is half a Frenchman, and has lived in France almost all his life. Nothing is more likely than that you should have known him."

"He is well worth knowing," said Mr. Middleton, chiming in just here. "I like that young fellow—he is sensible, straight-forward, and a thorough gentleman, without a particle of nonsense about him."

"He is an officer of the French army," added Mrs. Middleton, "and is said to have acted very gallantly at— what was the name of the battle, Leslie? Of course, that is a thing which we must take on trust; but he is certainly very pleasant."

"What is that?" said Carl, who had pricked up his ears at the last announcement. "Have you a fragment of the great wreck over here? I hope you have not been lionizing him, Leslie? I'll send for a Uhlan or two, if you want subjects for that kind of amusement."

"You are very kind," said Leslie, "but we generally find them to suit ourselves. Following the example of the people who, in advertising for servants, add, 'No Irish need apply!' we generally make it understood that, in securing subjects for lionizing, no Germans need apply— nor German sympathizers, either!"

"I see that I shall find very little appreciation for my devotion to the Fatherland," said he, shrugging his shoulders; "that is, unless I can persuade Miss Desmond to sing 'Die Wacht am Rhein' with me."

"I have not learned any thing since the 'Marseillaise,'" said Norah, dryly.

"That is better than 'Partant pour la Syrie,' at all events," muttered he. "It has a history."

"Of the *sans-culottes* and the Place de la Grève," said Leslie.

"Add Belleville, Montmartre, and La Roquette. We must not be personal, however. Miss Desmond was in Paris during the reign of the Commune, and she may have been a *patrioteuse*."

"Norah, were you, indeed? Tell us about it!" cried Leslie, eagerly.

"About being a *patrioteuse*?" asked Norah, smiling.

"How absurd! About being in Paris, of course, I mean."

"There is not much to tell. Since we were unfortunate enough to be women, papa thought that the best place for Kate and myself was in a convent— your chivalrous Prussians had battered down one of the walls, Mr. Middleton— and I shall never forget the days we spent there. We thought them horrible— especially as we lived in hourly expectation of being driven out— but, after all, many people fared much worse."

"But you must see that it was not reasonable to blame the Prussians about the wall of your convent"— Middleton was beginning, when his uncle interposed.

"We won't discuss the question, Carl. I fancy most of us have made up our minds in a general way, on one side or the other, and unprofitable excitement is bad for digestion. —My sympathies are all with the walls of your convent, Miss Desmond, and, if Carl becomes unpleasantly Teutonic, I'll shut him up with a cask of lager in a Dutch summer-house we have, to evolve any thing he pleases from his inner consciousness, so that he keeps quiet."

"Oh, I have really no great objection to the Germans," said Miss Desmond, in a tone of magnanimity. "They do very well for some things. I have lived among them so much that, of course, I know them very well."

"She told me that she liked Vienna better than any capital in Europe," said Carl, addressing the company.

"And do you call Vienna *German*?" she asked, indignantly. "Where do you find any leaven of Teutonic heaviness in that brilliant capital? Is there any suggestion of Unter den Linden on the Prater? I do not call any thing German which is enriched by the warm blood of the Slavic races."

"There is no telling what she will say next," said Carl, with an air of resignation. "But, for all that, she sings German ballads like a thrush."

"We will hear her after dinner," said Mrs. Middleton, smiling. Before very long, however, that lady's eyes began to open to the alarming degree of interest which Carl manifested in the young stranger. The feminine mind is proverbially quick in perceiving or foreseeing the faintest suspicion of a love-affair, and, although Mrs. Middleton had not yet heard of that previous acquaintance which had so astonished Leslie, she saw many significant signs that disturbed the serene atmosphere of comfort in which she usually existed. A new vista of possible annoyance, of horribly possible misfortune, appeared to open before her. Carl! In summing up all that might

occur from the visit of this Bohemian girl, she had not once thought of Carl. Yet, what if he should marry her!

It seemed a wide leap to take even in imagination, but Mrs. Middleton had lived too long in the world not to be thoroughly aware how often such leaps are taken in reality, and a bitter sense of anger rose up in her heart as she thought that this might be the end of all her hopes. Leslie's engagement to Arthur Tyndale had been unpalatable enough; but for Carl to fall in love with Norah Desmond would fill the cup of disappointment to its brim. "Good Heavens, how things turn out in this world!" she thought, with a terrible sense of her own inability to stem their current, "and who can tell what dreadful results may follow from one false step! If Leslie had only listened to me—" But then it was an unalterable fact that Leslie had not listened, as unalterable as Miss Desmond's presence at Rosland, concerning which Mrs. Middleton called her own weakness sternly to account, and wasted much time in vain regret that she had not opposed such a step more strenuously and with greater authority.

It was after dinner when she made these cheerful reflections. Mr. Middleton was smoking a cigar and reading a newspaper in the dining-room, the decanters still on the table, and a glass of wine near his hand. Carl, having smoked out two or three cigarettes, at last sauntered into the drawing-room, where he found his aunt alone. She was in her favorite nook—a recess large enough to contain her writing-table, her couch, her easy-chair, and all her luxurious paraphernalia of special comforts—and he saw at once that he had no alternative but to join her. At another time, this necessity would not have presented itself in an unpleasant light; but just now he was particularly anxious to see Norah Desmond, and he could not repress a slight feeling of impatience at the prospect of one of those unlimited gossips which women love. He faced it, however, with a sufficiently good grace, though his preoccupation of manner was so great that Mrs. Middleton soon detected the utter want of interest with which he received the various items of social and domestic news that she exerted herself to bestow upon him. She saw his eyes wander across the room, in which shaded lamp-light and summer twilight were mingled, to the veranda and lawn beyond. Watching him closely, she caught a sudden quickening expression which flashed across his face, and was very significant, as a pair of white-clad figures came slowly into sight, visible through the lace-draped window and green arch beyond.

"Leslie took Miss Desmond out to enjoy the twilight," said she, changing her topic of conversation quite abruptly—a fact which it is probable Carl did not discover. "By-the-by, you have not told me yet what you think of her. Is she not lovely?"

"Lovely!" repeated he, starting suddenly out of abstraction. "Yes, of course—only that is too weak a word! She is the most beautiful creature I ever saw!"

Then—brought up short, as it were, by Mrs. Middleton's look of surprise—he blushed and laughed.

"By Jove!" he said, "I thought you were talking of Miss Desmond. Is it Leslie you mean? Certainly she is very lovely—so graceful and refined—but she does not show to the best advantage by such a woman as her sister."

"There is no comparison between them!" said Mrs. Middleton, sharply—for the coolness of this depreciation was more than even her patience could endure—"they belong to entirely different social types. Leslie bears every mark of exquisite refinement and high-breeding, while Miss Desmond is a mere man's beauty!"

"Is she?" said Carl, good-humoredly. "Then it is no wonder men rave over her as they do. You should have heard them on board the *Russia*! Why, there were one or two fellows who were absolutely crazy about her! Now, you know, a woman must be remarkable to make a sensation like that on ship-board, for men are thinking of other things just then—their stomachs principally."

"It is never in good taste to make a sensation anywhere!" said Mrs. Middleton, in an ex-cathedra tone, which, to do her justice, she did not often employ. "No thorough-bred lady ever desires to do so!"

"But a woman can't help being beautiful, you know," said Carl. "Of course it has its drawbacks sometimes; I have heard Miss Desmond talk about them quite feelingly. But I can assure you she did nothing to draw attention on herself. She is enough of a thorough-bred woman to avoid *that*, at any rate."

"Is she?" said Mrs. Middleton. Without being a philosopher, she knew human nature well enough to avoid any argument on the score of Miss Desmond's breeding, or Miss Desmond's charms; she was perfectly aware that depreciation would only fan Carl's admiration to fever-heat; so, with a wisdom that many women lack, she allowed the subject to drop, and soon after this sent him away. "Go and make your bird-of-paradise sing," she said.

"But she is not my bird-of-paradise," answered he. "And she sings only when she has a mind to—I give you warning of that!"

He went willingly enough, however, and found the bird-of-paradise still on the lawn with Leslie.

"Do you think this is quite prudent?" asked he, coming up to them as they sat under a large catalpa-tree, making a pretty picture in the soft twilight. "There is a very heavy dew on the grass. Look!"—and he pointed to his evening boots, all covered with clinging moisture.

"It may not be prudent, but it is very pleasant," said Leslie. "Everything is so fragrant and exquisite! I have been making Norah listen to the mocking-birds. She never heard them before, you know."

"And what a delicious note they have!" said Norah. "I cannot imagine any thing more sweet. Listen! is not that one, now?"

"They sing in this grove all night long," said Carl, "or at least they used to do so. I have often lain awake for hours listening to them. That fellow who is singing now is a perfect Mario!"

"He is in the rose-hedge yonder," said Miss Desmond. "I think I shall go nearer, for the sake of listening to him."

"Take care, Norah, the grass is very wet," said Leslie. "I was just about to propose a return to the house, where we can hear you sing, instead of the mocking-bird."

"What an exchange!" said Norah; and, as she spoke, she walked toward the hedge.

"Go with her, Carl," said Miss Grahame, appealingly. "My shoes are too thin for me to venture into that high grass; and pray bring her back as soon as possible!"

"All right," said Carl, hastening away. His heart gave a triumphant throb. Here was his opportunity sooner than he could have dared to hope. It is to be feared that he did not think much just then of the dew-laden grass clinging round Norah's delicate ankles. The power of speaking to her alone was a boon worth purchasing at any cost.

"Why did you come?" asked she, turning round abruptly as he gained her side. "You should have stayed with Leslie. I am very well able to take care of myself, and I do not want to talk to you, but to listen to the mocking-bird."

"I never doubted that," said he; "but it was Leslie who sent me. Not that I needed to be sent—you know that; but it was she who bade me come. Pray excuse me if I ought to have stayed."

"It is not a matter of the least importance," answered she; "but of course Leslie will think that I came away to flirt."

"I think you anticipate many harsh judgments which are never passed," said he, coloring. "I will answer for Leslie that such a thought has not entered her mind. When you know her better, you will find that she is one of the most amiable and most unsuspecting people in the world."

"I think I perceive that already," said Miss Desmond, thoughtfully. "And, in consequence, I feel like one who is at sea without a compass. I have been so much surprised to find Leslie what she is, that I scarcely realize my position, or—or what I am to do. I fancied—I confidently expected—something so different."

"And so much more disagreeable, I am sure."

"Yes, I confess that."

"And why is it that you persist in always expecting the worst and thinking the worst of people?"

"Because, in the course of my nineteen years, I have found that people always think the worst and expect the worst of me."

"Stop a minute," said he, smiling. "I bind you on your honor to answer if you have found that *everybody*, even in the course of your mature nineteen years, has thought or expected the worst of you?"

"Men in love don't count," answered she. "A few of them have thought much better of me than I deserved."

"I should count them worth all the rest," said he, coloring again.

"Should you?" asked she, a little mockingly. "I cannot agree with you. If a man tells me that I am a goddess, for instance, I can only laugh at him, you know. Certainly, I could not be expected to respect an opinion so palpably absurd. But, when a woman says that I am a fast flirt, the words sting a little, because they have a modicum of truth in them. I have not been reared to regard conventionality overmuch, and I generally accept admiration when it is offered me."

"I have never yet seen a woman who did not," said he. "But, without any high-flown folly, a man might hold you far above all other women, and be worthy of credit if he told you so."

"That is a kind of homage which has never been offered to me," said she, with a look of quick pain—which the twilight hid—crossing her face. "Men, as a general rule, have fallen in love and made fools of themselves about me, against their better judgment. I am afraid I should not believe in any thing else if it were given to me now. But this is a tiresome subject, and we came—at least *I* came—to listen to the mocking-bird. I think our voices must have startled him, for he has ceased to sing."

"Ceased, in a paroxysm of envy, to listen to you, I am sure."

"Don't credit him with the meanest of our poor passions," said she. "That was a very neat compliment, however. Such things are like an inspiration, are they not? Now, I am sure you could not do as well again."

"Do you mean that as a challenge for me to try?"

"Not by any means, since a prepared compliment is about as excellent as twice-cooked meat. In fact, I do not like compliments, under any circumstances," added she, frankly.

"Then I shall employ more fragrant lips to utter mine for me," said he, pausing to break a rose—for they were now among the shrubbery—which even in the gloaming he could perceive to be one of the most royal and beautiful of its kind. Having done this, he turned to his companion. "I know nothing about the language of flowers," he said; "but this rose seems to me to typify you better than any other flower possibly could, and *it ranks far above all others, you know!*" Then, after a pause, in a lower tone: "Will you take it?"

She hesitated a moment—during which Middleton would have given any thing he possessed for a light in which to see her face—but, as he began to gather courage from her hesitation, she extended her hand with a laugh that made his courage sink to zero again.

"Thanks; you are very kind," she said. "I think my challenge must have put you on your mettle, for your second effort is better than your first. What a lovely rose! How good of you to say that it typifies me! I only wish I were half so glowing and perfect!"

"If you were any other woman, I should say that wish was an egregious affectation," said Carl, provoked by her nonchalance.

"But, as it is, you are kind enough to give me credit for sincerity," she said and he heard her laugh again. "How very complimentary you are to-night! Is it your uncle's excellent champagne which has inspired you? It would be pleasant to remain and hear you go from better to best; but I am becoming aware that the grass is damp, and, since Mario will not give us another roulade, it might be as well to return to the house. *A propos* of your pretty speeches, I have a shrewd suspicion that, if Leslie does not think that I am flirting, your aunt will not be so charitable!"

"We don't think quite so much of leather and prunella here as in the countries to which you are accustomed," said he, as he turned and walked by her side.

"Where do you draw the line between what is *de rigueur*, and what is not?" she asked. "I should really like to know. Perhaps on this side of the water I may find myself a very conventional and respectable person, indeed."

"You must ask some one better up in the proprieties than I am," he answered. "When they present themselves to me, it is generally in the light of such particularly unpleasant bores that I have never given them the attention which they doubtless deserve."

To cross a lawn cannot possibly take a very long time under any circumstances, so they soon found themselves in the drawing-room, where Miss Desmond went at once to the piano, without any troublesome solicitation. Notes she had none, but her command of the instrument was perfect, and her knowledge of harmony very good. After a well-modulated prelude, she began to sing. Descriptions of singing are mostly unsatisfactory, and very unmeaning to all save the technical, musical mind; so it is sufficient to say that a voice like this, which rose now and floated out on the midsummer night, had never sounded before within the walls of Rosland. A contralto so rich, so sweet, so powerful, would have been likely to command attention and admiration anywhere; but here it was greeted with an enthusiasm that might have gratified the most exacting prima-donna on the lyric stage.

It was a voice strangely familiar, and strangely fraught with association to one who did not form part of the group in the drawing-room. A solitary man, standing on a bridge that crossed a small stream not far from the house, heard the clear, full notes rising as he moodily smoked his cigar, and their cadence seemed suddenly to stir into life the wild thrill of an old passion which he had thought dead forever.

## CHAPTER VII.

"The branches cross above our eyes,  
The skies are in a net;  
And what's the thing beneath the skies  
We two would most forget?

Not birth, my love, no, no  
Not death, my love, no, no

The love once ours, but ours long hours ago."

"I SUPPOSE there is nothing for it but to face the music, Max!"

It was Arthur Tyndale who spoke thus, not interrogatively, but with a sort of gloomy decision, as he leaned back in his chair, stroked the silken ears of his favorite setter, and regarded his cousin, who, having come down late, was eating his breakfast with the appetite of a man who is neither dyspeptic, bankrupt, nor yet in love.

"I confess I am not able to perceive any very clear alternative," Captain Tyndale answered, frankly. "It is an awkward position; but you have had a month or two in which to prepare yourself for it, so I really don't see why you should take it *au tragique* at the last minute."

"Oh, you don't!" said Arthur, sardonically. "No—I suppose not. I believe we rarely ever do see any reason for the troubles and annoyances of other people! All the same—if you were in my place—"

"Which I am not, thank Heaven!"

"—You might be conscious of a strong temptation to order your horse and take the earliest train from Wexford in any direction, sooner than walk over to Rosland and face Norah Desmond."

"Face her!" repeated the other, impatiently. "But what do you think she will do? If she is half the woman you have described her to be, she is not likely to assert her claim to you in the face of the assembled family."

"The assembled family would be a matter of the least possible importance compared to *her*!"

"Or to upbraid you with your desertion, after the fashion of a melodramatic heroine?"

"Don't be a fool, Max!"

"Then, in the name of common-sense, what are you afraid of?"

"I am afraid of nothing," said Tyndale, coloring. "But you might understand that it is confoundedly awkward to use the mildest possible phrase to meet a woman who has good reason for thinking you are engaged to her, in the presence of another woman to whom you are engaged."

"Hm!" said Max, carving a chicken. "I can imagine that it might be slightly unpleasant. But you should have thought of that in time."

"Thought of it! But how the deuce could I think of it when, up to the first of May, I had no more reason for imagining that Norah Desmond was connected with Leslie Grahame, than I have for imagining that she is connected with you!"

He spoke so much in the tone of one who has been aggrieved by some supreme injury of Fate, that Max Tyndale absolutely opened his dark eyes and stared at him. "By Jove!" he said, half aloud. Then he stroked his mustache and went on, devoting his attention to the chicken. Arthur had been something of a study to him during the last two months, and this phase of his character was no new revelation.

"Are you going to walk over to Rosland this morning?" he asked, after a while.

"I suppose I ought to do so," Arthur answered, hesitatingly. "You'll come too, won't you?"

"I think not. Most likely I'll spend the day lounging in the house. It is too hot for anything else."

"They are always glad to see you at Rosland."

"I know that; but, all the same, I won't trouble them this morning."

Tyndale made a slightly-impatient movement and turned away. It would have been a satisfaction to him to have had Max at his side as a sort of moral support, and he felt vexed that his cousin should not have been aware of this fact. He was ashamed to make his request more particular or pressing, however, and so it came to pass that, in the course of the next hour, he set off alone—taking a footpath through the woods to Rosland.

The morning was indeed very warm, but he was scarcely conscious of the heat. With every step his nervousness increased. Clearer and clearer came the remembrance of how he had parted with Norah Desmond last, and the realization of how he was about to meet her now! More and more perfectly he appreciated how entirely he was in her power. He began to ask himself if he had been mad to let things go on thus far in the vague hope or chance of influencing her to silence. "Why did I not tell Leslie any thing?" he muttered, thinking of the day when she had asked him whether there was any reason why her sister should not be invited to her uncle's house, and he had felt constrained to answer that there was none. Now he looked back upon this answer as a piece of pusillanimous folly, seeing clearly that he had "owed it to himself" to put the girl's character in such a light that Leslie would never have been inclined to take any step toward nearer acquaintanceship. It must not be supposed that this opinion was a reckless impulse born of an hour or a day; it was rather the slow result of two months spent in halting between honor and dishonor, in counting the chances for and against detection, in persuading himself that they were very strongly in his favor, and in cultivating an habitually injured frame of mind, which he found to be a very solid and permanent comfort.

Just now it was less of a comfort than it had ever been before. Things which he had striven to ignore—memories from which he shrank—came back and stared him grimly in the

face. He could not rid himself of the consciousness that already—if Miss Desmond had chosen to speak—he might find the doors of Rosland closed to him; already he might be cast out indignantly from Leslie's heart. Standing on the bridge where Norah's voice had floated down to him the night before, he forgot himself far enough to curse her in his heart—her and "his luck." No man was ever in such a position before, he thought; and, so thinking, turned on his heel. Even here—in sight of the very walls of Rosland—he could not resolve to face her.

But, as he turned—filled with the one vague idea of escaping from the embarrassment which awaited him—voices suddenly smote on his ear—gay tones and light laughter floated to him. The next moment, around a turn of the path, two ladies and a gentleman came slowly sauntering toward the bridge. It was too late for retreat—even if he had still desired to make it. Fate had come to his assistance, and cut with sharp decision the Gordian knot of his vacillation. "There is Arthur!" he heard Leslie say; and after that he could only advance to meet them.

The meeting was, of course, less terrible than he had pictured it. Conventionalities are good things to keep troublesome emotions in check; and there are few of us who could dispense with the beneficent aid of commonplaces at those critical moments when the heart seems beating in the throat, and the lip quivers over every thing save the baldest platitudes. Afterward Tyndale could recall little besides a sudden great wave of recollection, which came over him with the force of an absolute shock, as Leslie said, "Norah, let me introduce Mr. Tyndale: this is my sister, Arthur;" and, looking up, he met Norah's brilliant eyes fastened on him. It was almost unconsciously that he bowed and said something—he did not know what—about her journey. The past rushed back upon him with a power which he could hardly withstand. Her face, her figure, the very ornaments she wore, the very fragrance that hung like a faint incense about her, seemed to conjure before him the green lindens of Baden—seemed to bring back, with a sense of overwhelming reality, scenes and words which—being more weak than willful in dishonor—he would have given any thing to efface by some spell of oblivion. But such a spell was difficult to find with the "haunting fairness" of her face before him, and the splendor of her eyes thrilling his very soul. He was forced to give himself a sort of mental shake in order to remember where he really was when she spoke to him—spoke as she might have spoken to the most indifferent stranger who crossed her path.

"Thanks; yes—I had a very pleasant voyage," she said—but he seemed to catch the echo of *other words* in every tone; he seemed to hear again the sweet thrill of tenderness which had filled that voice when they parted two years before!

Leslie did not observe his agitation; but there was some one else who did. When he greeted Carl Middleton, the latter noticed that the hand offered him was cold, and shook nervously. Instinctively he glanced at Leslie, but her bright smile forbade the idea that she was, in any way, connected with such an agitation. Then he looked at Norah. She was holding her dress lightly aside from the grass—as supremely calm and coolly nonchalant as it was possible for a woman to appear. Carl felt a little puzzled, and glanced back at Tyndale. The latter had turned to speak to Miss Grahame, but the first tone of his voice betrayed to a finely-strung ear the nervous tension in which he was holding himself.

"I was on my way to the house," he said. "I had no idea of finding you out. Is it not rather warm to be walking?"

"I brought Norah out to show her the grounds," Leslie answered, "but perhaps it *is* too warm for exercise.—If you think so" (turning to her sister), "we will go back."

"Not on my account," said Norah, quickly. "Our path has been so shaded that the sun has not been able to do more than glance at us, and there is a breeze which we do not feel in the house. Besides, I like to be in the open air. I think it is where we should live in summer."

"It is an ascertained fact that the people of America spend less time in the open air than any other people in the world," said Carl, meditatively.

"Do you mean that as a thing to be admired or decried?" asked Miss Desmond. "For my part, I think it very extraordinary. How can they resist the invitation which every gleam of

sunshine seems to give? Now, what a charming place this is just before us! How clear the stream looks under the overhanging shade! How prettily the shadows flicker— how softly the water murmurs! Such a scene is enough in itself to tempt one to idleness! —Have you ever outgrown your childish fancy for wading, Mr. Middleton? I confess that I never have."

She moved forward— passing Tyndale so closely that her dress touched him— followed by Carl. On the bridge they paused.

"Do you feel inclined to try a little wading?" he asked, leaning over the railing, but looking up in her face. "You did not give me time to answer your question; but I never *have* outgrown my fancy for it."

She laughed, and glanced down at her daintily-clad feet.

"I am afraid the golden age for that pastoral pleasure is over for me," she said. "My recollection of it is somewhat like a man's sentimental yearning over the memory of his first love. How much aghast he would be if sentenced to pass his life with the woman he loved at twenty! — and I am afraid I could scarcely go back into Arcadia sufficiently to enjoy the ripple of even that cool, clear water around my feet. This is a delightful place, however, even to those who have left Arcadia behind. It would be pleasant, would it not, to come down here some day and fish?"

"It would be pleasant to fish anywhere with you," her companion answered, quite truthfully. "But it would be foolish to cast our nets or our lines here, with the river near at hand full of capital fish."

"Is the river near at hand? How near?"

"Something like half a mile, I think.— I say, Leslie"— as Miss Grahame advanced toward them—"how far are we from the river?"

"A quarter of a mile, perhaps," said Leslie, "but why do you ask? It is too warm to go on the water at this time of day."

"Do you go on the water?" asked Norah. "Have you a boat? We were talking of fishing, but boating is my idea of beatitude."

"I think you are more than half mermaid," said Carl.

"I wish I were," said she, sighing. "It would be pleasant to live three hundred years, and then be dissolved into sea-foam— even so much better than the prospect of being haggard and toothless at threescore! —Don't you think so, Leslie?"

"It is only the exceptional people who live to threescore," said Leslie. "We need not flatter ourselves with the idea of such good luck."

"Such bad luck, you mean," answered the other. Then she turned to Carl. "Did you not promise to show me the Dutch summer-house where you mean to retire when you feel particularly Teutonic?" she asked. "Is it near here?"

"It is not very far off. I shall be delighted to cicerone you, if you feel inclined to come with me."

"Of course I feel inclined," said she. "Should I have spoken of it if I had not? — Leslie, you will excuse us, will you not?— Thanks, Mr. Tyndale" (as Arthur disentangled her parasol from the low branch of a tree), "fringe and lace are troublesome things. Is it this way, Mr. Middleton?"

Graceful and self-possessed as ever, she walked away with Carl, and Leslie would have turned to follow if Tyndale had not interfered.

"Need we go and look at the summer-house?" he asked. "We know all about it, and the sun is horribly warm. Let us go back to the house."

"But I want you to see Norah," said Leslie. "You have scarcely spoken to her as yet. I want you to know her. You were so right in telling me that she is fascinating! There never was any thing more true. She has fascinated all of us already."

"I see that she has fascinated your cousin," said he, bitterly. "But that is not remarkable! She is the most thorough-paced and unscrupulous coquette I have ever seen!"

"I think you do her injustice!" said Miss Grahame. "She is so beautiful—would it not be strange if she did not like the admiration which is offered her? And then, how much of it must have been offered! Enough to spoil the characters and turn the heads of half a dozen ordinary women, you may be sure."

"Of course she has been admired," said Tyndale, gloomily. "Nobody could look at her and doubt that. I think she is handsomer than ever!" he added, in a disgusted tone, for, unconsciously to himself, he had rather cherished the expectation that Norah's brilliant beauty would have "gone off" in watching for him.

"I do not think anybody could be more beautiful!" said Leslie; "and this reminds me to ask if you are *quite* sure you never knew her when you were abroad?"

"Am I quite sure!" repeated Tyndale. His heart seemed to stand still for a minute, his blond complexion changed its color violently two or three times. "Good Heavens, Leslie, what do you mean? Why should I not be sure?"

"I thought it was scarcely likely you could be mistaken," said Leslie, with a composure that proved how far any thing like suspicion was from her mind, "but Norah seemed to think that she had met you—at least, she spoke of having known some one who was named Tyndale, abroad."

"Did she?" said he, with a short gasp. "And you—what did you tell her?"

"I told her that it could not have been yourself, for you had distinctly told me that, although you had seen her, you had not known her."

"And then?"

"Well, then, of course, she said that it must have been another person; but I thought afterward that perhaps you might have been introduced to her—at a ball or some place of that kind—and forgotten it."

"Am I likely to have forgotten it?" asked he, breaking into bitterness again. "Is any man likely to forget such a woman? For good or for evil, one would have no alternative but to remember her."

"I see that you are very much prejudiced against her," said Leslie, looking at him in surprise. "Why do you speak so harshly? Has she ever done any harm to any one whom you know? Aunt Mildred thinks that it must have been your cousin who was the Tyndale she knew abroad. Is it so? and did she break his heart, or otherwise injure him?"

"No," said Tyndale, almost savagely. "Max is a lucky fellow—he has too much cool, hard common-sense to fall into the toils of such a woman as that. Forgive me, Leslie"—as he caught her pained and half-indignant look—"but you know I gave you warning beforehand what manner of person she was."

"But I have seen nothing to justify your warning," said Leslie. "I think you must have been listening to the accounts given of her by the enemies whom every beautiful woman is unfortunate enough to possess. Come!" she added, smiling, "come and give her an opportunity to fascinate you. I insist upon it."

Despite the smile, he saw that she was in earnest, and, too guiltily conscious of his motives to make further demur, he went with her along the path where the others had disappeared. "After all, perhaps it is best!" he thought. "I must, if possible, see Norah alone for ten minutes. I must know what she intends to do. What did she mean by that allusion to me last night? This suspense is more than any man could bear."

Meanwhile, Norah and Carl had reached the summer-house, which looked as if it had been imported from Amsterdam, as it crowned a softly-rising knoll in the midst of the shrubbery. The door stood open, and, mounting a flight of steps, they went in. The tiled floor, the quaint roof, the windows latticed with green vines, all seemed like a bit of still-life from one of Teniers's pictures.

"Surely a Hollander or a Fleming must have designed this," said Norah. "It is in the purest style of Dutch architecture. I have seen a hundred like it in the Low Countries. One almost expects to look out of the window at canals and dikes."

"The last owner of Rosland was a Dutchman," said Carl. "I don't think my uncle has owned the place more than twenty years." Then he walked to one of the casements. "The view does not command any canals or dikes," he said, "but it is really beautiful, Miss Desmond. Come and look!"

Thus bidden, Norah went and looked. It was certainly a fair, pastoral scene. All around were the green nooks and dells of the shrubbery, while beyond were shadowy woods, rich with midsummer foliage, and ringing with a soft echo of midsummer mirth, level fields stretching to where a dense growth of willows marked the winding course of the river, and blue hills softly melting into distance far away. From another window they could see the path which led to Strafford, and catch a glimpse of the gabled house rising above its noble oaks.

"That is a charming old place, as well as I remember," said Carl. "I should not wonder if it had been instrumental in tempting Leslie. When she was a child, she had the greatest possible fancy for it. By-the-by, what do you think of her *fiancé*? He is good-looking, certainly; but somehow he struck me just a little unpleasantly."

"There are few things more unwise than to judge people at first sight," said Miss Desmond, with the air of one who delivers a grave moral truth. "I have laid it down as a rule of life to distrust first impressions always and most emphatically."

"Still, I should like to hear what your first impression of Mr. Tyndale has been," said he, looking at her. "I have an idea that it is not very different from mine. Am I impudent?" he added, half laughing, as he saw her change color slightly.

"No, you are not impudent," she answered, coolly. "If you were, I should not hesitate to tell you so. But you are inquisitive, and that is not usually esteemed the height of civility."

"Is it not? Well, I was never much at civility—Leslie will tell you that. But, seriously, now, what do you think of the fellow?"

"Seriously, I have not taken the trouble to think of him at all."

"Then it must follow that you don't consider him worth the trouble of thinking about."

"Whatever follows is fortunately not a matter of any importance to him or to you."

"He is decidedly a beauty-man—don't you think so?"

"Very likely; but I have never noticed that fortunate class sufficiently to recognize their peculiar traits at sight."

"Don't you like them?"

"I scarcely know. I am such an amiable person that I like everybody, except troublesome people who ask foolish questions."

"I should never think of describing you as an amiable person," said he, coloring under this rebuke.

"Ah! What then—a termagant?"

"God only knows—a witch, more likely."

"Thanks for the compliment. Witches are always so particularly handsome that I appreciate the full force of it."

"A siren, then. A—anything that turns men's heads."

"Really, it is hard to make one answerable for the vagaries of men's heads. The most of them have so little ballast that they are easily turned."

"Your tongue is like a two-edged sword," said he. "No matter what I say, I am sure to get the worst of it."

"And yet you are one of my particular favorites," said she. "There are few people whom I treat with the consideration that I have always shown you."

"Heaven help those whom you treat with less, then!"

"You say that with great unction; do you fancy them in danger of a scratched face?"

"It does not matter what I fancy; but I am sure that any man in his sane senses would rather have his face scratched by you than caressed by any other woman."

"Speak for yourself," said she, coldly. And he saw that he had offended her. "It is not necessary to make your accusation of bad taste so general."

"I did not mean—" he began, contritely, but his excuses were cut short, for at that moment Leslie and Tyndale appeared at the open door.

"What a pretty tableau you make!" the former said. "They look like a picture—do they not, Arthur? I should say a Dutch picture, only Norah's Paris dress does not agree very well with our ideas of Dutch art."

"She is more like a figure out of a Watteau," said Tyndale, with a desperate attempt to appear at ease.

"And little enough like that," said Carl. "Her dress, perhaps, may be—but Watteau never painted such a face! The colors have never been mixed, save on the palettes of Titian or Rubens, to do Miss Desmond justice."

"Norah, how do you like to be discussed in such cool fashion, as if you were really a picture?" asked Leslie, smiling. "I suppose you grow used to it, however; and, to a beautiful woman, all flattery must be tame after that of her mirror. What have you two been talking about?" she went on, advancing into the summer-house. "As we came up you looked not only comfortable, but confidential."

"Everything relating to the nature of man comes under the head of philosophy," said Carl, gravely; "therefore, we have been talking philosophy."

"After the fashion of *Punch*" said Norah. "What is mind? No matter. What is matter? Never mind. What is the nature of the soul? It is immaterial."

"That is capital!" said Carl. "I shall send it to a friend of mine in Germany. It will do him good."

"Are you sure you don't need it yourself?" suggested she. "It is never well to be too generous. You remind me of the people who, whenever a particularly telling point is made in a sermon, think how well that suits their brother, or their sister, or their neighbor over the way."

"But *Punch's* sarcasm does not affect me at all," said he, sincerely, "for no man ever troubled himself less than I do about such questions. I would not give one day of golden idleness like this for the whole of Kant and Jean Paul."

"It is pleasant!" said Leslie. "Norah is right: even at the expense of becoming a little tanned, one ought to live in the open air in summer. It is a pity that I must go to the house and write some tiresome letters for the mail, is it not? — No, I won't be selfish enough to take you" (as Tyndale started forward with alacrity). "I believe I would rather have Carl. I can make him write one or two of them for me."

"Heavens and earth, Leslie!" said Carl. "You can't be in earnest! you don't seriously think that I will go in and write letters on such a day as this?"

"I seriously think you will," answered Leslie, with an air of determination; "for your cousins, the Brantley girls, wrote to me six weeks ago, asking for news of you, and I have never answered the letter. You shall do it to-day."

"I am very sorry to disappoint you," said he, "but the proposal is really absurd. I never could bear those girls, and as for writing to them—"

"Whether you can bear them, or whether you cannot, you must come and write the letter!" interrupted Leslie, decidedly. She had a reason for being so peremptory, for she had made up her mind that Norah and Tyndale should know each other, and since a *tâte-à-tâte* is generally esteemed the best means of advancing personal knowledge, she was determined that they should have this advantage, and also determined not to be thwarted by Carl's idleness and obstinacy.

"Pray do not come because I do," she said, turning to Norah. "It will be pleasant here for an hour or two yet, and Arthur will bring you to the house when you are ready to come."

"I am quite ready now," answered Norah, rising.

But Leslie had already drawn Carl—reluctant and protesting—down the steps, and, as Miss Desmond moved forward to follow, Tyndale took his courage in both hands and stepped before her.

"One moment!" he said, hoarsely. "I must speak to you."

He thought he had braced himself for any emergency—that he could not be unnerved by any thing she might do or say—but, when she lifted her eyes, full of astonished *hauteur*, to his face, he was conscious that all his resolution ebbed from him as completely and hopelessly as if she had been indeed the witch to whom Middleton had likened her.

"Excuse me," she said, in a tone that suited the glance. "As there is nothing you can desire to say which I can possibly desire to hear, I prefer to follow my sister."

"But I must speak to you!" he repeated, the hoarseness still apparent in his voice, the color coming and going in patches on his face. "You cannot refuse to give me a few minutes—you cannot refuse to listen to me! I shall not detain you long."

"I decline absolutely to give you one minute," she answered, haughtily. "I refuse absolutely to listen to one word that you have to say."

"Is this generous—is this just, Norah?"

"How do you dare to address me in that manner?" she asked—a sudden flash of lightning-like anger breaking up the coldness of her face.

"Pardon me," he answered. "But it is hard to see you, and not to remember the days when you *were* Norah to me."

"Will you stand aside and let me pass?" was her only reply.

"No!" he rejoined, sharply. "How can you ask it? How can you think that I should meet you like this and let you go? You must see for yourself that it is absolutely necessary for us to understand each other!"

"It is never well to take things too much for granted, Mr. Tyndale," she said. "So far from seeing it, I am unable to recognize the least necessity why we should understand each other."

"You can say that to *me*—Norah!"

She drew herself up superbly. Always of queenly stature and more than queenly bearing, she looked just then as if her form had come down to her from the heroic days.

"You forget yourself strangely!" she said. "Once more, will you move aside and let me pass, or must I understand that you intend to keep me here that you may insult me at your leisure?"

"Is the truth an insult?" asked he, flushing deeply. "If so, it is no fault of mine. Norah, we have no time to waste in idle fencing. Say what you please—and I remember of old how bitter your tongue can be!—all the same, I am determined not to stir from this spot until definitely and finally we understand each other."

"It is impossible to rate your chivalry too high, Mr. Tyndale," she said, with a glance of scorn. "Since I am a prisoner at your pleasure, however, and since it seems to you a matter of so much importance that we should understand each other, it may be worth while to say that I understand *you* perfectly."

He might have answered truly enough that this was not what he desired—that the vitally important point with him was the necessity of understanding *her* but, instead of this, her open contempt roused him to a different rejoinder.

"I doubt if you understand me at all," he said. "For the matter of that, I doubt if you ever did understand me."

"Did I not?" said she, with indifference. "It must have been owing to my own want of attention, then—certainly not to any thing particularly abstruse in the nature of the subject. I cannot say that I have acquired any new degree of interest since I had the pleasure of seeing you last," she went on, calmly.

"I can imagine," he said, quickly, "that you may have learned to feel very bitterly toward me. But, if you will only suffer me to explain—"

She interrupted him by a gesture, which he never forgot.

"You mistake my meaning entirely," she said. "Feel bitterly toward you! Why should I? Explain? What is there to explain?"

Her eyes faced him with such steady lustre that his own lids fell. He realized then how unequal he was to the encounter he had provoked. What could he say to such a woman as this? He had never been a match for her—he knew that well—she had always been a perverse and tantalizing enigma to him; but he had never felt so hopelessly bewildered as now. The cool disdain with which it pleased her to treat the past was so different from the passionate resentment he had expected, that he felt wholly unable to cope with it. Catching desperately at the first idea which presented itself, he uttered the very last thing which should have found expression on his lips.

"Norah," he said, passionately, "it is impossible for you to have forgotten that you loved me once!"

Instantly he read his mistake in the glow which came into her eyes, in the haughty curve of her clear-cut, resolute mouth.

"How entirely you are pleased to justify my opinion of your character, Mr. Tyndale!" she said, in a tone so full of contemptuous meaning that it cut like a whip. "But you must pardon me if I say that you flatter yourself too much. If all the men with whom I have chanced to amuse myself were kind enough to say that I 'loved them once,' I should be credited with a most facile and impressionable heart, indeed."

Looking at the beautiful, proud face, at the brilliant, scornful eyes, a sudden, horrible fear that she might be speaking truth came over him. I have written the word horrible advisedly; for, to a man of Arthur Tyndale's stamp, there was something inexpressibly humiliating in the mere suspicion that *he*—so magnificent in worldly gifts, so full of worldly knowledge—should have blindly served as the plaything of a coquette. The thought of his own broken faith he could face with due philosophy, but the idea of having been entwined in such a net as that which annoyed and cramped him at present, for the mere amusement of a "Bohemian adventuress," was more than he could endure.

"You know that you are insinuating what is not true!" he said, forgetting courtesy, chivalry, every thing, in the sharp stab under which his pride was writhing. "You know that, whatever else I may or may not have been, I was something more than material for amusement to *you!*"

"Were you?" she said, quietly; but there was that in her eyes which might have warned him that this calm boded no good. "You must excuse my forgetfulness of the fact I rarely trouble myself to remember any thing of the past—except my debts."

The significance of the last words were not lost on him; but, feeling that the conversation had taken a wrong turn—conscious that he was doing himself infinitely more harm than good—he caught eagerly at this the first opportunity she had given him to learn what she really meant to do.

"You have or you may think that you have a debt against me," he said, quickly. "How do you mean to pay that, Norah?"

"Have I a debt against you, Mr. Tyndale?" said she, with a kind of mocking surprise. "I am afraid I must ask you to refresh my memory with regard to it. Past follies are the things of all others which I most readily forget."

"You are trying my patience!" he said, setting his teeth savagely. "But you would do well to remember that you may try it a little too far."

"And what of mine?" she asked, with the well-remembered Celtic passion suddenly blazing out upon him from every eloquent feature. "Do you think that, because I have chosen to ignore your insults, I have not felt and shall not remember them? Your knowledge of me might have helped you to judge better than that. We have met to-day as strangers," she went on, after a moment; "as strangers ever hereafter we shall meet. Remember this; and remember, also, that, if

you ever presume to address me again as you have addressed me here, the means of remedy are in my hands, and I shall not hesitate to use them unsparingly."

"If you are attempting to threaten me—" he began, with the air of a Bayard.

But she interrupted him with cool decision.

"Pardon me, I am merely placing a plain alternative before you. Having done so, there is nothing more to add. The past of my life in which you have played a short and most unworthy part, is dead forever, and God is my witness"—extending her white arm with sudden, passionate energy—"that, if I could drain my blood to wash out its last lingering memory, I would gladly do so! With my future you have no connection. It is not necessary to remind me that you wish none"—as his lips unclosed. "I will take that for granted all the more readily, because any association with you would be the last, worst evil which Fate could send to *me*. Now, will you be kind enough to go? I can readily find my way to the house alone."

Couched in the form of a request, these words were, in truth, little more than an imperious command; but, conscious in what bungling fashion he had gone to work—conscious that he had learned literally nothing of that which he most desired to know—Tyndale made one last effort.

"For God's sake, Norah, don't send me away like this!" he said, eagerly. "How can I tell when I may be able to speak to you again; and I—I must know what you mean to do! Any certainty is better than—"

He stopped short. Though he was standing with his back to the door, something in Norah's eyes suddenly warned him of another presence in the summer-house besides their own. Turning sharply, he faced Carl Middleton.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"To-morrow we meet the same, then, dearest?  
May I take your hand in mine ?  
Mere friends are we—well, friends the merest  
Keep much that I'll resign."

THERE was a second's awkward pause. Then Middleton had sufficient presence of mind to come forward, as if he saw nothing unusual in the faces or the attitudes before him.

"Am I not lucky to get off duty so soon?" he said. "When we reached the house, Leslie found some visitors, and I at once slipped away—grateful enough to them for having come, you may be sure."

"You are lucky," said Norah, smiling—she had well-trained muscles, for no one could have told from that smile how her pulses were beating, with a rush which made itself felt in one vibrating thrill through her whole body—"I congratulate you on your escape, and I am glad to see you back—very glad!" she added, with an unmistakable accent of sincerity.

The young man flushed a little evidently with pleasure. "You are very kind to say so," he answered. "I am glad to find you still here. I thought you might have wandered away somewhere—only it is scorching out in the sun."

"Too scorching for wandering, I should think," said she, and she sat down almost wearily as she spoke—having, in truth, good cause to be weary after the battle she had fought.

"Do you feel tired?" asked Carl, quickly. "Absolutely, for once in a way, you look pale."

"Do I? That is strange—heat ought to flush, ought it not? Suppose you come and play the part of Zephyr," she added, holding out her fan. "You don't object, do you?"

Object! No one could have suspected him of such a sentiment who saw the eagerness with which he advanced, and, taking the pretty toy, began to play the part rather of Boreas than of Zephyr.

"There!—that will do!" said she. "I don't want to be blown away entirely. Are you going, Mr. Tyndale? Pray tell Leslie that I will follow as soon as I can summon sufficient resolution for the effort. If you could only order up a cloud or two for our benefit, it would be a great relief."

"I am sorry that I cannot do even that much in your service," said Tyndale, with more bitterness than it was wise to have displayed; but he could not entirely repress the exasperation which he felt in seeing another man enjoy before his very eyes the place he had lost or resigned—it did not, at that moment, matter which.

"Tell Leslie to send an umbrella, won't you?" said Carl, in his off-hand fashion. "It was awfully thoughtless of me not to have brought one."

Thus, burdened with a double message, Mr. Tyndale took his departure—descending the steps of the pavilion, and walking away down an arcade which led to the house. As Norah looked after him, the scene made a picture which she never forgot—the vivid sunlight quivering on the deep-green foliage, the flickering net-work of shadows falling softly over the smooth turf, the blue sky flecked here and there with fleecy clouds, and the slender, graceful figure, thrown into relief by the summer landscape and the golden light.

When she glanced back at Carl Middleton, however, and saw by the look in his eyes that he had been watching her, a sudden blush rose to her face.

"It is very ill-bred to stare at people!" she said, sharply. "I have told you so before, and you know that I dislike it particularly."

"Is it ill-bred?" asked he. "This is the second time to-day that you have convicted me of a solecism of good manners. But, if it is ill-bred, why were *you* staring at Mr. Tyndale?"

"I was not staring at him," she answered, with a flash in her eye which showed the ignited spark of a quick temper. "You are very impertinent to venture to say so! There is a very great difference between staring and—and looking at a person."

"I was only looking at you," he said, quietly. "One stares, does one not, when one means to be impertinent? Now, I certainly did not mean that, for I was engaged in wondering why you looked at Tyndale in just that way!"

"In just what way?" asked she, carelessly. "He has a good figure and carries it well. I like both things in a man and, liking them, I like also to watch them."

"Yet the expression of your face did not look much as if you were thinking of his figure, or of his walk," said Middleton. "It looked rather as if you were thinking of *him*."

"Your impertinence appears to be ascending in the scale of comparison," said she, "but, for the novelty of the thing, I am rather inclined to humor it. So, granting that I was thinking of him what then?"

"I have already been impertinent in the positive and comparative degrees, have I not?" he asked, in return. "Then I might as well be impertinent in the superlative, and ask *what* you were thinking of him."

She laughed. She was recovering herself, and any thing like a tilt of words and wit always pleased her.

"Do you chance to remember what Hotspur answered when Owen Glendower boasted that he could call spirits from the vasty deep?" she inquired. "So can I; but will they come? Now, it strikes me that is rather applicable to your question. It is asked, but will it be answered?"

"I am more resigned than you imagine, perhaps," he said ; "for I have a suspicion that the answer would not be likely to please me if it were given."

"Are you, then, so deeply interested in Mr. Tyndale that an unfavorable opinion of him might distress you?"

"I am not interested in Mr. Tyndale at all," he answered, dryly.

"Oh, in Leslie's *fiancée*? I had really forgotten for a moment that he filled that position."

"Nor in Leslie's *fiancée*," said he. "I had forgotten, too, for a minute, that he filled that position. It would be a little strange, would it not, if he should prove to have been afflicted with the same lapse of memory regarding the same fact?"

She glanced at him keenly. The significance of his tone made her sure that he had overheard more than she supposed of her conversation with Tyndale.

"It is not likely that he could have forgotten such a fact," she answered, coldly. "But it does not concern either you or me if he had."

"It concerns me!" said he, quickly. "You may rest assured of that, Miss Desmond."

"As Leslie's cousin, I suppose," said she, composedly. "But do cousins usually take quite so much upon themselves in America?"

"I am not Leslie's cousin, save by courtesy," he replied; "and I should never dream of taking any thing upon myself in her behalf. She has defenders enough, if defenders were needed. But, on *your* behalf, I might be tempted to take a good deal."

"On *my* behalf!" said Norah and she started in spite of her consummate self-control. "What need have I of a defender, or—if I needed a hundred—what right have you to assume the duties of the position?"

"I have two rights," answered he. "One is your need of me; the other is my love for you!"

"Indeed!" said Norah. She felt at her ease now. When a man began to make love, she knew exactly what to do and what to say. It was as much her native heath as Rob Roy's famous heather was to him. "Oh, this was all!" she thought, with a curious mixture of relief and disappointment. It was a relief to find that his innuendoes with regard to Tyndale had only this meaning; yet there was disappointment in the quick fall from the excitement of combat to the blank sameness of love-making. "But that is all nonsense, you know," she added, after a short pause. "I deny both your rights *in toto*! I have not the slightest need of you; in fact, I should not have an idea what to do with you if I had you; while that which you are pleased to term your love for me is only a *penchant* for pretty faces and flirtation in general applied to a particular person."

"Mock at me, if you please," said he, paling, but speaking steadily. "I expected nothing else. You never give any thing else to me. All the same, the day may come when you will need me, and then I shall not ask your leave to be your defender. I have said more than I should have done, perhaps, about the man who left us a few minutes ago," he went on. "I have probably made you believe that I overheard more than I really did of your conversation. In truth, I overheard only his last speech. But this speech was not necessary to prove to me that he had spoken falsely when he said he never met you abroad. *Your* face told me that last night. *His* face told me so this morning."

She was looking at him intently while he spoke. When he finished she made no attempt at evasion.

"I was feeling my way last night," she said. "I wanted to learn how much he had denied. It is strange that my face should have betrayed me," she added, with a dispassionate air of surprise. "It never did such a thing before."

"I am sure that it did not betray you to any one besides myself," he answered. "Leslie suspects nothing. You must see that."

"Yes, I see that," she assented.

"But, in saying that she suspects nothing, I do not mean to imply that it might not be well for her to know something," he added, quickly.

"Do you mean that you intend to inform her of what you know?" she asked, looking at him again with the peculiarly keen glance which her eyes sometimes possessed.

"You cannot seriously suspect me of such an intention," said he, almost angrily; "even if I knew any thing—which I do not."

"You know enough to make mischief," said she. "There are many people who do not need to know more than that."

"If you think me one of them, it proves that you have honored me with very little attention during the time that we have been acquaintances."

"Now you are angry with me," said she, smiling; "else you would not speak of our being 'acquaintances' in such a frigid tone—that, too, after offering yourself to me as a defender in the most lavish and generous manner! Will it put you in a good-humor to say that I never fancied for a moment that you would interfere in a matter which has only accidentally come to your knowledge, and which does not concern you in the least?"

"You are quite right," said he. "I shall not think of interfering, as far as Leslie is concerned; but I bind myself with no pledge that will keep me from interfering as far as you are concerned."

"I think you must be mad," said she, candidly. "In the name of common-sense and common reason (if you know any thing about those things!), what have you to do with me?"

"I have already told you what I have to do with you," answered he.

She leaned back, and looked at him with a laugh in her eye, which for once his glance did not return.

"It is really a comfort to have one ludicrous element in an affair which promises to be rather tiresome and troublesome on the whole," she said; "but, despite your absurdity, you must be aware that no claim of the kind holds good unless sanctioned by the person in whose behalf you make it."

"Permit me to say that you totally misinterpret the nature of the claim I make," answered he, with a face more pale and firm than any one had ever seen Carl Middleton wear before. The straight lines between his brows had deepened; the volatile, laughter-loving expression had left his mouth. Just then he looked like a man with whom not even a beautiful woman might care to trifle. "It is you who mistake," he said. "I have made no claim that needs your sanction. I love you—I have told you that before, have I not?—and, loving you, I hold my life subject to your service. I shall defend you from insult, and guard you from contempt, as much as if you had extended your hand and chosen me before the world."

"I believe I said, a moment ago, that I thought you were crazy," returned Norah, coldly. "Now I think that you are melodramatic. Of the two, I prefer the latter phase of character least."

"You do not think that I am in earnest?" cried he, passionately. "You do not believe that I mean every word I utter. How little your boasted knowledge of human nature has taught you, then, after all!"

"It has taught me more than you think, perhaps," said she, rising to her feet. "It has taught me when to end such folly as this. Good-morning, Mr. Middleton, and allow me to hope that you will be a little more sane and reasonable when I see you again."

"I shall not detain you after the manner of that cur whom I found standing between you and the door," said he; "but if you will listen to me for a moment, I should like to ask if love is such a common thing with you that you can afford to throw it away like this?"

"The fitful admiration and school-boy passion which you choose to dignify with the name of love, has certainly been sufficiently common in my experience," answered she, haughtily. "You are not the first man who has thought that love-making might be a pleasant variation to flirtation with a Bohemian like myself nor the first who has discovered his mistake, let me add."

"How little you know what I feel for you when you can do me such injustice!" said he, quickly. "Flirtation!"—he uttered a short laugh—"Good Heavens! As if I were mad enough to dream of flirting with you! As if I should not be the happiest man on all God's earth if you would only put your hand in mine and promise to marry me!"

"And how long would you be happy?" asked she. "Not to speak of your friends, who would be scarcely likely to be happy at all."

"My friends have nothing to do with me," he answered. "My life and my fortune are my own. Being my own, I ask nothing better than to dedicate them to your service."

"You are very kind," said she, with the same provoking and impassive composure; "but I really have not the least use for them."

"Not even the use of convenience?" asked he, a little bitterly. "Stop, Miss Desmond, and think! It is not often that a man puts himself so unreservedly in your hands as I have done. Say but one word, and the man who insulted you here a little while ago shall answer for it as he never dreamed of answering when he was coward enough to detain you!"

"And do you think that I need your hot blood, or your clumsy, masculine hand to espouse my cause?" asked she, with a smile of scorn rippling over her face. "Do you think I am not able to pay with interest—much more than interest, indeed—every fraction of debt I owe Arthur Tyndale? Do you fancy that I have come here for any other purpose than that I *may* pay it, in the time and in the manner that seem best to me?"

"I know that you are much too clever to need any assistance from me," he said, in rather a crestfallen tone; "but there are some things that only a man's hand can do—clumsy as you think it."

"It requires a man's hand to take another man by the throat, I'll admit," said she. "But I have studied in the school of Machiavelli, and that is not my mode of dealing with those who wish or intend to do me wrong."

"After all, it is the best and shortest mode," said he, doggedly. "Fine words and fine actions are lost on curs."

"I have not the faintest idea of bestowing any fine words or fine actions on anybody," said she, coolly.

"You seem to have no intention of bestowing any words at all on me," said he, looking at her with a certain passionate reproach in his eyes. "Is it because you do not think me worth them? Yet, certainly, no man ever loved you better than I do, and, having offered you all that is mine to give, I ask for an answer—even though it is only likely to be a rejection."

"You are right—it is only likely to be that," said she, holding out her hand to him with a sudden softening expression of her face. "But still I must thank you for having spoken as you have done—for having treated me as if I were as much your equal in all things as in blood. When a woman has lived the life I have, she learns how to appreciate courtesy and chivalry better than those who have known them from their cradles. Of all the many men who have loved or fancied that they loved me, you are one of the few who have had the courage to pronounce the word marriage. Now, although I do not intend to take advantage of your generosity, I cannot fail to like you the better for it."

"And is there no hope that this liking may grow into love?" asked he, clasping eagerly in both his own the hand she had given. "If you can only say so, I—I shall be so patient to wait!"

"But I am not sure that it would be right for me to say so," answered she, her eyes fastened as calmly on his face as if he had been a sexagenarian, the clear, rose-brilliance of her cheek undepened by a shade—"I do not think it is in the least probable that I shall ever like you better than I do at present. Not but that you are more agreeable to me than the majority of men," she added, candidly.

"Then promise to marry me!" said he, impetuously. "Take me as a convenience, as a means of 'establishment,' as any thing under heaven, so that you do take me, and that you like no other man better than you like me. At least, if you marry me, you will be done with Bohemia," said he, wistfully. "You will be moderately rich, perfectly free, and passionately loved. Norah, are not these things worth a sacrifice?"

"No!" answered Norah—and the clear, sharp monosyllable seemed to cut the air as Saladin's sword cleaved its way through the silken cushion—"no!" she repeated, "good as these things are, and naturally attractive to a waif and stray like myself, they are distinctly not worth the sacrifice of self-respect and independence. You look surprised? I believe a woman in your world is not supposed to suffer any loss of self-respect when she barters herself away for a good establishment but we think differently in Bohemia. I should hold that I had done you a great

wrong if I married you for any one of the reasons you have mentioned; and I should certainly feel that I had justified the opinion of all those who are good enough to consider me an adventuress!"

"But if you loved me, Norah?"

"If I loved you I should marry you, let the whole world say what it would," answered she, with a smile so bright and so defiant that it thrilled him to the heart. "I do not love you, however, and I have not the least desire to marry anybody; so you see we have wasted a great deal of time in talking about something which is not likely to come to pass. By-the-by, don't you think it is time for you to let my hand go? You are really hurting it."

She took it from him before he could carry it to his lips, as he plainly intended to do, adding, with a nonchalance which was not particularly encouraging to a crestfallen suitor:

"I won't say let us try and forget what has passed, because that is all nonsense—few are able to forget disagreeable things just when they please—but I *do* say let us try to avoid any constraint or awkwardness. It is so inconvenient and so absurd! We like each other as well as we did before, and, after all, it is a good thing to have had a clear explanation, and settled matters."

"It may be a good thing," said he, a little doubtfully, "but it has not settled as much as you think. If I do not exactly make the boast of Philip of Spain, and say, 'Time and I against any two!' I know that time sometimes works wonders for any one who loves as well as I do—and then I am your defender and champion if you had rejected me a hundred times!"

"When will you understand that I am my own defender, and that I need no champion?" asked she, impatiently. "What folly you talk! But then you are young—something must be allowed for that, I suppose. Now, let us go back to the house, for I see that we are likely to continue talking in a circle as long as we stay here, and really the weather is too warm for such excessive loquacity."

Back to the house they went accordingly—in more amicable companionship than might perhaps be imagined, for Norah Desmond was not a woman to allow a man to be ill at ease in her society. It was a point of pride with her, indeed, that she had a very effective way of dissipating any thing like constraint when she chose to do so. With Middleton she did choose, and, before they reached the house, she had so tantalized, amused, and charmed him, that he was more hopelessly and desperately in love than ever. If she had been asked why she did this, she would probably have answered that she liked the pleasant young fellow in his way, and that, since it was certain that they would inhabit the same house for some time to come, it would be exceedingly disagreeable to be on stiff or formal terms with him. In truth, being a woman accustomed to exercise power, and fond of receiving admiration, she did not fancy the idea of surrendering the only homage which was available just then, and, consequently, she exerted herself to make Carl understand that there need be no change in their relation to each other. "You really ought to be obliged to me for not having accepted you," she said to him.

"If I had, whom would you flirt with? You would be in as bad a condition as the Frenchman, who asked where he should spend his evenings when advised to marry the lady with whom he had spent them for twenty years."

"I have nothing of the Frenchman in my composition," said he, "but, if it were absolutely necessary for me to flirt with somebody, I might find Mrs. Sandford useful in an emergency. Leslie tells me that she will be here in a day or two."

"And who is Mrs. Sandford?"

"A person of note in a small way. She was a fast young lady when I left home; afterward I heard that she was a fast married woman; now she is a fast widow."

"She has run the gamut, then, of fastness in all conditions of life. What a study she will be for me! I have not an idea what constitutes a fast woman on this side of the Atlantic, though I know very well what constitutes it on the other."

The house looked cool and airy when they entered it. In the wide hall there was a pleasant green light from the closed blinds at each door, which kept out the fierce noonday glare. Chairs and lounges were placed there; books, newspapers, and work, were scattered about—every thing

showed that it was a favorite and informal gathering-place of the family. Mrs. Middleton, who was seated alone, looked up as they entered.

"Did you not find it very warm?" she asked. "Leslie reported the heat to be intense, and Mr. Tyndale seemed almost overpowered by it. I was opposed to his walking back to Strafford; but he insisted upon going—young people are always so obstinate!"

"So Tyndale went back, did he?" said Carl. "If the heat was so overpowering, I wonder he walked over simply for the sake of spending half an hour or so with Leslie."

"He came as an act of courtesy to Miss Desmond, I think," answered Mrs. Middleton, in her stately way. "Otherwise, he would have been kept at home by a business engagement all the morning, he said. He has promised to dine with us this evening, however and his cousin," she added, turning to Norah; "so you will be able to see more of him."

Miss Desmond bowed with the air of one profoundly grateful for such a privilege.

"Is the cousin at all like Mr. Tyndale?" she asked, by way of a diversion that would not be too far away from the subject to excite attention.

"Not in the least," answered Leslie's gay voice behind her. "Fancy Arthur's opposite in every thing that is Captain Tyndale!"

"*You* don't like him, then, I suppose?" said Carl.

"And pray, why should that follow?" asked she.

"If he is the exact opposite of your Prince Charming, I don't see how you could conveniently manage to like both of them."

"There are things which 'differ, in order to correspond,' Mr. Philosopher," said she, smiling. "Want of similarity is not always want of harmony. I should be very ungrateful if I did not like Captain Tyndale, for he certainly is very fond of Arthur."

"Did you not say that he is half a Frenchman?" asked Miss Desmond. "How does that happen?"

"His father was attached to the American legation in Paris," said Mrs. Middleton, who had one of those memories of the old school, that never forget a genealogical point. "He married a Frenchwoman, and, after that, lived principally in France. So it came to pass that Captain Tyndale is half French in blood, and almost wholly French in training."

"I suppose he cannot be reasonably blamed for either fact," said Carl; "but really it is very hard on the poor fellow! Why couldn't his father have stayed at home, or else gone to Germany?"

"I am afraid we shall have another Franco-Prussian War when Captain Tyndale and yourself meet," said Leslie. "Come, Norah, luncheon is ready—after that we will take our *siesta*; and, *after that*, you shall make yourself as lovely as possible for dinner."

## CHAPTER IX.

"Said I not so?  
O my prophetic heart! . . .  
He has not betrayed me—he could not betray me.  
I never doubted it."

WHEN that obstinate young man, Arthur Tyndale, reached Strafford, after a very warm and exceedingly disagreeable walk, he found his cousin established in the shady library, with a novel and a cigar. "Confound the fellow, how comfortable he looks!" was the first thought of the over-heated pedestrian, as he entered this cool retreat—green shade rustling without the open windows, mellow depths of oak wainscot and book-lined walls within—and observed, with a sense of exasperation, the air of repose which pervaded every line of the figure extended at full length on a couch at the farther end of the room.

"You are back rather soon," said Max, looking up lazily. "Didn't you find it very warm?"

"Warm!" repeated Arthur, in a tone of impatience. He flung himself into a chair, and pushed back the rings of damp hair that clung moistly to his brow. "Go out into the sun and try it a little, won't you? I think you'll be more likely to call it infernally hot!"

"I thought you would be apt to find it so," said Max, philosophically. "Order some iced sherbet, my dear fellow. It is the most refreshing thing you can—"

"Deuce take refreshment!" interrupted the other, irritably. "I haven't time to think about iced sherbet just now. Max, you can't imagine what cursed ill-luck I have had this morning!"

"Indeed!" said Max. He raised himself on his elbow, with a quick look of interest in his dark eyes. "How was it?" he asked. "Does Miss Grahame know or suspect any thing?"

"Not the least thing, as yet; but there is no telling how soon she may know every thing. Norah opened the ball, last night, with a vengeance, by informing the assembled family that she had met me abroad."

"The devil!"

"Or, if not me—it seems she did not stand to that point—*some one* bearing the name of Tyndale."

"Well, that's rather more vague."

"So they have decided Mrs. Middleton and Leslie that it must have been you."

"Me!" said Captain Tyndale. He opened his eyes still wider for a moment, then burst into a laugh. "*Parbleu*, but that is a good joke! What did you tell them?"

"I told Leslie, at first, that it was absurd; but, when Mrs. Middleton spoke of it, I thought I would leave the matter for you to contradict. After all, I am not supposed to be aware of all the women whom you may have met in your life."

"That is very true; but still you know that I have never met Miss Desmond."

"Yes, I know it; but there is no earthly reason why you should *not* have met her; and—and, if you had, it would make matters a good deal easier for me."

"Granted, with all my heart; but the fact remains the same, that I have not had that pleasure."

"But, hang it, Max! it would do no harm to let them think so—for a little time, you know."

"Let them think so!" repeated Max. He shot a keen glance at his companion. "Do you mean that I should tell a downright lie?" he asked. "I don't know how else I could 'let them think so.' And it would not only be a lie, as far as I am concerned, but a most unwarrantable liberty, as far as Miss Desmond is concerned."

"I am not asking you to tell any thing at all," answered Arthur, impatiently. "Confound it, you are amazingly straitlaced all at once! Can't you see that all I ask you to do is to *let the thing pass*, and not to deny that you were the man whom Miss Desmond met abroad?"

"But don't you see that, if I were inclined to oblige you a hundred times, it would do no good? Miss Desmond herself can certainly tell whom she met abroad, and she is not likely to mistake my mahogany face for your red and white one."

"Of course, the whole thing hangs on her; but, if she allows it to be tacitly accepted that you were the man—and, somehow, I have an idea that she may—all I ask of you is, that you will take the advantage thus afforded you to do me another and still greater favor."

"So there's another, is there?" said Max. He rose as he spoke, and walked across the floor, "See here, Hal," he said, stopping after a while, "this will not do! You know perfectly well that, in any thing which is open and fair, I would serve you heartily; but I cannot consent to take either a passive or an active part in such a gross deception as that which you are practising on a woman who deserves better things at your hands!"

"Am I asking you to take any part in it?" demanded Arthur, angrily, but conscious that he could not afford just then to quarrel with Max. "This deception, as you call it, is a thing which I detest as much as you do; but it is also a thing in which I became entangled without my knowledge, and from which I must free myself as best I can. All that I ask from you is your

assistance in doing this. If you refuse it, well and good: I can get along without you, no doubt. But don't make a pretext of refusing it on Leslie's account, for the best way to serve her would be to end all question of deception at once."

"What is it you want me to do?" asked the other, reluctantly. "I don't promise that I will do it, mind you! but still there's no harm in hearing what it is!"

"It is simply this: to find out from Norah what she means to do—whether she intends to hold her tongue or to make mischief—and, if possible, to obtain my letters from her."

"Great Heaven!" said Max, aghast. "Are you mad? How on earth could I approach a woman, of whom I know nothing, with such demands as those?"

"Simply by understanding, in the first place, that any thing like chivalrous delicacy would be quite out of place with such a woman as Norah Desmond," said Arthur, with a bitter sneer.

"And, in the second place, by going about the business like a diplomatist, and not with point-blank 'demands.' "

"I have been bred in camps, and not in drawing-rooms," returned Max, dryly. "If you want diplomacy, I am afraid you must go elsewhere for it."

"I only propose such a plan," said the other, with fresh irritation, "because you are not fettered as I am—nobody will think it remarkable if *you* walk or talk with Norah while I could only see her by stealth—if I saw her at all; for, besides the Middletons, who look on me with any thing but eyes of love, there's a young sprig of a nephew there who is head over ears in love with her, and already suspicious of me."

"How have you managed to find that out?"

"Easily enough—as you shall hear."

Then he told the story of the scene in the summer-house—of his own discomfiture when he attempted to sound Miss Desmond, and of Carl's inopportune appearance just when he could not have failed to overhear that last significant appeal. It need not be imagined, however, that, in relating these occurrences, Mr. Tyndale was of necessity obliged to give them exactly the coloring of reality. He was too much a man of the world to represent himself in a contemptible or badly-worsted light; and, although he gave Max a substantially correct outline of what had taken place, he was careful to say nothing of his own blunders or of Norah's scorn. On her passionate defiance, however, he dwelt emphatically.

"She absolutely went so far as to threaten me with immediate exposure if I spoke to her again," he said. "So, you see, my only hope is in you."

"And she gave you no hint as to what she meant to do?"

"Not the least. Now, you know this uncertainty—this sort of sword-of-Damocles business—is more than a man can be expected to endure. As far as I personally am concerned, I should not mind it in the least. I should simply let Miss Desmond do or say her worst. I am not the first man who has flirted with a fast coquette. But there is Leslie. It would be hard on her."

"Yes," said Max. He turned on his heel and walked to the window as he spoke. Standing there, looking out over the green landscape and the bosky depths of summer shade, his mind went back to the May evening when he had loitered by Leslie's side among the roses, and when she had spoken with almost wistful sadness of her great happiness. He had seen then that this happiness, whether for good or ill, was irrevocably bound up in Arthur Tyndale, and, with this knowledge, had come the resolution that Arthur should "keep straight," if he had any power to make him do so. It was too late to think of his worthiness or unworthiness for the great gift that had fallen into his life—too late to ask whether that loyal and tender heart might not have been better bestowed—what was done was done with such distinct completeness that Max plainly perceived that any event which proved his cousin unworthy would stab Leslie's life all the more deeply for Leslie's pride. Feeling this by an instinct which is not often given to men, and feeling, also, with the sort of despair common to us all, that she must take things (and people) as they are, without hoping or expecting to make them what they should be, he recognized that his best way of serving Leslie was to help Arthur as far as possible out of Miss Desmond's net. Of Miss Desmond herself,

it may be said, in passing, that he had the lowest possible opinion. A woman who was a celebrity at Baden and Homburg, who had an adventurer for a father, and who was plainly determined to make Arthur pay a heavy price for freedom from entanglement, offended every one of his most cherished ideas and opinions. If he had consulted his own taste, he would have preferred to have nothing to do with her; but, since that was impossible, he made up his mind to further his cousin's cause with as much earnest effort as he could exert.

So it came to pass that Arthur—still leaning back in the depths of his chair, and contemplating a bust of Dante with a frown of petulant discontent and ill-humor—was rather surprised when the tall figure at the window turned with its quick, military swing, and Max's voice said:

"Don't think me churlish for having taken some time to consider matters, Hal. I doubt if I shall be a very valuable auxiliary, but, nevertheless, I'll do my best for you as far as I can!"

"I was sure you'd never leave me to get out of the scrape by myself, old fellow," answered Arthur, gratefully. And in those few words the compact was made and the matter ended.

Six or seven hours later—the heat of the day being over, and the long, cool shadows of late evening lying over green turf and dusty, sun-baked road—the two cousins drove up to the door of Rosland in Mr. Tyndale's dog-cart. The disk of the sun was just touching the horizon when they entered the drawing room, and his level rays were pouring through the western windows in a stream of light which made so dazzling an illumination that, for a few seconds, the young men were absolutely unable to tell who was before them. The transcendent glory was short-lived, however. Even while they hesitated, the great orb sank, and they saw that three ladies and two gentlemen made up the group gathered in the centre of the large apartment. Greetings having been exchanged, and Captain Tyndale having been presented to Miss Desmond, such commonplaces as people in the country usually talk, ensued.

"Found it very dusty, didn't you?" said Mr. Middleton to Arthur. "I never knew rain needed worse than it is just now."

"Every thing is so dreadfully parched!" said Mrs. Middleton, in a confiding aside to Max. "It really makes one sad to go into the garden. Don't you feel as sorry for flowers, when they droop, as for people, when they are sick? I always do."

"The Andersons, who were here this morning, report the drought still worse with them," said Leslie. "They say their garden is literally burned up. By-the-by, Arthur, Lizzie Anderson is to marry Frank Tabor, after all. Are you not surprised to hear it? She rejected him half a dozen times, people said. Fancy accepting a man, at last, whom you had rejected half a dozen times!"

"There is always luck in odd numbers, you know," said Tyndale, with a smile of tolerably well simulated interest, "and seven is an odd number, if my arithmetic serves me."

"There is encouragement for me!" said Carl, in a discreet aside to Norah. "If Frank Tabor—whom I remember as a black-eyed young rascal at school—persevered after six rejections, I certainly should not despair, after one! But imagine, if you can, the moral pluck, or the mental despair, of a man who could screw his courage to the sticking point of a seventh proposal!"

"It proves that he was exceedingly foolish, as well as rather obstinate," said Norah and, as a lull had just then fallen in the general conversation, her words were audible to all the group. "No woman in the world is worth half so much trouble! I never see a man desperately bent upon such a chase that I do not feel inclined to remind him of the fact that there is any number of other women in the world, multitudes of whom are prettier, and cleverer, and more desirable in every way, than the one of whom he is so madly enamored."

"But what are other women to a man who loves one?" asked Leslie. "And, then, constancy, Norah—surely you admire constancy even when it is misplaced?"

"I am not at all sure that I do," answered Norah. "I am inclined to think that constancy, in such cases, simply means weakness and want of self-respect. A spaniel is constant to the hand that repulses him, but we don't exactly admire the trait: and I have known many women, and

some men, who were spaniels. After all," pursued she, "why should we exalt constancy into such a virtue? It certainly is not according to the law of Nature. In Nature, all things change. No man's body is the same at twenty-five and forty—neither is any man's character. Therefore, why should we expect his heart alone to be unchanged?"

"I had no idea that you were such a heretic!" said Leslie, laughing; but she felt, in the silence around, that the careless, defiant words had shocked most of the audience. "You forget one thing," she added, after a moment; "if constancy is not according to the law of Nature—which I freely grant—it is because it is above Nature, as many other virtues are. I am sure you will not deny that."

"It would require a person more fond of theory and argument than I am to deny you any thing," said Norah. "For peace' sake, and to be obliging, I would surrender the most cherished opinion that I have. *Apropos*, I saw, not long ago, a definition of an agreeable person, which rather struck me. 'He was very amiable in temper,' it said, 'and had no strong opinions.' "

"I would not give a fig for a man who had no strong opinions," said Mr. Middleton. "He might as well be without a backbone."

"Oh, a man; of course, should have them!" said Norah. "But a woman, you see, is different. Opinions only make us disagreeable. We should be, as nearly as possible, graceful, receptive nonentities, blindly adoring the masculine intellect, and ready to believe, on an emergency, that the moon is made of green cheese."

"I assure you that you quite mistake my meaning," said Mr. Middleton, gravely.

But, since dinner was announced just then, his apology was brought to an end, together with the young philosopher's somewhat cynical satire. As they left the drawing-room, Captain Tyndale thought that Miss Desmond was quite as disagreeable as he had expected to find her. In fact, during these few minutes, she had shown her character in even a worse light than he had anticipated. Her tone of mingled levity and skepticism—with a certain bright, hard cleverness showing through—jarred on and disgusted him more than the most free and easy "fastness" could have done. "Arthur is right; she is a Bohemian adventuress," he thought, "more outspoken than the most of her class, but with nothing of a true woman in her." Like a great many other people, Captain Tyndale forgot to ask himself by what authentic standard he had measured his ideal "true woman;" or whether, after all, his abstract idea of what the sex should be, in general, was quite a fair rule for judging Miss Desmond in particular.

He could not but acknowledge, however, that her beauty was something extraordinary, as he sat opposite her at dinner, and studied the perfect face, line by line, and feature by feature. Even with her beauty, however, he found fault. It was too brilliant for his taste. He agreed with Mrs. Middleton that a thorough-bred woman should never make a "sensation;" and it was undeniable that Norah Desmond could not have walked through the quietest village in Christendom without drawing eager glances of admiration to herself. Looking from her to Leslie, he thought how much more of attraction there was in the delicate face of the latter, with its silken soft brown hair, and

". . . . loveliness which rather lay  
In light than color,"

and it chanced that, while he was so thinking, Leslie turned and spoke to him.

"I have been telling Norah, Captain Tyndale, that I am sure she must have known you abroad. She thinks that she remembers having met some one named Tyndale at Baden or Homburg ; and, since it was not Arthur, I think it must have been yourself. Tell me, am I not right? Have you not seen her before?"

"What a horribly direct question!" Arthur thought, conscious that his complexion was changing color just then in its most trying manner. "Max will never venture to answer it in the

affirmative. Why on earth should Leslie bring up the subject just now! Confound all women and their tongues, I say!"

But Max, meanwhile—with no change of color on *his* weather-beaten visage—had coolly lifted his eyes and met Miss Desmond's glance. There was a defiance in it which he was sufficiently quick to read aright. "Take your cousin's identity upon yourself, if you dare!" it said to him; and he smiled a little as he answered:

"It is probable enough that Miss Desmond does not remember me; but I have certainly had the pleasure of seeing her before."

It amused him a little, as he uttered these words, to observe that, instead of any thing like surprise, an expression of scarcely-veiled contempt came over Norah's face. "You have spoken falsely!" her eyes said to him, but her lips only parted in the smile of scorn peculiar to them.

"Captain Tyndale's memory is so much better than my own that I do not like to run the risk of telling him that he is mistaken," she said, very coldly; and Arthur gave a sigh of relief as he saw that she did not mean to make a "scene." "But I suppose that I may at least be permitted to say that I have not the faintest recollection of himself or his face."

"My face is not an uncommon one," said Max, carelessly. "It has its disadvantages, especially in the fact of looking like a million or two other faces; but, then, it has its advantages, also, some of which are very solid ones. If I wanted to escape from a detective or a woman, for instance, how much better my chance would be than Arthur's here!"

"Yes, if Norah had seen Arthur, she certainly could not have forgotten him" said Leslie, innocently.

"You are mistaken about one thing, however," said Norah, looking at Max. "A woman's eyes, when sharpened by love or hate, pierce through all disguises; and, although your face is in general like a good many other faces, especially faces in France, it has a great deal of individuality besides."

"Thanks," said he, quietly. "I am glad to hear that it has individuality, even though it lessens somewhat my problematical chance of escape if I should ever kill a man or betray a woman."

"If you intend to do one or the other," said she, "take my advice, and kill a man. It is the safer experiment of the two."

The dilating glow of her eyes, as she uttered the last words, was certainly superb; but it was also full of unpleasant significance to one person at least. Arthur Tyndale involuntarily lifted his glass of wine to his lips and drained it. He felt that he stood in need of support, and this was the most convenient form in which it presented itself to him. "What does she mean to do?" he thought. "The devil seems to possess her! I have half a mind to make a clean breast of it all to Leslie, and so block her game." But that such a resolution was utterly impracticable, Mr. Tyndale was thoroughly conscious, even while he gave mental utterance to it. He was at Miss Desmond's mercy. He felt that fact to the bottom of his boots—felt it with a desponding sense that even the mellow glow of the wine he had so liberally quaffed could not dispel.

Just then, to his great relief, Carl Middleton changed the dangerous course of conversation. Instinct warned him to do this immediately after Norah's last speech, and he plunged at once into the first convenient subject, which chanced to be the existing state of government in France.

"By-the-way, what do you think of M. Thiers?" he asked Max, with a degree of relevance that was rather startling. "How long do you think he will be able to hold his own over there in Paris?"

"Probably till the Prussians are safely off the soil of France," answered the other, who rarely betrayed surprise, however much he might feel it.

"And who do you think will be most likely to succeed him to profit by the present state of affairs, you know?" proceeded Carl, in a dispassionate tone of inquiry.

Max shrugged his shoulders with a rather amused expression of face. "How can I tell?" he said. "I am no prophet. Perhaps there are no better words in which to answer you than those which have lately fallen from royal lips: '*La parole est à la France et l'heure à Dieu.*' "

"I remember that sentence," said Carl. "I was struck by its epigrammatic force when I saw it first. Poetically it does very well indeed."

"Young Germany, you see, quite excludes the idea of God (save in poetry) from the affairs of nations," said Leslie.

"Mr. Middleton is one of the people who only believe in the existence of their own senses," said Norah; "and, since metaphysics have proved conclusively to him that he has no senses, he is in rather a bad condition—that is, theoretically. Practically, he supports the inconvenience of being a blank negation very well indeed."

"He certainly does not look at all like one," said Mr. Middleton, senior, dryly.

In this manner, although Carl's zeal drew the conversation upon himself, it accomplished what he desired in the way of effecting a diversion. Ranging here and there—through fields political, literary, and social—the stream of talk did not again approach the dangerous question of *what* Tyndale Miss Desmond had known abroad.

Only when the ladies were alone in the drawing-room did Leslie recur to the subject.

"You see I was right, Norah!" she said, triumphantly. "It was Captain Tyndale, after all, whom you knew abroad."

"You are so often right that I should not think it would be a very novel sensation to you," said Miss Desmond, smiling. "Now, as for me, I am so often wrong, that I really feel scarcely inclined to trust my own judgment on any point whatever. Perhaps I ought to add my memory also, for I certainly have not the faintest recollection of Captain Tyndale's face. Yet I don't think it is as much like every other man's as he fancies. If you had not told me that he belonged to the French army, I should have known it. There is something strikingly suggestive of the *Chasseur d'Afrique* in his appearance."

"I hope you mean to like him. He is worth liking, we think."

"Do you? But why not say 'I think?' Surely you do not think, as the army of Flanders reasoned, in platoons?"

"Not by any means. But the opinion of many is worth more than the opinion of one, is it not?"

"That depends so much upon who are the many and who is the one, that I don't feel equal to giving a general opinion."

"You are a perfect Talleyrand in petticoats," said Leslie, laughing. "One would certainly imagine that you believed words to have been invented for the purpose of concealing thoughts. But you must learn to like Captain Tyndale. He is a special favorite of mine."

"And an old acquaintance of mine—pray don't forget that."

There was such a gleam of mockery in her eyes as she uttered the last words, that Leslie said, quickly:

"I believe that you half suspect Captain Tyndale of having claimed your acquaintance without any right to do so. Now, if you knew him at all, you would know that he is incapable of taking such a liberty a liberty which would be a gross presumption!" she added, indignantly.

"You are right," said Norah, quietly. "It would certainly be 'a gross presumption.'"

"Not by men like Max Tyndale, I am sure."

"Hm—I am not sure. Are you acquainted with any man who carries his character on his face for women to read? Not that I seriously impugn the veracity of your mirror of truth and honesty. It is a law of logic that a crime presupposes a motive for the crime, is it not? Well, I am not an important person, nor a particularly agreeable person; therefore, it stands to reason that Captain Tyndale could have had no interested motive in claiming my acquaintance."

"Yet I thought you allowed the claim very coldly."

"Did I? Set the fact down, then, to surprise. I had not an idea that the man would venture to say 'Yes' to your question."

"Was there any reason why he should not have ventured to say it if he had really known you?" asked Leslie, looking keenly into the beautiful, unruffled face.

"None at all," answered Miss Desmond, indifferently.

They had been standing by an open window while they talked—one of those which overlooked the veranda—and, as she uttered those last words, Norah stepped through and stood for a minute outside.

"I think I shall go in search of our Mario of last night," she said, half turning to Leslie. "Don't come! Mr. Tyndale will be in before long, and you look so lovely where you are! You may send the cousin—the old acquaintance of mine—after me, if you choose. Of course, we shall naturally have a great deal to say to each other."

## CHAPTER X.

"The weakest woman is pitiless to weakness in a man, and the gentlest of a gentle sex has no mitigation of scorn for the man that has betrayed the gentlest quality of her nature—implicit trust.

"There is no pardon for desecrated ideals."

THE soft summer twilight was exquisitely mingled with the faint lustre of a new moon—a pretty, baby crescent hanging in the still, tinted sky—when Norah strolled across the lawn toward the rose-hedge, where the mocking-bird had piped so sweet a lay the evening before. But mocking-birds can be fickle as well as men. From the leafy depths came no delicious trill or full-throated note to-night. Save for a few irrepressible katydids, all was stillness and silence in this part of the grounds. The fresh fragrance of grass and flowers, the great oaks, with their brown trunks and mighty depths of shade, the stately magnolias, and tropical shrubs, all seemed full of that supreme magic of repose which dwells in midsummer gloaming. Athwart the grass, and against the hedges, fire-flies were beginning to gleam in their fitful way; but other sign of life there was none. Perhaps the dewy freshness, the perfect quiet, the shadowy loveliness of the scene, served Miss Desmond's purpose as well as the mocking-bird could have done. At all events, she did not retrace her steps toward the house; but, finding a convenient garden-chair, she sat down, looking like a fair dream-lady, outlined by the dark shrubbery behind.

In this place and attitude Max Tyndale found her when he crossed the lawn and entered the shrubbery ten minutes later, having been sent by Miss Grahame in search of the wanderer, somewhat to his own discomfiture, and greatly to Carl's disgust. "How well she has arranged herself for effect!" was his first thought. "What an actress she is!" Then, pausing, he lifted his hat. "I have the honor to obey your summons, Miss Desmond," he said, coldly.

"You are very kind," answered Miss Desmond, more coldly still. She did not rise, but only looked at him, with a certain proud steadfastness, as he stood before her, erect and tall, in the soft dusk. "You are very kind," she repeated, after a second's pause; "but I am sure you are aware that I should not have troubled you with any 'summons' if I had not desired to learn what end your cousin or yourself hope to serve by the acquaintance which you did me the honor to claim at dinner?"

The challenge came more quickly and more peremptorily than he had expected. Despite his large fund of imperturbable coolness, Max felt the blood rushing warmly to his face. After all, it *was* an awkward position; and, Bohemian though she might be, the girl looked just then like an archduchess. Somewhat to his own surprise, he found himself a little confused in his reply.

"If you will allow me to explain," he said, "I do not think that you will find that Ar—any one beside myself is accountable for the act of presumption of which I acknowledge that I was guilty at dinner."

"I have found that men are rarely guilty, even of an act of presumption, without some motive for it," said she, haughtily. "Yours is not difficult to find. Your cousin was in an awkward position, and you were kind enough to rescue him at the slight expense of truth. I am not so dull but that I can read clearly enough that far. What puzzles me is to imagine what good end he proposes to serve by such a stratagem. Does he think that, if I choose to open my lips, he will be likely to gain any thing by the desperate policy of denying that he ever knew me? If so, he must be prepared to deny also the evidence of his own letters. Or perhaps you, sir, will affirm that you were also the Tyndale who wrote those?"

"I shall certainly not affirm any thing which is untrue, mademoiselle," answered Max. "And you must pardon me if I repeat that you are entirely wrong in supposing that I claimed your acquaintance falsely, in order to serve any interest that my cousin may have."

"With or without an interest, the fact remains that you spoke falsely!" said she, imperiously. "You cannot deny it."

"Pardon me again; but I must have expressed myself very badly, or you must have understood me very ill, if you have not yet comprehended that I do deny it most emphatically."

"You deny it—*to me!*" Great as was her natural fluency and command of language, her power of expression seemed for a moment to go no further than that. "You are playing a bolder game than I thought, monsieur," she said, then, contemptuously. "You will tell me, next, that we are indeed old acquaintances—that I have danced with you at Baden, and flirted at Homburg. *Grace à Dieu!* I should have remembered that denial is, after all, only a matter of words; and how little words count with any of your sex, I learned long ago."

"Mademoiselle," said Max, who began to feel as if it were within the range of possible events that he might lose his temper, "I repeat, again, that you are charging me with falsehood in the most causeless and unprovoked manner. I have no connection whatever with my cousin's affairs; and, in saying at dinner that I had seen you abroad, I said nothing more than was strictly true."

"In that case," said she, throwing back her head with an air of defiance, "you can certainly tell when and where you met me, and how it is that such a fact should have escaped my memory altogether."

"It is not remarkable that your memory should not bear testimony to a fact which never had a place in it," he said, coolly. "If you will do me the justice to remember, I did not venture to say at dinner that I had known you abroad, but simply that I had seen you. This was perfectly true. I saw you, two years ago, at the opera, in Paris."

Even through the twilight—momently growing deeper—he caught the scornful and incredulous curl of her lip.

"I congratulate you on your inventive powers, monsieur," she said. "Such a very definite place and date certainly put your assertion beyond all dispute."

"You may believe me or not, as you choose," answered he, beginning to grow a little haughty in turn; "but I speak on my honor as a gentleman when I say that I remembered your face the moment I saw it in the drawing-room before dinner. Up to that time, I had not entertained the faintest idea that I had ever seen you; but the instant the sun sank—you remember how it dazzled our eyes?—I said to myself: 'Here is the face I saw at the opera, in Paris, two years ago!'"

"What lucky coincidences there are in this world!" said she, dryly. "How fortunate that you should have made this discovery just when it would benefit your cousin so much!"

"I see that you doubt me still," he said. "As far as I am concerned, that is not a matter of any importance; but, for Arthur's sake, I should like you to believe that I am speaking the truth. It is not likely that you remember one special night in June two years ago; but I do—partly because

of other events, partly because one does not often see such a face as yours. I remember the people who were with you, and, if necessary, I could tell even the color of the dress you wore."

She looked at him quickly and keenly; baffled, however, by the growing obscurity which veiled his face as it veiled the trees and shrubs and distant uplands.

"If this is true," she said, at last, "I beg your pardon. Instead of accusing you of falsehood, it seems that I should only have accused you of equivocation, which is as bad!"

"To that charge I must plead guilty," answered he. "But two things tempted me: one was to assist Arthur; the other (if you will pardon me), to mystify you."

"Mystify me, you did not," said she, coldly. "You only made me believe that you were assisting your cousin at the expense of your own honor—if, indeed, a man ever counts his honor forfeited by a lie."

"I am afraid your experience among men has been very unfortunate."

"It has been very extensive, at least."

"There are many classes of men, however."

"I have known many of all classes—your cousin among the rest."

"Will you give me leave to inquire," said he, abruptly, "how it is that you take it so entirely for granted that I am aware of Arthur's connection with yourself?"

She laughed slightly—the faint cadence, though with little of mirth in it, ringing out sweetly enough on the still, evening air.

"I learned to read faces early," she answered. "It cost me no effort to read in your face, the moment your eyes fell on me: 'So this is the Bohemian girl over whom Arthur once made a fool of himself!'"

"I must endeavor to keep my face in better order," said he, smiling a little. "You are right, however. I have heard Arthur's story, and, without seeking to excuse his fault, I should like to ask whether the woman whom he once loved can find no leniency for him in her heart?"

"Has he requested you to ask such a question?" demanded she. "If so, you may tell him that, in a woman's eyes—I speak of women who are not spaniels—nothing can excuse falsity and cowardice."

"You speak strongly, mademoiselle."

"I might speak more strongly if I added slander to falsity and cowardice."

"In doing so I am sure that you would wrong him deeply."

"Are you? Be good enough to tell me, then, in what manner and what character he has spoken of me to you."

"As a woman to whom he was once deeply attached," answered Max, thankful for this loop-hole of evasion, and full of devout hope that she might not press her awkward question any further. But, in indulging such a hope, he certainly did not know any thing of Norah Desmond.

"You spoke a moment ago of your honor as a gentleman," said she. "If you really possess any thing so foreign to my experience of the Tyndale name, I beg that you will tell me whether or not your cousin has spoken of me as a woman worthy of faith and respect, or as a fast flirt, with whom men only amuse themselves?"

"Miss Desmond, is it fair—"

"To make you testify against the man you call your friend?" interrupted she. "Perhaps not. I will spare you an answer, therefore, especially since your hesitation sufficiently answers me. And yet, you wonder that I have no inclination to spare such a man!" she added, with a ring of vibrating contempt in her voice. "You wonder that I—the woman he once professed to love, the woman to whom he was solemnly engaged, the woman whom he not only deserted and betrayed, but whom he has slandered and defamed—should think him a coward and a dastard!"

"Still, if you could appreciate his anxiety—if you could know how much he desires some assurance of what you mean to do—"

"That assurance he will not obtain, either in his own person or through his agents," said she, decidedly. "Let him understand this once for all."

"He has empowered me to say for him that he is willing to make any concession, any arrangement—"

"Spare your diplomacy, Captain Tyndale," she interrupted, more coldly and haughtily than ever. "What possible concession does Arthur Tyndale imagine that I require at his hands? In my own time, I will name my own terms, and, whatever they are, you may be sure that he will accede to them."

The tone of confident power which filled the last words, and the glance which accompanied them, told Max, more plainly than many assurances could have done, the hopelessness of his mission.

"I see, indeed, that I waste time and effort," said he. "But I had hoped that, for your sister's sake, at least—"

"For my sister's sake I should certainly be inclined to sacrifice a great deal," said she, quietly, as he paused. "We have known each other so long and so well, have been so closely associated together and grown in sisterly affection as we grew in years, that you are right to calculate upon such a bond. Your cousin, too, may safely shelter himself behind it."

Now, it must not be supposed that there was any vulgar banter in this speech. Save for the faintest possible accent of mockery—an accent so natural to her that her voice was scarcely ever free from it—Max might have supposed that she was speaking in perfect seriousness and good faith. As it was, he felt a little puzzled how to answer her, and his thoughts left Arthur and Leslie for a moment to consider how thoroughly disagreeable this woman was. He made a mental comparison of her changing moods, her passion, her mockery, her cynicism, with Miss Grahame's graceful and gracious sweetness.

"Good Heavens, to think that such women should be even *half-sisters!*" he thought. Just then he felt more inclined to excuse Arthur than he had ever felt before.

Miss Desmond, with a quickness of perception which often startled people into a belief that she had some dealing with the black art, answered these thoughts as if he had spoken them aloud.

"You feel more inclined to pity than to blame your cousin just now, do you not?" she said. "You think that such a woman as I am is hardly worth keeping faith with, after all."

"Have I hinted such a thing for a moment, Miss Desmond?" asked he, quite indignantly.

"You have not hinted it, but you have thought it."

"Pardon me, I have done nothing of the kind. On the contrary, I think there is no justification whatever for Arthur's conduct."

"And yet you make yourself his agent and advocate!"

"Not exactly the first, nor at all the last," answered he. "It is simply as his friend that I have endeavored—though very unavailingly—to serve his cause."

"It is a poor cause, and scarcely worth being served," said she. "As for your failure, it would be strange if you had not failed. Your cousin has every thing to fear from me, while I have absolutely nothing to fear from him."

"I begin to appreciate that," said Max, a little grimly.

"I have nothing to gain from him, and nothing to lose by him," she repeated, after a minute. "Therefore he who professes to know the world so well can judge whether or not he is wise in appealing to me."

"But it is impossible that you can refuse absolutely to give him a clew to your intentions in a matter that concerns him so vitally!" said Max, beginning to perceive that this woman was indeed a very cool and subtle adversary.

"I refuse absolutely," she answered. "It seems that I must repeat this very often. Are you so accustomed to finding women like wax in your hands, that you cannot understand a woman's resolution when you meet it?"

"I beg your pardon," replied he, hastily. "I should not have forced you to repeat what you have already said."

"And now I believe that we have finished all that we have to say," she went on, rising and gathering up her light dress from the dewy grass. "In going back to the drawing-room, you must not forget that you have the part of an 'old acquaintance' to play. It is one of the disadvantages of equivocation that it generally places you in a false position even when you have adhered to the rigid letter of the truth."

But they found, when they emerged from the shrubbery, that it was not necessary to return to the drawing-room. Even across the lawn, it was evident that the rest of the party were assembled on the veranda, whence their light tones and laughter floated out on the still night-air. As the two absentees approached, they heard Carl humming one of Miss Desmond's songs, from which he managed to extract all the melody, while Leslie's voice said:

"Norah and Captain Tyndale must have discovered that they possess a great many reminiscences in common to tempt them to extend their walk so far and their talk so long. I am selfish enough to wish they would come back; I want Arthur to hear Norah sing."

"Here I am, Leslie!" said Norah, advancing out of the shadowy darkness, "but I am afraid you must excuse me from singing to-night. I am like our friend the mocking-bird—out of sorts and out of voice, though not, like him, absent in body as well as in mind."

"Was he absent? Did you not find him, after all? I am sorry."

"So was I—really disgusted! But, like most great singers, he is capricious, and Mr. Middleton offended him by talking, all through his most beautiful song last night."

"I object to being held accountable for the caprices of the mocking-bird," said Carl's voice from out the demi-obscure in which it was scarcely possible to tell who was who. "But there are half a hundred singing in the copse at the back of the house, Miss Desmond, if you care to hear them."

"One in the rose-hedge would have been better," said Norah. "It is a very disagreeable trait in human nature that we do not care for any thing which we can have in abundance and with little trouble."

"I never knew a woman who contradicted herself as often as you do," said Carl. "Before dinner you told me you cared for nothing which cost trouble!"

"Ah, but that was my trouble!" said she, laughing.

"And the trouble which is necessary as a zest is somebody else's, I suppose?"

"He that runs might read that much, I should think," said his uncle. "Miss Desmond's taste is like that of the rest of her sex, but her frankness is her own."

"You are quite right, sir, my frankness is my own," said she. "It is one thing to which I can lay fair claim."

"You must allow the rest of us to think that there are other things to which you can lay quite as *fair* claim," said Mr. Middleton, who occasionally made puns of such a brilliant nature that nobody but himself was aware of them until they were elaborately explained.

"If you really want to flatter me," said she, "say that there is something Irish in my tongue. There is nothing of which I am half so proud of as belonging to the most ready-witted people on the face of the earth."

"We'll say any thing you please, if you'll only go and sing for us," said Leslie.

"I suppose I must be more obliging than the mocking-bird," said she, with a sigh. "But I shall sing execrably, I give you warning of that. I always do, when I don't feel like it."

"Your worst must be better than many other people's best, I am sure."

"After such flattery as that, how can I refuse?" said she, turning to Max. "Stay where you all are, then, and I will go and sing for you."

She moved across the veranda as she spoke, and entered the drawing-room; but one member of the group did not obey her last injunction. When she reached the piano, she found Carl Middleton at her side.

"Did you not hear me tell you to stay outside?" she asked, impatiently. "What do you mean by following me like this? Don't you know that it is the thing of all others which I most detest?"

"I can never enjoy music unless I see the singer," said he, coolly. "Besides, can't you give me credit for a little curiosity? I am anxious to hear how that fellow out yonder managed to defend his audacious assertion at dinner."

"Is it so incredible that a man who has lived in France all his life should have seen me, who have lived there the greater part of mine?" she asked, indifferently.

"Not incredible, nor even remarkable as an abstract fact. As a particular fact, however, I would be willing to wager my next good horse that it is a pure invention of his own impudence and his cousin's necessity."

"Perhaps so," said she, lightly running her hand over the keys, "but there are some things which it is less trouble and better policy to believe than to disbelieve. This is one of them."

## CHAPTER XL

"For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,  
Our fancies are more giddy and infirm,  
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won,  
Than women's are."

AMONG all the pleasant rooms at Rosland, the dining-room in the morning was perhaps the pleasantest. On one side the windows opened down to the green turf, on the other upon a vine-latticed alcove—half piazza, half room—which, being delightfully cool, served as an after-dinner smoking-room to Mr. Middleton and his masculine guests.

"What a pleasant place!" Norah said, strolling into it on the morning after the Tyndales had dined at Rosland. She had come down rather early, and, entering the breakfast-room, found only Carl in occupation. "How charmingly airy, and what a fragrant odor of good tobacco seems to pervade every thing! Do you know," she added, laughing, that, although I would not for any consideration betray the fact to our friends here, I am very fond of a cigarette, and I should like nothing better than to take one after dinner in this pretty nook."

"Why not do it, then?" asked he. "You cannot really think that my aunt or Leslie would be so narrow-minded or so ill-bred as to object?"

"Object! Oh no, they would not dream of doing that; but they would give me over to utter reprobation as fast, as Bohemian, and every thing else that good society condemns. Now, you may not think so, perhaps, but I am on my best behavior at present, and I don't want to shock them more than I can help. This is my first introduction into respectable life, and I must try and learn to be as much like respectable people as I can."

"You'll never succeed. There's the stamp of another life and another rearing on you."

"That is encouraging, at any rate. But you have yet to learn that I generally succeed in whatever I undertake."

"I wish you would undertake to like me, then," said he, with a tone of only half jest in his voice.

"That would be quite unnecessary, since I like you already," answered she. "I informed you of that fact yesterday, and you may be sure that I should not have done so if it had not been true. Polite fiction is a branch of social accomplishment which I have never cultivated. Have you looked at the morning papers. What is the news from France?"

She turned carelessly back into the breakfast-room as she spoke, and, walking to a side-table, began turning over the mail that lay there. Provoked by her nonchalance, Carl remained

where he was, and in this sociable attitude Leslie found them when she entered a few minutes later. It was one of the little things which sometimes occur, as if with strange perversity, to justify an erroneous opinion. "I think you are wrong about Carl," Miss Grahame had said the evening before to her aunt. "I do not believe he is in love with Norah. He admires her, of course; but I am sure he has not an idea of any thing more." It must be said that conscience pricked Leslie a little as she made these comforting remarks; but, as she came in now, she thought how right she had been. No man in love could have resisted such an opportunity for a *t àe- à-t àe*, she felt sure; therefore it followed, with a logic irresistible to the feminine mind, that Carl was not in love.

"How early you are!" she said to Norah. "Are you looking to see if you have any letters? It is too soon yet, is it not?"

"To hear from Kate, do you mean? Yes; she would scarcely have written immediately after I left, especially since she started at the same time for Ireland with papa. But there is an attraction in turning over letters, even when they are not for ourselves; and here are a great many."

"Let us see whom they are for," said Leslie. She took and began sorting them. "Half a dozen for uncle, three for Aunt Mildred, and more than it will be pleasant to answer for myself. Carl, there are none for you."

"I have mine already thanks," said Carl, emerging from the alcove.

"But here is one which may interest you. It is from Mrs. Sandford, I think."

She opened a pale-gray envelope, stamped with monogram and crest, and inclosing a sheet of paper filled with writing—

"... as when a field of corn  
Bows all its ears before the roaring East"—

as fashionable, illegible, and full of long tails, as such calligraphy usually is.

"Yes, it is from Mrs. Sandford," she added, after a minute. "She says she will be here to-day. Think of that, Carl!"

"I am thinking of it as hard as possible," said he; "but I don't know whether I am expected to be overpowered with ecstasy or with disgust."

"You will not ask when you are in full tide of flirtation to-morrow."

"I have sworn off from flirtation," he answered, walking to the window. "Champagne is a very good thing for holidays, but it is not wholesome when taken as the staple of a man's life."

"What is not wholesome when taken as the staple of a man's life?" asked Mr. Middleton, coming in just then, with his feet arrayed in the gorgeously-worked slippers which were always such a conspicuous feature of his morning toilet.

"Champagne," answered Leslie. "Did you know that it was not good when taken in any way? But Carl, having become philosophical, has begun to talk in metaphors and illustrations, like a sage."

"I am afraid you are cultivating satire, Leslie," said Carl, strolling back to the table. "Take my advice, and don't—even in its mildest form it makes a woman so exceedingly disagreeable!"

"And how does it make a man?"

"It is not pleasant in any case, but pleasant things, as a rule, are not expected from a man."

"Are they not? This is the first time I ever heard that freedom to be unpleasant is one of the many monopolies which your sex are kind enough to claim."

"There's nothing like living and learning," said he, sitting down. "Now, pray, leave your correspondence for the present, and give me a cup of coffee, like a good girl. I have eaten a dozen apricots and three pears already; but one needs something a little more substantial, even in July."

Since Mrs. Middleton seldom appeared at breakfast, Leslie took the seat of honor (and trouble) at the head of the table; and her pretty, deft hands were soon busy among the cups and saucers. It was an anomalous but attractive-looking breakfast over which she presided. Besides the standard dishes—the crisply-broiled "spring-chickens," the flaky rolls and waffles which are the pride of every Southern cook—there were fruit-stands heaped with peaches, apricots, pears, and plums, beautiful enough in color and variety to have tempted any artist alive to make a study of them.

"I am not sure that in midsummer one needs any thing more substantial than this," said Norah, holding up a peach with cheeks as glowing as her own. "You remember the old proverb which says that 'fruit is golden in the morning, silver at noon, and lead at night?'"

"Whatever it may be," said Mr. Middleton, "I cannot say that I like it at breakfast. Of course, there is no accounting for particular tastes; but give me a beefsteak and a cup of coffee, all the year round."

"Give it to me also, if a positive choice must be made," said Norah. "I have nothing whatever ethereal about me—appetite least of all."

In this way they were taking their breakfast leisurely, and talking lightly, as people do who have nothing in particular before them all day, when a man's figure suddenly appeared on the turf outside the window, and a familiar voice said:

"May I come in?"

It was Arthur Tyndale, who, being bidden cordially to enter, came in and took the empty seat by Leslie's tray.

"I thought I would walk over before it became so very warm," he said, by way of explanation. "Will you take me on your hands for the day? It is really insufferably dull over there at Strafford. I thought yesterday that I would not attempt to pull through another long warm day with no better amusement than a novel and Max."

"I was under the impression that men were never bored by each other's society," said Leslie, with that light, rippling laugh which is so significant of happiness on a woman's lips. "Norah and I, now, might be supposed to find each other dull; but Captain Tyndale and yourself—the idea never occurred to me for a moment!"

"It occurred to us, however, very strongly at least, it occurred to me."

"Why did you not bring Captain Tyndale over with you?" asked Mr. Middleton, hospitably.

"Simply because the unsociable rascal would not come. He intends to spend the day lying in the shade on the verge of the lake, and fancying that he is fishing."

"There are worse occupations for such a day as this," said Carl "that is, unless the fish are too much demoralized by the heat to bite. I have half a mind to go out for the same amusement myself.—What do you say, Miss Desmond" (turning quickly), "will you come, also?"

"If you will guarantee that it shall be cool and pleasant all the time, that we shall catch as many fish as we desire, and that I shall be neither sunburnt nor freckled."

"Let us all go!" said Tyndale, eagerly. "If we drive over to the lake, where Max is, we shall find it very cool and pleasant; Strafford is near at hand for luncheon, and we can come back in the cool of the evening to dinner."

"There is only one objection," said Leslie. "Mrs. Sandford is coming to-day."

"Mrs. Sandford! Is she coming to-day?" said Tyndale. An expression of deep disgust fell over his face. It was evident at a glance that this was any thing but a pleasant item of news to him.

"Mr. Tyndale seems inclined to furnish you with the ecstasies which I was unable to afford, Leslie," said Carl.

"Mrs. Sandford is no favorite of mine," answered Tyndale; "I confess I am not glad to hear that she is coming."

"It cannot be helped now, however," said Leslie, "and so don't you think the fishing might be a good plan for to-morrow? I should like Norah to see Strafford and its grounds."

"Yes, let us go to-morrow, by all means," said Carl.

And, since Norah did not say any thing, the matter seemed to be settled that they were to go.

After breakfast that general aimlessness and want of purpose which always characterize a set of idle people in the country, took full possession of this group. Somebody threw out a suggestion about walking, which somebody else negatived by saying it was too warm; Leslie talked of ordering the carriage to pay a visit in the neighborhood, but was readily dissuaded on the score of dust; Carl, being questioned as to why he did not carry out his intention of going fishing, replied that the house could not furnish any good tackle—and so they all sat on the lawn, under a large tulip-tree, and did nothing, until the sun invaded their retreat, and, Mr. Middleton coming up just then, carried the two young men off to the stable to look at a horse he had bought, or was thinking of buying—nobody besides himself understood very clearly which.

Then, as the two girls returned to the house, Norah said:

"You must excuse me, dear, if I leave you for the rest of the morning. I have all my letters yet to write, and you know that epistolary effort is not the easiest thing in the world such weather as this."

"I am very sorry that you have to go," said Leslie, in her cordial, sincere voice; "but, of course, letters cannot be put off, and I hope you feel that you are at home that you can do exactly as you please. Give my dearest love to Kate, and tell her that if she were here it would be the only thing which could add to my happiness just now."

"You are certainly very kind!" said Norah, with a quick thrill in her voice. "I'll tell Kate with pleasure; and I'll tell her, also, that you deserve all, and more than all, of the happiness of which you speak."

So it came to pass that when the two gentlemen returned from inspecting Mr. Middleton's equine purchase, they found Leslie alone in the hall. "Norah has gone to write letters," she said; and Carl felt immediately that human endurance of heat, ennui, and gossip, had reached its utmost limit. The withdrawal of the sun behind a cloud typifies but poorly the blank cheerlessness which Norah's withdrawal brought over his world. "I've got a letter or two to write myself," he said, and so went off—not to the library, or to his own chamber, but to the little smoking-den by the dining-room, where his letter-writing consisted in lying on a lounge and consuming many more cigars than were good for him. He entertained no doubt, however, but that his epistolary labors were quite as genuine as Miss Desmond's. The idea that she had really gone to her room to write letters never for a moment occurred to him. She had gone to avoid Tyndale, he felt sure—so sure that if, indeed, "curses, like young chickens, always come home to roost," Carl certainly provided himself with a liberal brood that morning. "D—n the fellow!" he found himself saying again and again, even while trying to read two or three alternate newspapers and a magazine. "How does he dare to thrust himself into her presence like this? I wish to Heaven she would let me teach him better?" That Mr. Tyndale had a right to be at Rosland irrespective of Norah's presence there, or that Leslie might possess some slight claim upon his consideration, never for an instant occurred to this zealous champion. Neither did it occur to him that he knew exceedingly little of Miss Desmond's "cause," and that little only by inference. With regard to this cause, there was justification enough for all possible ardor in the one grand, simple, and wholly satisfactory reason that it was her own.

Meanwhile Arthur Tyndale began to discover that time might hang heavily at Rosland as well as at Strafford. Fond as he was of Leslie, and charming and bright as she always made herself to him, he felt this morning a certain lack of zest in her society, a certain vague want of the pungent flavor of an excitement which he had specially come to seek. It was so vague—this sense of flatness and tameness—that he was scarcely more than conscious of it, and yet he could not banish it. "I believe you are bored, after all," Leslie said to him, smiling, and, although he quickly denied the assertion, he could not so readily shake off the fact. Yet, in truth, he was something more than merely "bored"—which is a passive state of suffering at least. He was

actively conscious of a subtile excitement which made the shaded room, with its perfect quiet and whiff of roses on the air, almost intolerable to him. Leslie herself, for the first time in her life, jarred on his mood through her very unconsciousness of it, through her utter ignorance of the restless craving which possessed him, and to which he would have found it difficult to give a name, being a man little addicted to self-analysis. In fact, he was not a man who ever troubled himself very much about his motives, or who could have been said to own a particularly high standard for any thing, though it can fairly be added for him that he was not in any sense a bad man. He was only one of a large class whose impulses are stronger than their principles, whose courage is not great in the moral order, and who are in all respects born epicureans and seekers of pleasure. Just now he was in a state of transition, which puzzled and annoyed him not a little. He felt that he was outraged—that he had good cause for being outraged—with Norah Desmond: she had defied, insulted, scorned, and mocked him, until he could almost have lifted his hand and struck her down in the proud insolence of her beauty—yet she had so stung and roused him, that he could not banish her from his thoughts let him do what he would. All other things seemed tame after the supreme excitement of her presence, the varying spell of her face, the haunting music of her voice. Leslie, sitting in the green shade of the Venetian blinds, with the dainty needle-work of which she was fond in her slender white hands, had little idea of the feverish restlessness which filled her companion. Yet, even to Leslie, it was a relief when their *t à e - à t à e* was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Middleton with a barometer in his hand.

"Just as I thought!" he said, with an air of gratification. "We are going to have a storm at last. I was sure this sultry heat meant something of the kind."

"Are we going to have a storm?" asked Leslie. "If so, I hope it will clear both the physical and moral atmosphere. Somehow I think we are all more or less affected by the weather this morning at least, I know we are all more or less out of sorts."

"That might be caused by something besides the weather," said her uncle; "but I am pretty sure we shall have a storm, and the usual result of a storm is to clear the physical atmosphere, at least."

"I think the day is growing more sultry," she went on, after a minute, letting her work drop and beginning to apply her fan. "Arthur, will you open the blinds? After all, one must have air, even if one is obliged to take heat with it."

The blinds being opened, it was found that the vertical heat was untempered even by the faintest breeze. The blazing noon seemed beating with fierce power upon the parched earth which lay helpless under its scorching glare. Sound there was none. Through all the wide domain of Nature a stillness reigned, compared to which midnight is vocal with noise. Not a leaf rustled, not a single bird found courage to chirp; only a locust now and then lifted up its solitary voice in the burning land. The sky above was cloudless and intensely blue; but along the verge of the horizon, especially in the southwest, white, fleecy clouds were lying piled in great masses, which dazzled the eye as it fell on them.

"If the rain is coming at all, the sooner it comes the better," said Mr. Middleton, walking to and fro, with the barometer in one hand and a palm-leaf fan in the other. "This is unendurable or would be unendurable if there was any way to remedy it!"

Way there was none, however, save to wait for the storm, which really seemed at last as if it meant to come; for, while they panted and gasped for air in the stillness of the burning noon, the first distant rumble of thunder smote suddenly like welcome music on their ears. Then, by slow degrees, the dazzling white cloud moved higher up the sky, the rolling sounds grew more frequent, though still very distant; the leaves began to rustle a little, as if in thirsty expectation, though the sun still shone with the same pitiless glare on the dusty ground and dried up herbage. "It really seems impossible that we shall have any rain!" said Leslie, skeptically; and, considering how long it had been since they had last seen a cloud, her skepticism was excusable. *This* cloud, however, plainly meant business. It gradually changed from fleecy whiteness to a dark, blue-gray, lurid mass, in the depths of which vivid flashes of lightning leaped and played among Alpine

peaks and crags. As it marched steadily up the sky, overspreading and taking possession of the whole heavens, like an army with banners, it was a sight well worth witnessing. When it finally reached and enshrouded the sun, the darkness which fell over the land was like an eclipse. In the house it was scarcely possible to see any thing. The party, who were just then sitting down to luncheon, looked at each other in dismay. It is too much to expect of human nature that it will eat by faith and not by sight in summer weather. There was a moment's pause; then, while Mr. Middleton, with his eye-glass, was closely examining the dish before him, preparatory to announcing its name and nature to the company, Mrs. Middleton ordered Robert to light the gas. "The storm must be near at hand," she said.

When the gas was lighted, Leslie uttered a slight exclamation. "Why, Norah is not here!" she said. "It was so dark that I really did not notice her absence before."

"I suppose she did not hear the bell," said Mrs. Middleton. "Robert, send up and let Miss Desmond know that luncheon is ready."

"Perhaps she is asleep—"

It was Miss Grahame who began this sentence, but it was never finished. At that instant a flash of lightning, like a solid sheet of flame, seemed to fill the room, paling into insignificance the glow of the gas, and lighting up every thing with a lurid and terrible glare impossible to describe. Following so closely that it seemed almost simultaneous, a volleying crash of thunder shook the house to its very foundation. With this magnificent though rather startling prelude, the storm burst. Before the last mighty reverberation had died away, the rush of pouring rain sounded on the roof and down the dry water-spouts.

"Are our heads still on our shoulders?" asked Leslie, as soon as it was possible to speak at all. "Did anybody ever see the like of such a flash? What a mercy that none of us were killed?"

"As soon as Robert comes back he must close the shutters," said Mrs. Middleton, who had laid down her knife and fork and turned very pale. "It will not do to run such a risk."

"What an uproar!" said Carl, laying down *his* knife and fork to listen. "By Jove! wouldn't you think there was a tremendous artillery -duel going on in the celestial regions?"

"It is more like a pitched battle," said Tyndale. "Listen! You cannot only hear the boom of heavy guns, but the rattling volleys of musketry."

"I thought we should have a deluge when it came," said Mr. Middleton, helping himself complacently to cold mutton, and thinking what a good thing it was for the corn, which needed rain terribly.

In the midst of the din, which was truly deafening, Robert came back, and said a few words to his mistress, the effect of which was to make that lady look very much astonished.

"Not in the house!" she repeated. "Are you sure? Why, where on earth can she be?"

"Where can she be?" asked Leslie, quickly. "Not Norah—you can't mean that Norah is not in the house?"

"So Robert says," answered Mrs. Middleton, "though I scarcely think it can be possible."

"Me and Maria's looked everywhere fur her, ma'am, but she can't be found," said Robert, speaking to Miss Grahame ; "and Ellen says she saw her going toward the woods 'bout an hour ago, with a book under her arm."

"Toward the woods!" two or three simultaneous voices made this exclamation. "Good Heavens!" "You must be mistaken!" "It can't be possible!"

"Miss Desmond is not crazy, is she?" said Mr. Middleton, when these disjointed exclamations were for the moment exhausted. "If not, it stands to reason that she could not have done any thing so foolish as to go to the woods in the burning heat of an hour ago, with a storm plainly coming up."

"But where is she, then?" asked Leslie. "She must be *somewhere*, you know. Carl, what are you going to do?"

"I am going after her," said Carl, rising, and pushing back his chair with a quick jerk "if you are sure she is not in the house, Robert."

"I am perfectly sure, sir," answered Robert. "Me and Maria looked everywhere."

"You need not trouble yourself, Mr. Middleton," said Tyndale, also rising abruptly; "I am going in search of Miss Desmond."

"Are you?" said Carl, haughtily. Their glances met and crossed like two swords. "But, if you will pardon me, I think I had better take that liberty, since I am an old acquaintance of Miss Desmond's, and you are not."

He turned and was leaving the room, when Mr. Middleton interfered.

"Don't be a fool, Carl!" he said, irritably. "What is the sense of talking about going out in such a hurricane as this, especially since you have not the faintest idea where Miss Desmond is?"

"You don't expect me to sit still with the consciousness that she is out in the hurricane, do you, sir?" answered Carl. "Leslie, will you send somebody to get me a water-proof and a shawl or two? Robert, tell Ellen I want to speak to her in the hall."

## CHAPTER XII.

"Some ladies love the jewels in Love's zone,  
And gold-tipped darts he hath for painless play  
In idle, scornful hours he flings away;  
And some that listen to his lute's soft tone  
Do love to deem the silver praise their own;  
Some prize his blindfold sight; and there be  
they  
Who kissed his wings which brought him yes-  
terday,  
And thank his wings to-day that he is flown."

WHEN Miss Desmond went to her own room, and began writing her letters—of which, notwithstanding Carl's incredulity, she had a goodly number on hand—she naturally found that it was very warm work. There are warmer things, perhaps—making hay may be one of them—but certainly it is a sufficiently warm thing to sit down in the exhausting heat of a July day to write two or three letters to that class of people who expect to hear "every thing about every thing" in detail. Now, ready as Norah was with her tongue, she was not particularly ready with her pen, and she found that her ideas and energy were forsaking her in the most disheartening manner.

"It is the intolerable heat," she said, at last, throwing down her pen after an hour's fruitless labor. "Horace Walpole himself could not have written any thing more than a string of commonplaces under such circumstances. If I could only get out in to the open air! It never is as warm in the open air as it is in-doors, let people say what they will."

Fired with this desire, she rose, drew back her blind, and, finding the coast apparently clear on the side of the house next the shrubbery, proceeded to tie on a garden-hat, to take a portfolio under her arm, and to cautiously sally forth down the back staircase.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, as the case might have been esteemed, Carl was taking a short nap over his novel just then, and so he missed the light footstep which crossed the dining-room, and the light flutter of a dress which passed through one of the open windows to the lawn. Rejoicing in her escape, Miss Desmond unfurled her parasol, and took a short cut across the sunlit turf to the green depths of the shrubbery beyond.

"There are at least a dozen pleasant places there where I can sit and scribble without being suffocated," she thought. "Have I really any gypsy blood, I wonder? No Zingali ever hated the confinement of four walls worse than I do!"

But even in the shrubbery she discovered that, at high noon, pleasant places, which should be also shady places, were hard to find. The shadows of the largest trees seemed infinitesimally small, and proved wholly unsatisfactory. Strolling on from point to point, she scarcely knew where she was going until she found herself in the neighborhood of the summer-house where her interview with Arthur Tyndale had taken place the day before.

It seemed so full of the recollection of this scene that she turned away impatiently for a moment. But then as if remembering herself she turned back again and took her way toward it with an air of resolution.

"This will not do!" she said, half aloud; "I cannot afford to indulge myself in matters of sentiment, even in little things; it is a bad precedent. One must do whatever is the best thing to do; and just now it is the best thing to find shelter from the sun."

The door of the summer-house was standing open, as it had been the day before; the chairs were sitting exactly as they had been left; and on the small table in the centre of the floor was a faded rose which Norah remembered to have laid there when she attempted to follow Leslie.

"Was it only yesterday?" she thought, taking up the flower and looking at it. "Somehow it seems to me a much longer time!"

Then she laid her portfolio on the table, opened both casements to secure as much of a thorough draught as possible, and, taking a fresh sheet of paper, resumed the letter on which she had last been engaged.

"You would scarcely credit, Kate," she wrote, "for I scarcely credit it myself until I had fairly tested it, how entirely my old love—was it love, or only fancy, as you warned me once?—for this man is dead! Looking at him as he stood before me yesterday—here, in this very summer-house where I am writing now—I scorned myself, with a scorn that tingled to the very ends of my fingers, that I had ever loved him for an hour, and, above all and over all, that I had ever been mad enough to tell him so. For, Kate, he taunted me with it! Think of that—imagine that—if you can! Whether you can or cannot, the fact remains the same—he taunted me with it! He asked me—me, whom he was insulting and defying—if I dared to deny that I had loved him once! Are you acquainted with any epithet strong enough to express your opinion of such a man? If so, oblige me by bestowing it upon him, for *I* am not.

"Ah, Kate, he is so pitiful in his cowardice and fear of me! He has not even the courage necessary for being wholly false. He alternately blusters and cringes, in order to learn what I 'mean to do.' Baffled in this endeavor, he has set his cousin on the track of discovery. This cousin is a very transparent diplomatist, however, and I do not think will be likely to discover very much. In a small way, he is something of a puzzle to me. Yesterday evening I changed my opinion of him several times—which is rather unusual for *me*, who have had such good cause to know men well, and to read them easily. He possesses the unusual combination of a certain direct frankness (either real or assumed), together with a great deal of imperturbable self-possession; but what chiefly puzzles me is his motive for espousing his cousin's cause, since you are probably as well aware as I am that men do not readily undertake delicate and difficult negotiations (especially with a woman) out of pure friendship for another man. What Captain Tyndale expects to gain by obtaining from me certain concessions for his cousin, which he never will obtain, I cannot as yet imagine. You will say, with that peculiarly deep knowledge of human nature which distinguishes you, that probably the cousin has promised to pay his debts, or to afford him substantial aid in some other form, if he succeeds. I do not know. Perhaps it is because the martial *diplomate* bears the name of my old hero in '*Wallenstein*', that I do not think he looks like a man to whom it would be exactly safe to make such a proposal. A gentleman, I should say, a man of better moral fibre than his cousin, as well as of higher 'tone'—he proved that last night when he approached with courtesy and respect a woman whom he had evidently been taught to think worthy of neither.

"For he—the coward whose name just now I cannot force myself to write—has added, to the passive insult of treating me as if I were an adventuress, the active insult of saying that I am one. What he has said, and what left unsaid, what insinuated, and what openly avowed, I can

scarcely tell you, for it has been merely hinted to me. Carl Middleton—half in honest warning, half with the jealous instinct of a man in love—told me yesterday that Mr. Tyndale had been kind enough to warn Leslie against sending for me, assuring her that I was a woman 'with a notoriously fast reputation,' and one with whom 'it would not be well for her to associate.' You know these men of the world, as they love to call themselves; you know how, with an accent, an arch of the eyebrow, a shrug of the shoulders, they can put more force and meaning into one simple sentence, than all the eloquence of all the advocates who have ever lived since the beginning of the world could disprove. I can see, I can hear, Arthur Tyndale, as he delivered that warning against me.

"And perhaps you wonder how I felt when I heard it repeated by other lips. In truth, my Kate, not much more scorn than I had felt before—scorn so great, so overpowering, that, for a time, it literally swallowed up all other feeling. Then, after a while, indignation came over me. I thought, my poor Kate, of our friendless, unprotected girlhood; of our careless, wandering, vagrant life; of how hard we have striven—against odds that none but ourselves can even guess—to keep our names above reproach. I thought—for, in the still hours of the night, I added up my debt against Arthur Tyndale item on item—how well he knew these things, how thoroughly he had appreciated our position, how entirely he was aware that the hand which Leslie held out might have been to both of us scarcely less than a hand from heaven. Then I thought of his passionate and persistent devotion when we knew him first; of his resolute determination that I—who had already learned to put scant faith in men's admiration or men's love—should learn to love him; of his success, at last; of his departure; of his silence; of the manner in which he flung this love, which he had won at such great cost and from so proud a heart, into the dust like a worthless thing. I recalled the manner in which he had denied to my face that he ever knew me; the insult which he had added to treachery, the slander to scorn; I burned it into my comprehension and memory that, not content with having broken his faith, and thrown his honor to the winds, he had opened his false lips—than which falser never spake since the birth of time—to take away that good name which, of great value to all women, is simply priceless to *us*.

"And, when the debt was all added up, it was so great that I thought to myself, 'What reprisal can ever equal it?'"

The passionate excitement of the writer had waxed so great over the last paragraph that, as her pen dashed rapidly across the paper, covering it with a heavy, black chirography, very unlike a woman's usual hand, she had failed to notice the steadily advancing cloud, or the muttering thunder overhead. At the last words, however, that sudden darkness fell which amazed the party assembled round the luncheon-table at Rosland; and, wondering what strange eclipse had overtaken the noonday, she looked up with a start. Then she saw the cloud, of whose approach she had before been merely vaguely conscious, and saw, also, how near at hand it was. Through the open door she commanded an excellent view of the lurid blackness which had overspread the whole western heavens, against which the green depths of summer foliage stood out in vivid relief. As yet every thing was very still but, as she gazed, a low, sighing wind swept by, and two or three birds flew up out of a neighboring copse, uttering shrill, discordant cries. "There is going to be a storm!" she thought—a conclusion in which a child of two years old might have acquiesced—"shall I have time to reach the house before it bursts?"

Since there was no weather-seer at hand to answer this question, she paused irresolutely and looked at the cloud. As she looked, it gave its terrible and majestic answer back. Her very eyeballs seemed scorched by the blinding glare that suddenly lit up the whole face of Nature, and she felt as if the house in which she stood was tumbling over her head in the pealing crash which followed. Immediately after this, her breath was literally swept away by a storm of wind which rushed into the summer-house like an incarnate fiend; and, when she recovered it, she found herself seated again in the chair from which she had risen, clutching the table by a blind instinct, while her portfolio and papers were already gone from sight, dancing a demoniac dance on the

wings of the wind, thanks to the convenient and delightful thorough draught which she had arranged.

Her first idea was that she had been struck by that awful and vivid flash of lightning; but, finding this to be an erroneous impression, she then decided that it would be well to close the windows against the storm which was rushing in. It cost her a struggle to accomplish this feat, especially on the southern side, for the hurricane beat her back again and again with fierce violence. Succeeding at last, however, she then turned her attention to the door. It proved, however, even more unmanageable than the windows had done. The bolt being defective, as fast as it was closed the wind burst it open again with a triumphant blast. Dismayed at the third repetition of such a performance, Norah tried the effect of placing a chair against it. The effect was simply that of seeing a chair knocked over in the floor, and the door burst wide open for the fourth time. Then she tried the table, which, being a little more substantial, held its own for several minutes. During these minutes, Miss Desmond had time to consider how very warm it was, now that she was safely shut up in a box, to think that she had much better have stayed in the house after all, to wish that she had noticed the approach of the storm a little earlier, to wonder how long it would last, and to discover that the roof of the summer-house was leaking when the door was burst open for the fifth time, and the drenched figure of a man appeared on the threshold.

"Carl!" she said, involuntarily, but a pair of long, dark mustaches had not appertained to Carl's personal appearance when she saw him last, and, a very battered hat being pushed back at that moment, she recognized Max Tyndale.

The astonishment on both sides was very great, and without any real or simulated admixture of pleasure.

"Miss Desmond!" said Max. Then he took off his hat and laughed—shaking himself like a Newfoundland dog. "I suppose you were caught in the rain as well as myself," he said. "I had no alternative but to seek the nearest shelter. It is a regular tropical storm!"

"I have not been in the rain, but I was caught here," answered Norah. "Pray shut the door if you are coming in," she added, anxiously. "I was sure the wind had burst it open again."

"I suppose I ought to have asked if I might come in," said he, proceeding to obey her directions. "But I had no idea of finding any one, and then "

"And then you know that you have quite as much right to be here as I have. Don't make foolish apologies, Captain Tyndale; but push the table as hard as you can against the door, else it will not stay shut."

"Is that the way?" asked he, pushing very hard indeed.

"Yes, that is the way, but I am afraid it will be open again in a few minutes the storm seems really increasing in violence. Oh! I have an idea! You intend to sit down, I imagine. Well, suppose you sit on that? It will help to keep it firm."

"On the table, do you mean?"

"Yes, on the table, of course."

"Very well," said he, and immediately sat down, without exhibiting any sign of surprise, or making any objection.

"You must be invaluable as a soldier," said Miss Desmond, after a short pause, during which she had regarded him as he sat with his arms crossed and his back against the door.

"You are very kind," he answered, "but it would not become me to say that you are right."

"Prompt, unquestioning obedience is the greatest virtue of a soldier, is it not?"

"It is one of the most necessary, at least."

"You certainly seem to possess it in more than ordinary degree."

"I have generally found it less trouble to obey than to question; therefore, you see that my obedience would scarcely come under the head of a virtue."

"It might come under the head of a recommendation though."

"It has done that once or twice in my life."

"As when?"

"Oh," said he, smiling, "I hope you don't think me so foolish or so egotistical as to entertain a woman with accounts of military events."

"And pray why not?" asked she, a little piqued. "Do you think a woman incapable of understanding them?"

"Not necessarily; but the chances are, in the first place, that she would be very much bored; and, in the second place, that the relator would be tempted to embroider, or at least to dwell upon his own achievements—two things which no man of sense ever does."

"You should not make such sweeping assertions about men of sense; you condemn the majority of mankind altogether."

"Being in the majority, they can afford to support the fact with philosophy, since majorities govern most things in this fine world of ours."

"Yes unfortunately. Would it not be a singular, and, from some points of view, rather a pleasant thing, if we were able to reverse matters and give the power to minorities for a time? I belong to so many minorities myself, that I should like it extremely."

"And I should not object. Matters could not be much worse than they are at present."

"I am surprised that fishing has not induced you to look at the affairs of the world more cheerfully. People who like that amusement say that one views every thing so philosophically from an angling point of view."

"Not when the fish refuse to bite, when one breaks a good line, and when a storm comes up and wets one to the skin."

"I am afraid you must be very wet," said she, as if the idea had occurred to her for the first time. "Don't you think you will take cold?"

"It is not impossible, but scarcely probable."

"How did you chance to come here?" she went on, after a minute. "I thought your cousin said that you were fishing in some lake which cannot be very near at hand?"

"I was fishing there, but I grew tired of an amusement which came to nothing, and I was on my way to Rosland for luncheon when the storm came up."

"It must have come up very quickly, for I was writing, and did not notice it until there was not time to reach the house."

"Writing!—were you writing *here*? That accounts for various waifs and strays of paper that I saw tossing about. One of them came as straight to me as if it had been directed and sent by post. I was hurrying along, when it blew into my hand so often and so persistently that I caught and crammed it into my pocket. By-the-by, I suppose it is there yet."

He put his hand into one of his pockets as he spoke, and drew forth a crumpled mass of blotted paper, which he proceeded to smooth out on the table.

"The rain has made the ink run to such an extent that I fear it is almost illegible," he said. "But, still, I think it must be yours, Miss Desmond."

"Why do you think so?" asked she.

He looked up with a quick glance in his dark eyes.

"Because, if you will excuse me, I see a sentence here which no one else could have written," he answered.

"What is it?" she asked, as coolly as before.

"Shall I bring the letter and show it to you?"

"No; read it aloud."

"Miss Desmond!"

"Well, did you not hear me? The thunder *does* make a great noise. I said, 'Read it aloud.' "

"Are you in earnest?"

"Am I likely to be in jest?" demanded she, haughtily.

"It is your own affair, of course," said he, with the momentary surprise vanishing from his face. "I only beg you to believe that my eye fell on the passage accidentally, and that I have

seen nothing else. This is it"—he bent over the letter and read aloud the following, with the utmost *sang-froid*:

"Looking at him as he stood before me yesterday—here, in this very summer-house where I am writing now—I scorned myself, with a scorn that tingled to the very ends of my fingers, that I had ever loved him for an hour, and, above all and over all, that I had ever been mad enough to tell him so!"

"And you think I am the only person who could have written that?" asked she, in a quick voice, as he stopped.

He looked up again, and, as he did so, wonder seized him that she should have forced him to read aloud any thing which had power to bring such a blush to her face—such a look of pain to her eyes.

"Forgive me," he said, almost humbly. "I was guilty of gross presumption in thinking or saying any thing about it."

"You were guilty of nothing of the kind," answered she, imperiously. "How could a man possibly be guilty of gross presumption toward a woman whom he holds as you hold me?"

"Miss Desmond, I must protest"

"Protest nothing," interrupted she, quickly, "or you will force me to hold your word as lightly as that of any other man. No doubt you are like all the rest of your sex; but, as yet, I have not found it out. For novelty's sake, therefore, let me believe that you sometimes speak truth even to a woman!"

"Believe me, I was not going to speak any thing else when you interrupted me."

"Were you going to protest that you do not take me to be the woman whom Arthur Tyndale has described?"

"No; I was only going to protest against your interpretation of my thoughts, and your idea of my opinions."

"Well, you are candid so far, at any rate," said she, smiling a little. "Do you know," she added, after a minute, "that I am half inclined to ask you to read that blotted letter which has come so singularly into your hands? You cannot believe that I had any intention of the kind when I wrote it. Therefore, you may take it as a truthful statement of certain facts which you have no doubt heard differently rendered from your cousin's point of view."

He looked at her keenly.

"Will you pardon me if I ask again whether you are in earnest?" he said, gravely.

"I am perfectly in earnest," she answered, "unless you consider the matter of too little importance to be worth the trouble of deciphering such a scrawl!"

He replied by taking up the letter and beginning to read. For some minutes after this, silence reigned—that is to say, no words were spoken; but the pouring rain and the rolling thunder made any thing but silence in the literal sense of the term. Norah watched Max closely, as his eye traveled down the pages of the letter, but she was able to make very little of his face. In truth, he knew that he was being watched, and so put on his most thoroughly impassive and non-committal look.

This look he carried through to the very end of the letter; but, when he lifted his eyes at last, the keen glance of the woman before him read in *them* that she had won his belief and respect. When he spoke, his words were very simple and characteristic:

"I am glad you did me the honor to show me this, Miss Desmond. Without holding any such opinion of you as you have imagined that I did, I certainly was not aware of the truth as it is here told."

"I did not suppose it possible that you were," she answered, "and I—well, I do not usually care what people think of me, but this opportunity seemed to come without my seeking, and I took advantage of it on an impulse which I may possibly regret."

"I hope you will not do so!" he said, quickly. "I hope you do not think so poorly of me as to imagine that I misunderstand in the least, or could make any use which you would disapprove of the contents of this letter."

"No," said she, slowly. "I think you may be honest—and honorable. The two things are not the same, you know, and many men who are the first are not the last."

"Thanks," said he, smiling. "I consider that as an *amende honorable* for being called 'a transparent diplomatist.' "

"I am not sure that you are such a very transparent diplomatist," said she, looking at him, and smiling also. "As you may have noticed, I confessed to Kate that your motive for espousing your cousin's cause—a cause which you could not have failed to suspect to be a poor one—puzzled me."

"I noticed that you spoke of me in much better terms than I deserved," said he, flushing suddenly, "for I—I did not think very highly of you when I approached you last night, Miss Desmond."

"I was aware of that at the time," said she, "and therefore I appreciated your courtesy and respect all the more."

"You did not resent what lay behind those things?"

"No. Why should I have resented that which was perfectly natural?"

"Most women would not stop to reason on a question of that kind."

"So much the worse for most women, then. But 'let us return to our sheeps,' as the Frenchman said. Were we not talking of your motive for advocating your cousin's cause?"

"*You* were talking of it."

"Which means that you do not wish to do so?"

"No," said he, "it does not mean that, for really I have no objection to telling you what my motive is and has been."

"Well," said she, with frank curiosity, "what is it, then? You must forgive me if I am inquisitive, but I cannot bear to be puzzled."

"There is no reason why you should be puzzled"—he began, when, just at that moment, they became conscious that somebody outside was knocking violently on the door, and shouting in an unintelligible manner besides.

"Another unfortunate has been caught in the storm and wants shelter, I suppose," said Norah. "We have no alternative but to let him in, have we? Really, this begins to put one in mind of an inn in a play."

"Don't break down the door—I'll open it in a minute!" shouted Max to the outsider, who certainly seemed in violent haste.

He descended from the table as he spoke, and, drawing it aside, the door swung quickly back—revealing the water-proof-enveloped figure of Carl Middleton, with a broken umbrella in one hand and a bundle of wraps under the other arm.

"How glad I am to find you!" he said, stalking breathlessly forward to Norah. "I was terribly afraid you would not be here, although the gardener swore he saw you as he passed the door an hour ago. You've no idea how anxious they all are about you at the house!"

"Did you come out in all this storm to look for me?" she said. "How could you be so foolish! It is so kind of you, and so provoking of you, both at once! You will take your death in the way of a cold, and then what shall I do for a champion?"

"I will never die while you need me, you may be sure. But are you confident you are not wet? Have you not been caught in the rain at all?"

"Not at all. Not any more than if I had been sitting in my own room, where it would have been wiser to have stayed. But there is Captain Tyndale, who was even more wet than yourself when he first sought refuge here."

Thus recalled to a sense of propriety, Carl turned and shook hands with Max.

"I beg pardon for not speaking before," he said, "but I was so anxious about Miss

Desmond—I left Leslie, firmly persuaded that she had been struck by a bolt of lightning, or knocked over by a falling tree."

"I am sorry to have caused so much uneasiness," said Norah, "but it is a very good rule in life to expect the best until the worst happens. It spares one so much unnecessary annoyance."

"I suggested something of that kind to Leslie," said Carl, "but she paid no attention to it."

"We are none of us likely to be philosophers in an emergency," said Max. Then he walked to the door, which still remained open, and stood there, drinking in the fresh, rain-laden air. "I think your imprisonment will be at an end very soon, Miss Desmond," he went on. "The storm will be likely to pass as quickly as it came. Already the clouds are breaking in the west, and the worst is plainly over."

His prediction was amply verified. Fifteen minutes later, Norah decided that it was quite possible for her to attempt to return to the house. True, the ground was a literal lake, and the clouds were yet sending quick showers upon it, but Carl had brought a pair of overshoes, besides a water-proof and two shawls, so she felt able to defy moisture either above or below. When she was equipped for departure, when the overshoes had been fitted on, and she had drawn the dark hood of the water-proof over her graceful head, she turned and looked at Max.

"Of course you are coming too, are you not?" she said.

"I believe not," he answered. "My wardrobe is at Strafford, and therefore I must turn my steps in that direction. After all, it is not very much farther to go. Good-day, Miss Desmond, and let me hope sincerely that you will not suffer any ill effects from your exposure."

"That is a very stiff, disagreeable fellow," said Carl, as, having parted, they went their different ways. "I cannot understand how all those people at Rosland like him so much."

"And perhaps he cannot understand why they like you so much," said Norah. "Liking and disliking are arbitrary and inscrutable things at best. By-the way," said she, starting suddenly and speaking half to herself, "he carried my letter with him!"

"Your letter!" repeated Carl, surprise and jealousy instantly appearing in mixed quantities on his face. "What the deuce is he doing with a letter of yours? You must have taken amazing strides toward intimacy while you were shut up there together!"

"You forget that we are old friends," said she, maliciously. "And, after all, the letter does not matter, being of little or no importance."

### CHAPTER XIII.

"Let the world roll blindly on!  
Give me shadow, give me sun,  
And a perfumed clay as this is:

    Let me lie,

    Dreamfully,

When the last quick sunbeams shiver

Spears of light across the river,

And a breeze which seems the sigh

Of a fairy floating by,

    Coyly kisses

Tender leaf and feathered grasses;

Yet so soft its breathing passes,

These tall ferns, just glimmering o'er me,

Blending goldenly before me,

    Hardly quiver!"

"How beautiful your sister is, my dear!" said Mrs. Sandford, enthusiastically. "You can't imagine how much I am charmed with her!"

"Yes, Norah is certainly very beautiful!" said Leslie. "I am glad you like her. She is very attractive, too, I think, although her manner may strike you at first as a little cold—

"Oh, no, no—only dignified, and reserved, and delightful."

"—But, after a while, you will see that it is *only* manner. I do not think that she is cold herself."

"Well, now, do you know I rather *like* cold people," said Mrs. Sandford, opening her blue eyes very wide indeed. "I am so warm-hearted, so outspoken, so impulsive myself, that I admire and really *envy* people like Miss Desmond, who are always self-contained, always say and do the right thing, and never possibly commit themselves to any thing wrong."

"I hope Norah does not deserve quite such high praise as that," said Leslie. "So great an amount of perfection would be uninteresting."

"She is charming," repeated Mrs. Sandford—"really charming! I assure you that I have fallen *quite* in love with her!"

This assurance was given on the morning after the volatile lady's arrival at Rosland. Breakfast being over, she found herself for a few minutes alone with Miss Grahame in the drawing-room, and it was impossible to allow these few minutes to pass without going into raptures over such a convenient and tempting subject for raptures as Miss Desmond. Leslie, who understood her guest very well, was not at all surprised.

"Norah would be flattered if she knew how well she had impressed you," she said, moving back a few paces, to see if some flowers she had been arranging stood well in the vase. "She is not exactly the kind of woman whom other women usually like."

"Because she is so beautiful, I suppose," said Mrs. Sandford. "But, then, I never was jealous in my life—never! My greatest friends have always been among beautiful women."

"You have never had any need for jealousy," said Leslie: it was impossible in common courtesy to say less. But then she changed the subject paying and receiving compliments being very little to her taste. "Come and tell me if you do not think this vase is well arranged," she said, "and look what lovely sofрано-buds these are!"

While Mrs. Sandford was going into raptures over the vase and over the sofрано-buds, Carl entered the room, looking rather out of humor.

"Have you given up the fishing expedition, Leslie?" he inquired. "I heard you promise Tyndale last night that we would be over there early this morning, but I don't see any movement that way, and the sun is getting higher and hotter every minute."

"I ordered the carriage when we left the breakfast-table," Leslie answered, "and I was only waiting until it came round, to propose that we should put on our hats."

"The carriage!" repeated he, in a tone of disgust. "Why did you not order the phaeton for Mrs. Sandford and yourself, and let Miss Desmond go with me on horse-back?"

"Because Norah declined such an arrangement, saying that her habit would be too much in the way at Strafford."

"Mrs. Middleton is not going with us, then?" said Mrs. Sandford, turning round from the roses.

"No; she is not fond of damp grass, and she thinks that you will be chaperone enough for the party," answered Leslie, smiling.

"How absurd it seems to talk of *my* being a chaperone at all," said the pretty widow, with a silvery laugh—so even that ill-natured people averred it had been practised at the key-board. "I never can repress my amusement at the idea! One *feels* so young, Mr. Middleton, even after one has ceased to *be* exactly young."

"If feeling follows appearance, I can well imagine that you might fancy yourself sixteen," said Carl, paying with only tolerable grace the tribute which was plainly expected from him.

"The French say that, in the matter of age, a woman is what she looks," said Leslie, coming to his relief. "Carl, what do you think of going to inquire if the carriage is not coming to the door to-day?"

Ten minutes later, the carriage drove to the door, and the ladies in linen dresses—dresses not likely to be injured by mud or water—and becoming sailor-hats were assembled on the veranda. Mrs. Middleton, provided with a fan and a novel, and established in a comfortable wicker-chair, looked at them with compassionate surprise. It was a dispensation of Providence, she thought, that young people required amusement—but what amusement was to be found in driving two or three miles for the purpose of spending the day on damp grass and in wet boats, with a scorching sun overhead, when they might have staid in a cool house or on a shaded lawn, and taken life easily, she was unable to imagine.

"You think you will not be back to luncheon?" she asked, in a tone which plainly said, "If you are wise, you will be."

"Oh, no," Leslie answered, turning on the steps, while Carl assisted Mrs. Sandford and Miss Desmond into the carriage. "I promised Arthur that we would certainly take luncheon at Strafford. We shall be back in time for dinner, but not before."

"Very well," said Mrs. Middleton. "I am sure I hope you will have a pleasant day, but I do not think the rain has tempered the heat at all, and in shady places you will be likely to find it very damp, indeed."

"Aunt Mildred is evidently of the opinion that our prospects of enjoyment are not very brilliant," said Leslie, after they had driven off. "As a general rule, I agree with her in thinking that *al-fresco* parties are mostly failures—but occasionally they are pleasant."

"Chiefly when they are *impromptu*," said Carl. "Rarely ever when they have been talked over and arranged."

"This one is *impromptu*, is it not?" asked Mrs. Sandford.

"Partly so; enough, perhaps, to insure its being moderately pleasant," answered he. "Plans of the kind, however, ought to be carried out when they are perfectly fresh. To defer their execution is like waiting five minutes to drink a glass of soda-water."

"You ought to be very glad that it was not carried out yesterday," said Norah. "Fancy having been caught without shelter in that storm of wind and rain!"

"I am glad you waited till to-day on my account," said Mrs. Sandford. "I shall be so glad to see Strafford! I have heard so much of it from my cousins. And then there is Captain Tyndale. I shall really be very glad to see *him*, though I think he might have been civil enough to come over to Rosland and see *me* last night."

"He did not know that you were expected," said Leslie.

"Oh, that accounts for it, then!" said she, with the air of one who accepts a satisfactory explanation. "He was at my house so constantly before he left the city, and we made so many plans for seeing a great deal of each other down here, that I thought his absence very strange last night. It is certainly very pleasant," she added, with a laugh. "Do you know, Leslie, that it is town-talk in Alton that I am engaged to him?"

"Is it, indeed?" said Leslie. "No, I should never have suspected such a thing."

"I tell my friends that they are really quite absurd," said Mrs. Sandford, shrugging her shoulders. "They engage me to a new man every month, though I have said again and again that I have not the faintest idea of marrying *anybody* for at least five years to come! One can do as one pleases when one is a widow, which is considerably more than one can do as a wife; and, therefore, I find it a great deal pleasanter than having a jealous husband to worry one."

"But husbands are not necessarily jealous," suggested Carl.

"Indeed, I don't trust any of them not to be," said she, and it was evident that she meant it; "I don't trust any of them not to be jealous of me."

"Of course I bow to your superior knowledge," said he. "It is certainly based on a much more extended experience than I can boast."

In such instructive and entertaining conversation the drive passed. It was a greater distance to Strafford by the high-road than by the short cut across the fields which Arthur and Max chiefly affected, but before long they saw the tall chimneys and brown gables of the house

showing through the green foliage of the park. The nooks and dells of the latter were full of more than usual beauty as the early sunlight slanted across the wet grass and through the mighty ranches of the great oaks, throwing entrancing shadows on the turf. It was not oaks alone, however, which filled the park. There was scarcely one of the magnificent variety of Southern shade-trees which was not represented, with bosky depths of copse-like shrubbery intermixed. Every thing was as green and still as an enchanted forest, every thing was glittering yet with the rain of the day before, and every thing, even to the moss-grown palings, bore eloquent witness that this home of the Tyndales was not a place of yesterday.

That it was a beautiful place no one could deny. They all said so with one accord as they entered the wide gates and drove to the front of the house, where Arthur and Max were standing in the shade of the stone portico waiting for them. When the carriage stopped, the former stepped forward, looking even more handsome and high-bred than usual. Perhaps it was the consciousness of standing on his own threshold which helped him to a new dignity and courtesy of manner. Certainly it is a consciousness which cannot fail to have its effect upon any man who is not hopelessly *parvenu* in blood and sentiment.

Next the door, which he opened, sat Mrs. Sandford and Leslie, who naturally descended first, and, while they were being assisted to the ground, Norah said, in her quick, imperious way, to Carl:

"Open the other door, and let me out. It is not necessary to wait on them, is it?"

"Not in the least," he answered ; and, immediately wrenching the door open, he sprang out and extended his hand to her.

As she was about to take it, Tyndale spoke quickly, having deposited Leslie on the round, and turning his back on Mrs. Sandford, who was greeting Max with an enthusiastic ripple of words and laughter.

"Take care, Miss Desmond, there is a great deal of mud on that side. Let me assist you out here."

But Norah had already given her hand to Carl, and, before he finished speaking, she was on the ground, with the slight misadventure of brushing her dress against a muddy wheel, and stepping deep with one kid boot in the soft loam.

"Look!" she said, holding out her foot to Carl. "Is it not a pity?"

"Let me take it off," said he, and, stooping, he drew out an immaculate white-cambric handkerchief for the purpose.

"Don't be absurd, Sir Walter Raleigh," said she, drawing back the foot with a laugh. "Mud is more appropriate to shoes than to handkerchiefs, if it must be on one or the other. It is a small penalty to pay for escaping the necessity of having my hand touched by *him!*" she added, in a lower tone.

After this they passed into the house, where Mrs. Sandford went into a rapture of admiration over the fine old hall, with its carved oaken staircase, its paneled walls, its family portraits, and antlered stag-heads which had gazed serenely down for many a long day since that by-gone time when they had looked their last on the fair greenwood, with its dewy coverts, its tangled depths, and gleams of summer shade and sheen.

They lingered for a little while in the pleasant, old-fashioned drawing-room—so lofty, spacious, and softly toned, that it did not look as if heat could ever invade it. On the green terrace without, deep, cool shadows were lying. It seemed impossible to imagine a scene more suggestive of repose.

"One might almost forget that there was such a thing as time in a place like this!" said Carl, following Norah, who, after a while, walked to the end of the room to look at a statue.

"There seems a sort of dreamy stillness in the very atmosphere. I should call it stagnation, but some people—Mr. Tennyson's lotus-eaters, for example—might like it extremely, I dare say."

"It is more a melancholy than a dreamy stillness," answered she. "One feels that life has long been absent from these rooms. Do you know that I am enough of a barbarian to prefer a new

house to an old one?" added she, suddenly. "An old house always seems to me peopled with ghosts. I am sure that lady, for example"—turning her back on the marble Psyche, and pointing to a faded beauty in the costume of fifty or sixty years before—"comes down and walks the floor at night in her satin and pearls."

"You don't mean that you believe in ghosts?"

"One believes in what one has seen generally. I saw a ghost once."

"Indeed!"—laughing and arching his brows. "Pray when and where was it?"

"Ask in a tone of faith, and perhaps I may tell you."

"But I thought faith was to come afterward"—he began, when at that moment Arthur Tyndale advanced down the room toward them.

"Leslie says that she thinks we had better go to the lake now," he said, addressing Norah, with rather a deprecating look in his violet eyes. "That is—if you are ready."

"I am quite ready," she answered, with careless coldness. Then she turned to Carl. "If you will promise to be quite credulous, I will tell you all about it," she said.

What the "it" was, Tyndale, of course, did not know; but he did know that she wished to show him in this way, as in every other, that his intercourse with her was to be restricted to the narrowest possible limits. Turning, she walked down the room with Middleton, and he had no alternative but to follow at some distance behind them.

They found Leslie, Mrs. Sandford, and Max, waiting on the terrace outside—a servant in attendance laden with fishing-gear. "If we are to go at all, I think we had better go at once," the former said; and so they set forth.

Their way lay across the park, under its green shade, across its fresh, fragrant grass. The earth and air seemed washed clean by the late rain; the former exhaling a sweet, moist odor, the latter clear and bright as crystal, with a buoyancy in it different indeed from the sultry heat of the days that had gone before. The air was full of soft, woodland sounds—a ringing echo of the rejoicing mirth of every bird and insect. The sky was the tenderest sapphire, crossed by a few fleecy clouds, and the distant, violet hills stood out clearly, unrelieved by the faintest drapery of haze.

Before long they came to the lake—a transparent, winding sheet of water, on the farther side of which rose the slender stems of pines, with delicate, spear-like crests, outlined like pencil tracery against the clear, blue heavens. On the side where they stood were many nooks and inlets, shadowed over by drooping trees, and made more beautiful by the broad green leaves and pure white blossoms of the water-lily.

"Is it not pretty?" said Leslie, turning to Norah. "Of course, it is only an artificial sheet of water, but it has been seventy years since it was made—has it not, Arthur?—and so we may fairly suppose that it has forgotten by this time that it is not quite natural."

"Nobody would ever suspect that it was artificial," said Norah. "It is very pretty indeed." But in this as in every thing else, she seemed to avoid saying very much about the beauties of Strafford, thinking, perhaps, that from her lips such praise might sound like regret.

Then each lady's line was arranged by her attendant cavalier, and, having established themselves two-and-two at different points along the shore, they proceeded to fish.

As might reasonably and safely have been predicted, however, the fishing came to very little. Patience and silence are, as a general rule, two absolute requisites for success in this sport, and neither of these virtues is likely to be displayed in eminent degree by a pair of young people, who, being more or less in love, or more or less inclined to flirt with each other, are sitting side by side in a green nook, with limpid water at their feet, a blue sky overhead, and the whole glory of a mid-summer day around. Max, who was the best angler of the party, contrived to catch a fish or two, despite his companion's unceasing chatter; but Norah was the only one of the feminine trio who had any success. Instead of displaying exultation, however, it must be recorded of her that she was sufficiently weak-minded to insist that Carl should throw the gasping trout back into its native element.

"It is mine! I will do as I please with it!" she said, authoritatively, when he demurred. "If you will not throw it back, I can call Albert" (this was the servant) "to do it. I shall never again impale a poor creature upon a hook and draw it out of the water to die."

So the trout was thrown back, to Albert's great disgust, and Miss Desmond pronounced her fishing over for the day. "It is too beautiful to do any thing more than be merely idle!" she said, leaning back against the great brown trunk of a water-oak, and tilting her hat over her brow, low enough to keep the sun out of her eyes, but not low enough to shut out a view of the level expanse of water, the curving shore, and the dark, solemn pines, whence now and then the breeze brought whiffs of that spicy, aromatic odor familiar to the nostrils of all those who have ever lived in a pine-region.

After a while, however, she grew weary of quiescence, and, rising, sauntered away, refusing absolutely to allow Carl to accompany her. "Stay where you are, and catch my fish again, if you can," she said, a little mockingly. "As for me, I am tired of society just now, and I want a little solitude."

"Tired of your society," would have been the true rendition of that sentence, if poor Carl had only known it; but the stars will fall indeed when it begins to enter the remotest conception of a man in love that his society can possibly ever bore the woman with whom he is in love.

So Miss Desmond wandered away into solitude, farther and farther from the group she had left behind, from the sound of Mrs. Sandford's theatrical little scream every time Captain Tyndale drew forth a fish, from Leslie's pleasant, ringing laugh, from Arthur talking to Carl and Carl talking back to Arthur, each out of his own leafy covert—wandered aimlessly on and on, plucking absently at a water-lily which Carl had procured for her at the imminent risk of a plunge-bath—thinking, meanwhile, thoughts neither very sweet nor very bitter, but simply grave, if it were possible to judge by the expression of her face.

After a while she came to a nook so pretty that it involuntarily tempted her to pause. The shore rounded just here into a mimic bay, the green turf sloped softly down to the water's edge, and, under the silvery branches of a willow that bent until it touched the lake, a little skiff was lying, with the oars across it. At this Norah looked, with desire in her eyes; but it had been many a long day since she had handled an oar, and she had a great dislike to trouble, added to a still greater dislike of making herself ridiculous. "Better never do a thing at all than not do it well," was her motto—a motto which she faithfully observed, for she never did attempt to do any thing at all unless she was sure of being able to do it well. Hence, in the present instance, she contented herself with sitting down on the grass and throwing a longing glance at the boat lying so restfully under the willow. She was almost sorry now that she had not allowed Carl to come with her—"except that I am so horribly tired of him," she said, aloud, throwing a tiny pebble into the water with a splash.

"So horribly tired of whom?" asked a voice over her head; and then, as she started and looked up, Max Tyndale added: "I beg pardon, Miss Desmond. I should not have answered your remark, only the temptation was great."

"The temptation to play eavesdropper?" asked she, haughtily. "But, then, people who soliloquize in the open air must expect eavesdroppers, I suppose. It seems to me, Captain Tyndale," she added, in a different tone, "that you are always begging my pardon about something or other."

"You mean, perhaps, that I am always doing something for which I need to beg your pardon?"

"Perhaps that is it. For example, what are you doing here now? I came away to enjoy my *dolce far niente*; and I did not imagine that the whole party would soon be following me."

"Am I the whole party? It has really struck me that I am only one, and an insignificant member of it."

"It is easier to fancy that the whole party are coming than that you have come alone, unless, like myself, you are in search of the twin oreads, silence and solitude."

"I am afraid that you are the only oread whom I can honestly plead guilty of being in search of."

"And, may I ask, why are you in search of me?"

"I answer in the words of Katharine to Petruchio, 'I am sent to bid you come in to dinner ' or rather to luncheon."

"It is a pity to leave out any thing so appropriate as the first part of that sentence. Why are you not honest enough to quote in full, and say, 'Against my will. I am sent to bid you come in to dinner?'"

"Simply because it was not against my will," answered he. "I not only insisted upon coming, but I bore off the palm from Middleton, who was anxious to be sent on the same errand."

"How very tired you must have grown of Mrs. Sandford!" said she; then, as he flushed, she laughed. "Confess that being bored was the secret of your anxiety to come if, indeed, you were anxious."

"Well, yes, I confess that was it," said he, laughing in turn, but emulating her frankness with remarkable ease. "Mrs. Sandford is a very pleasant person, and one who does me the honor of professing to be a friend of mine; but still, a whole morning spent in her society is—is—" Here he paused.

"—Is rather exhausting, I should think," said Miss Desmond. "I found an hour of it a great deal too much for me last night."

"Yet she speaks most enthusiastically of you."

"Does she? That is very good of her, especially since I am unable to return any of the compliments she may have paid me."

"I confess that I like to hear a woman speak pleasantly of other women," said Captain Tyndale. He was leaning back against a tree, and looking meditatively at the charming picture which the beautiful woman before him made. "It shows amiability, at least."

"Do you think so? Knowledge of women is your special *forte*, is it not, Captain Tyndale?"

"Very far from it," answered he. "I am old-fashioned enough to credit women with a great many more virtues than they—than many of them, that is—seem to care to be credited with at present."

"I don't think any woman of sense likes to be set up on a pedestal, with a label of conventional virtues attached," said she. "We are what God has made us—a subtle mixture of good and bad, of sense and folly. But we are nothing if we are not sincere. Now, a woman like Mrs. Sandford, with only honey on her lips, is not sincere."

"You mean, I suppose, that 'who dare not censure, scarce can praise?'"

"I mean that praise which is given indiscriminately is worth nothing—except to show the weakness or falsity of the speaker. You look shocked! See how you men are shocked if you hear a woman speak truth once in a way."

"I cannot think that it is truth, Miss Desmond—I cannot believe that amiability always means weakness or falsity."

"And I never said or implied any thing of the kind. But you are one of the men who will live and die worshiping an ideal, unless, indeed, you have the misfortune to marry it."

"And then?"

"Oh, well, then you will find that gall is occasionally mixed with the honey."

"Shall I?" said he, a little dreamily. It is likely that he was not thinking of Mrs. Sandford, as he passed his hand half absently across the red mark which the straw hat in his hand had left on his forehead. "But there are some women who have no gall in their nature," said he.

"When you find such a woman, you may reasonably hope that a century hence her name will take its place in the calendar of the Church."

"How can you be so incredulous of good in your own sex!" said he, almost sharply.

"I am not incredulous of good, but of perfection. Besides, you should remember that my experience of life has not been favorable to seeing much of the qualities which you laud in my own sex. Few women have honey on their lips for a beautiful Bohemian like myself. Such friends as I have made in my life—and they are few enough, God knows!—have all been men."

"All, Miss Desmond?"

"All—except the nuns of a convent in which I once spent a few months, and acquired all the education and all the religion that I possess."

She spoke half defiantly, as if to say, "See and know the worst of me!" but Max made no reply. He was not at all shocked—for few things are able to shock a man who has seen much of the world—but he thought how different this woman was from any woman whom he could possibly admire or love. Beautiful though she was—beautiful with a glory of flesh and blood rarely equaled—her Bohemian defiance and recklessness condemned her utterly in his eyes. Again he compared her with Leslie—thereby ignoring the different circumstances that had made the different women what they were—and tried to fancy that graceful embodiment of all womanly gentleness denying the good in her own sex, and openly proclaiming the fact that all her friends were men! While he was trying to do this, and failing utterly, Norah's voice roused him—a voice, with that tone of mockery in it, which, of all her tones, was most distasteful to his ear.

"Now that I have thoroughly shocked you, Captain Tyndale, and showed you how entirely I belong to the life in which I was born and reared, I will let you go to luncheon. Don't trouble about me. I will come after a while when I feel like it. Just now, I don't feel like it in the least. I am comfortable and lazy."

"So am I," said he, "and therefore, if you will be good enough to let me stay—"

"Let you stay! But are you not hungry? Men always are hungry."

"I don't think they always are—at least, I am sure that I am not, just at present."

"I see that you are afraid of Mrs. Sandford," said she. "Honey clogs after a time, even on the palates of those who like it. But you may stay on one condition—that you will take me out on the water in that charming little boat under the willow there."

"I will take you with pleasure, if you care to go, but are you not afraid of the sun? Arthur decided not to propose boating until this afternoon."

"The sun can do nothing but tan me a little, and that I am not afraid of. But, if you object to the exertion—"

"I object to the exertion? I'll have the boat out in a minute, and take you round the lake, if you care to go."

## CHAPTER XIV.

"The day so mild  
Is Heaven's own child,  
With Earth and Ocean reconciled;  
    The airs I feel  
    Around me steal  
Are murmuring to the murmuring keel.  
    "Over the rail  
    My hand I trail  
Within the shadow of the sail,  
    A joy intense,  
    The cooling sense  
Glides down my drowsy indolence."

"AH, how delightful!" said Norah. "Could any thing possibly be more pleasant?"

It was the first genuine expression of pleasure which she had uttered at Strafford, and seemed drawn from her involuntarily, as she found herself floating on the still bosom of the lake, with the golden noonday lying all around her, and a breeze, which had just then sprung up, bringing spicy wafts of pine-land fragrance over them.

"It is pleasant," said Max "pleasanter than I thought it would be! If we coast along in the shade, we shall not suffer from heat at all, and we can go to the head of the lake if you like."

"If I like!" repeated she. "If you leave the question of how far we shall go to me, I warn you that I shall be likely to have no mercy on your arms. I can imagine nothing more delightful than the lulling charm of this gliding motion."

"You spoke of *dolce far niente* a little while ago," said he, pulling along with the easy skill of a practised oarsman. "This is the perfection of it—to float dreamily along in a boat is even more suggestive of repose on such a day and under such a sky as this, than to lie on the grass under the shadow of a tree."

"So I think; and yet you did not want to come!"

"Pardon me—I only wanted to warn you that you would be likely to find the sun very warm."

"I am not afraid of the sun. I have lived most of my life in the south of Europe, where people love and enjoy it."

"But where they also understand how and when to keep out of it. For stillness and repose, commend me to a high-noon in Italy or Spain."

"And yet how you see the fishermen and lazzaroni basking in that very high-noon! I have seen it often, and wished that I were one of them."

"What a lucky thing that our wishes are not always gratified, isn't it?"

"I am not sure of that. With regard to my wish, for instance, I envied the lazzaroni, because they are so entirely contented with life, and all that life has given them. I know no other class of people who are half so well satisfied. I have never, to my knowledge, envied a duke or duchess, but I have often envied the beggar curled up in a palace doorway. We Bohemians are next to them in devil-may-care recklessness, and indifference to all save the passing hour; but we lack the sublime philosophy and trust of our poor relation on a Neapolitan door-step."

"Your poor relation may have a sublime trust, but he has also a keen eye to the chance of a penny."

"So have we a keen eye to whatever may advantage us, a keen sense of all the liberty, pleasure, and respect, that flows from money. I know, for instance, exactly how much it would take to live like a *grande dame* in Paris; and I confess I should like as well to try the experiment as our poor relation likes macaroni on a fâte day."

"I should think your life in Paris would not be difficult to compass," said he, looking at the beautiful face before him. "Women, with fewer advantages than yours, have often made brilliant marriages."

"Women, with less beauty and less cleverness, perhaps you mean," answered she, coolly. "Those are trump cards, and sure to win when one's position in life supports them—otherwise they only secure for their possessor attention and admiration little removed from insult. The beauty and wit of a vagrant are of small account in the respectable world, Captain Tyndale. I learned *that* by the time I was fifteen."

"You seem to have learned a great many hard lessons for one so young."

"A street Arab generally learns a little more of life than a mother's darling in his nursery at home."

"And you—?"

"I have been one of the Arabs of civilization ever since I was born. You would laugh if you knew how strange the life in which I find myself here seems to me. Its ease, its luxury, its

comfort, are literally incredible. I find myself expecting all the time some jar of the wheels, some proof of sordid care, of debt and trouble and want of money, behind the scenes."

"What a life you must have lived!"

"And yet it has been a freer and happier one than many you would hold enviable by the side of it. We know how to enjoy ourselves in Bohemia; in the worst weather we know how to keep 'on the windy side of care;' and, when we *do* have any money, we know how to spend it royally!"

"I am aware of that," said he, laughing.

"And, although I have sometimes felt as if I would give any thing to hold *some* definite position in life," said she, trailing Carl's lily slowly through the water, "as if I would like to stand no longer in an attitude of defiance to society, yet I know that I could not endure the bondage and stagnation of ordinary respectable existence—of your ideal woman's existence, for example—for an hour! I should pine as the lion which Girard brought from the desert, pined in his cage, in the Jardin des Plantes."

"Then you mean to live and die a Bohemian?"

"I mean to do nothing save take life as it comes—as I am taking it to-day. Look up at that sky, Captain Tyndale—it is beautiful enough for Italy! And see how the green boughs go across it! Ah, it is something to be alive on such a day as this—just to be alive! One need not wish or ask for any thing more!"

She threw her head back and looked upward, the flickering shadows falling lovingly across the white arch of her throat and the rounded outlines of her form. The attitude was as free from affectation or self-consciousness as that of a child, and yet graceful as that of the most thoroughly-trained actress. She seemed reveling, as she had said, in the simple sensuousness of existence—a nature full of vitality and keenly alive to beauty, thrilling with the full pulse of life, and steeped to the lips in the golden charm of the summer day. Max looked at her critically. After all, he could not wonder that Arthur had loved this woman with a passion greater than any which he had given to Leslie Grahame. She was eminently the kind of woman to fascinate a man of Arthur's stamp, Captain Tyndale decided—a woman with moods like a chameleon, a woman who could be simple as a child one moment, and imperious as a queen the next—yet who might, perhaps, fascinate even while she puzzled, annoyed, and repulsed. "But it would fare ill with any man who tied his heart-strings to her rudder!" he thought, going back in imagination to that "serpent of old Nile" whose infinite variety age could not wither nor custom stale. In truth, even Captain Tyndale's cool judgment began to find itself a little at fault with this "beautiful Bohemian," as she called herself. She had already shown him so many different sides of her character, that he began to wonder which was the real one or if, indeed, there were a real one! As fast as he felt an inclination to like or admire her, she shocked and disconcerted him; as soon as he detected a trace of womanly gentleness, it turned into *hauteur* or mockery. "What the deuce am I to do?" thought he, meditatively.

It may be imagined, perhaps, that there was no very incumbent necessity upon him to do any tiling, as far as Miss Desmond and her peculiarities of manner and character were concerned; but the "martial diplomate," as she called him, thought otherwise. He could not forget that he had solemnly promised to obtain, if possible, some assurance of what she meant to do, and he could not forget, either, that this assurance was as yet entirely unobtained. In the morning Arthur had reminded him of this fact. "You will have an opportunity to see Norah alone to-day, Max," he said. "For Heaven's sake, try and draw something definite from her!" Now, with Mrs. Sandford and Carl Middleton in the background, Max knew perfectly well that the present was the only opportunity for seeing Norah alone, and therefore he was naturally anxious to make the most of it, and open his important negotiation at once. But how to do it? That was the question.

It was a question which dwelt on his mind not a little, as he rowed along in the perfect stillness of the noonday, under the drooping shadow of the trees that lined the shore, past the tiny, curving bays and inlets, and finally around a point which opened to them a different part of the

lake altogether—a part more beautiful than any they had seen before, Norah thought, as she looked at the crystal water stretching away, until it seemed to vanish in the depths of a green, shadowy forest which fringed it at the upper end, such a forest as those who have never seen Southern forest-growth, especially in the vicinity of water, cannot even imagine.

"The tropics must be like this, I imagine!" said she, pointing to the broad-leaved water-plants around, and the indescribable blending of color in the foliage and undergrowth beyond. "How much more beautiful than the park, for we are past the park now, are we not?"

"Entirely past it."

"And does *this*" indicating with a motion of her hand the magnificent verdure before them "does this belong to Arthur Tyndale, also?"

"Every rod of ground around us belongs to him."

"I am sorry!" said she. "Oh, not sorry that he is rich!" she added, quickly, as she met Max's glance. "That is not a matter of the least importance. I only meant that I am sorry there is no breathing-place for me even in those beautiful woods, for I cannot breathe freely on Arthur Tyndale's ground."

"Do you hate him so much, Miss Desmond?"

"Hate him!" She turned her full, brilliant glance on him. "No, Captain Tyndale, I do not 'hate him' in the least."

"Why, then—" he began, but seemed to think better of the question, and paused.

She finished it for him with the impetuosity to which he had by this time become a little accustomed.

"Why, then, do I feel that I cannot breathe in his house or on his lands? Simply because I scorn the man, with a scorn which I cannot express to you, and because I scorn myself not a little for being here to-day, for playing, or seeming to play, a part which degrades me!"

Max saw his opportunity and seized it at once—despite the quick passion that lit up her mobile features at the last words.

"Will you allow me to ask why you do play it, then?" he said.

"Because I choose to do so," she answered, curtly.

After this there was naturally nothing more to be said. Captain Tyndale devoted himself in silence to his oars; Miss Desmond still trailed Carl's lily through the water, and was silent also. They had proceeded some distance, and were floating rather than rowing past a shore along which tangled vines, with starry leaves and brilliant crimson flowers, were running in many trailing loops and graceful festoons, when Norah spoke again abruptly:

"That was very rude that last speech of mine! I might have told you civilly, at least, that I choose to keep my affairs to myself, might I not?"

"I have no right to quarrel with the incivility of your reply, Miss Desmond; my question drew it on myself."

"You always contrive to blame yourself, Captain Tyndale. Are you very amiable or very hypocritical?"

"Neither, I think—I never take blame to myself when I do not honestly believe that I deserve it."

She laughed; and, throwing the lily carelessly away, plunged her white, gleaming hand into the water instead.

"How pleasant!" she said. "Who would not be a naiad, if she could!" Then, abruptly: "But you have taken blame to yourself once or twice when it was *I* who deserved it."

"Was it? I think you must be mistaken. I am not enough of a *preux chevalier* to be ever gallant for the mere sake of gallantry."

"You puzzle me a little," said she, looking at him with inquisitive eyes. "I never met a man exactly like you before—and that is something unusual in my experience. Most men are alike on all general points."

"In what particular have I struck you as unlike other men?" asked he, looking intently at the beautiful face, on which the broad light of noonday fell, showing every delicate tint and perfect curve.

"Well, for one thing," said she, candidly, "most men lose their heads in talking to *me*. You have not done so."

"I prefer to keep my head under all circumstances," said he, coolly. "It is more convenient. Men who lose their heads lose every advantage that skill or chance can give them. I prefer to take all of mine."

"So should *I*, if I were a man!"

"And, although you are a very beautiful woman, Miss Desmond, you are not a woman—"

"Finish your sentence," said she, quietly, as he paused. "Say that I am not a woman whom you admire."

"You credit me with more impertinence and less taste than I deserve," answered he. "Should I have been likely to have remembered your face, as I saw it in Paris two years ago, if I had not admired it? No; if I had finished my sentence, I should have said that you are not a woman whom a wise man would allow to deprive him of his head or of his heart."

"Wise men sometimes do very foolish things," said she, looking at her hand as it lay idly under the water. "They sometimes put their heads and their hearts into the hands of a fool, and that is worse than putting them into the hands of—you may characterize me, if you choose, Captain Tyndale."

"Shall I say, then—of a beautiful woman who is trying to believe that she has no heart?"

"You are impertinent!" said she, suddenly turning her face round, and flashing an eloquent glance of anger upon him.

"I beg your pardon. I see that one is never safe, under any circumstances, in taking a woman at her word."

"You might have called me a Bohemian adventuress, or a fast flirt, and I should not have cared."

"As far as I can venture to judge, however, you are neither of those things."

"But to say that I—I am 'trying to believe' that I have no heart!"

"It would have been wiser not to say it, perhaps."

"What should I do with a heart, if I had it?" asked she, with a low, scornful laugh. "Let another man amuse himself with it as long as he likes, and then throw it away to harden or break as it pleases?"

"Before you could ask such a question, Miss Desmond, you must have forgotten that there are men of honor in the world."

"Men of honor to women of assured position in life, very likely," said she, dryly.

"Men who would hold themselves bound by their plighted word if it were given to one of the lazzaroni of whom you spoke a little while ago," said he, almost sternly.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"We need not discuss the subject. You believe in the general honeyed nature of women—Bohemian women excepted—from your experience. I believe in the general lax ideas of honor in men from my experience. We all look at the world from a one-sided point of view. It is a thing which cannot be helped, I suppose."

"In our cynical moments most of us are apt to look very gloomily on human nature," said he; "but sometimes human nature proves itself better than we expected—more generous, more faithful, more worthy of trust. Miss Desmond, that is a riddle. Will you read it?"

"I never read a riddle in my life, Captain Tyndale."

"Then, in plain words," said he, quickly, "I should like to think that you will prove more generous than any one—than Arthur Tyndale, least of all has a right to expect that you will be!"

"Ah," said she, looking at him with a sudden keen glance, "you have taken up your role of devil's advocate again, have you? By-the-by, this reminds me that, when we were interrupted

yesterday afternoon, you were about to tell me what was your motive for espousing your cousin's cause and giving him the invaluable aid of your diplomatic talent. We are not likely to be interrupted here, so you can tell me now."

"I have no objection to doing so," said he. "My motive for desiring to serve Arthur is partly on account of my friendship for him, but more particularly and principally on account of your sister."

"On account of my sister!"

"Yes," said he, steadily, although he felt with vexation that the keen eyes bent upon him were noting a sudden flush which showed itself through his bronzed skin. "I saw long ago—I mean months ago—that her happiness is wholly bound up in Arthur, and that, if her trust in him is once broken, it—it will be a terrible blow to her."

Captain Tyndale felt that he had fallen into the depths of abject commonplace in this speech; but he would have been a brave man and a fluent man who could have held his thoughts and his tongue under proper control with the lustrous challenge of Norah Desmond's glance bent upon him. Max felt his ideas and his words alike forsaking him when he suddenly remembered that the "terrible blow" which he deprecated for Leslie had already fallen on her.

"So you think that Leslie's happiness is 'bound up' in Mr. Tyndale!" she said, as he paused—an incisive coolness in her voice striking unpleasantly on his ear. "I should have given her credit for being more of a woman of the world, and looking at things from a more worldly and philosophical point of view."

"Then you must pardon me if I say that you understand her very little," said he, bending with sudden energy to his oars.

"I have imagined that her engagement to Mr. Tyndale is much such an engagement as is often made in society—convenience amply consulted on both sides," she added, after a short pause.

"It is impossible, Miss Desmond!" he said, indignantly. "You could not have known your sister for an hour, and done her so much injustice."

"Injustice! Is that injustice? I know so little of your world that you must forgive me. I really thought it was high praise."

"You are mocking both her and me," he said, after a minute. "Since I have brought it on myself, I suppose I have no right to complain; but, if you will allow me to apologize for having opened the subject, I can safely promise never to do so again. My role of advocate is over."

"Is it?" said she, quietly the mocking light vanishing from her eyes, the mocking tone from her voice. "I am glad to hear it, Captain Tyndale, for it is not a role that befits an honest man. As far as Leslie is concerned, however, you are right. She is as different from me as day is from night—so different that, if we lived together for fifty years, we should be no nearer any real sympathy for each other than we are to-day but I see and recognize all the sweetness and strength that make up her character. I see that she is engaged to Arthur Tyndale simply because she loves him; and I, who came here with a heart as hard against her as the nether millstone, have learned already to hesitate in my reprisal on her account."

"Why should your heart have been hard against her?" asked he, with point-blank directness.

"Why is a socialist's heart hard against the rich? Is it not because they have that which he lacks that for which he is starving? So it was with me. I had never envied Leslie the love and wealth which surrounded her—in fact, I had scarcely ever thought of her—but, when she wrote and told me that to *her* had fallen, also, that which had been the one bitter-sweet gift of my life—when she said that the man who had treated *me* in so cruel and cowardly a manner was *her* accepted lover—well, then it would have taken some one more reasonable and more Christian than I, not to desire to make her feel a little of the bitterness which filled my heart."

"And so it was that you came?"

"Yes, so it was that I came—came prepared for any amount of patronage and condescension, but not for one iota of the affection and kindness which met me in her honest eyes."

"And for her sake—for her sake alone, Miss Desmond—can you not spare Arthur Tyndale the exposure which I freely own he deserves?"

"Even for her sake, Captain Tyndale, would you advise me to do so?"

"Why should I not advise you to do so?"

"Simply because you might put yourself in Leslie's place, and see whether you would thank the mistaken kindness which sent you through life holding a lie for truth, dishonor for honor, a coward for a brave man!"

"But you do not look at the matter as I do," said he, earnestly. "Arthur Tyndale is no worse than many other men who go through life safe in the loving esteem of faithful hearts. He has fallen into dishonor more through weakness than intent. But this dishonor does not touch his loyalty to your sister. He loves *her* unquestionably. You think, perhaps"—as her lip curled—"that this is a consideration of little importance. But it is of great importance if we look at the matter as it regards her, and we *are* looking at it simply as it regards her, are we not? Hence we cannot afford to ignore the fact that Arthur's dishonor, as I said before, has not affected his loyalty to her. For the rest, I am sure that you do not need for me to tell you that she loves *him*. Neither can you need for me to tell you what it would be to her to discover the position which he holds to you. You see in all this," said he, breaking off abruptly, "I am taking for granted that you have no feeling of—of the sort that some women would have, left for him."

"I have no idea what sort of feeling some women would have left for him," said she, carelessly, "but *I* have none save contempt. If it were possible to cut away with a sharp knife and at any expense of pain all that part of my life into which he entered, I would do it—simply that I might not include myself in this contempt. Beyond that, I have no feeling of any kind for your cousin, Captain Tyndale."

"You can realize, however, that, to your sister, such contemptuous renunciation of what was once love, might not be so easy. Her pride would hold her aloof from him, but I scarcely think that her scorn would enable her to fling all need of him out of her life as you have done."

"Would it not?" said Norah.

Again she turned a quick, intent glance on the speaker.

"I am inclined to disagree with you," she added, after a minute. "I think that if another man—more worthy, and loving her as well, perhaps better than Arthur Tyndale—came into her life, she would soon learn to love *him*."

"I am presumptuous enough to say that I think you are mistaken. I am sure that Miss Grahame is one of those women who are faithful by a divine instinct of Nature—faithful often to unworthy objects and in their own despite. Therefore it might be better for her to go through life 'holding a lie for truth' than to be overtaken by utter shipwreck at its very beginning."

"Certainly in the former case she would not fare worse than other women have before her," said Norah, cynically. "Was Satan right, after all, I wonder? Is it folly to tell women truth? Would they 'rather live on lies, so they be sweet?' One might think so from the universal practice of men. But, for me"—she turned on him with a sudden, passionate energy for which he was unprepared—"I would rather a thousand-fold be miserable than deceived! Let any fool's paradise into which I have entered be shattered forever, so that the clear light of truth comes in!"

"Still, can you not see that there may be cases—"

"Yes, I can see that there may be cases in which your conventional ideal woman would rather be left to worship her clay idol in ignorance. But, despite your opinion of Leslie, I think there may be better stuff in her than that. She may be brave enough to face the truth, and, if so, Captain Tyndale, on my honor as a Christian woman, she shall have it! The choice shall rest with herself, however, I promise you that; and here is my hand upon it!"

With a sudden, graceful motion, she drew her hand, all wet and gleaming, from the water, and held it out to him. Dripping though it was, the man would have been made of strange material who hesitated to take it; and, as Max bent forward to do so, he thought that the first sweet smile he had ever seen on the lovely lips before him was faintly curving them just then.

"You are more generous than I ventured to hope," he said. "But promise me that in any case you will incline more to mercy than to justice."

"I think you ought to be content with what you have gained, Mr. Devil's Advocate," answered she, with the smile deepening a little. "I cannot make any rash promises, even though the hand on which it would be ratified is rather slippery!"

## CHAPTER XV.

"How many years since she and I  
Walked that old terrace, hand-in-hand!  
Just one star in the rosy sky,  
And silence on the summer land.  
And she? . . .

I think I hear her sing  
That song—the last of all our songs.  
How all comes back! thing after thing,  
The old life o'er me throngs!"

"I DON'T know what anybody else may think," said Mrs. Sandford, "but I call such conduct very fast, indeed!"

The irately virtuous tone of this remark would have suited the chiefest of social Pharisees, instead of a lady famous for willful disregard of all the laws and canons of propriety; but, when we are angry, very few of us are strikingly consistent or logical, and Mrs. Sandford was as angry just then as a pretty woman who is fond of admiration ever becomes in the presence of a man to whom she is not related.

"I don't know exactly what constitutes fast conduct in a *Chasseur d'Afrique*," said Carl, who was lying at full length on the grass by her side, "but I think it is amazingly inconsiderate conduct in your friend Captain Max."

"You may be sure it is not *Captain Tyndale's* fault!" said she, with marked emphasis on that gentleman's name. "He is not so great an admirer of Miss Desmond's that he would be likely to go off *of his own accord* and spend the whole day in her company."

"Whose accord could he have gone of, then, I wonder?" said Carl. "Certainly not on mine, for, as you may remember, I was quite as anxious to go in search of her as he was."

"I did not observe that he was anxious at all."

"Didn't you? You must have been very busy just then counting all the fish you had caught."

"He does not admire Miss Desmond in the least" (returning to that point with a positive and somewhat triumphant air). "He would scarcely acknowledge that she was beautiful when I asked him if he thought so, and, therefore, it is impossible that he is in fault for all this long absence."

"No man with any worldly knowledge, or with tact above a grasshopper, ever tells one woman that another woman is beautiful," said Middleton, placidly; "but, if Tyndale is not in fault for all this long absence, it naturally follows that Miss Desmond must be. Yet I don't think she has any particular fancy for *him*."

"Miss Desmond is the sort of woman who has a fancy for the society of any *man*. It is only that of women which she dislikes."

"I am not sure that you are wrong there," said he, laughing. "She may not fancy the society of *any* man—to alter your emphasis a little—but I think that, as a general rule, she prefers men to women."

"Those Bohemian adventuresses always do," said the pretty widow, provoked, until she scarcely knew what she was saying. "They know that women *can see through them!*"

"And they probably know, also, how much amiability and kind judgment they can expect from women!" said Carl, with a flash, not of laughter, in his eyes, while his brow knitted into its quick frown.

"No woman was ever more disposed for kind judgment than I am," said Mrs. Sandford, quickly—conscious, perhaps, that she had gone a little too far. "I am foolishly, *absurdly* lenient in my opinions, but, when everybody who knows any thing about the family, knows what Miss Desmond's rearing has been, she ought really, out of consideration for herself, to be more careful in her conduct."

"I think I shall go in search of her," said Carl, rising lazily to his feet, and leaving a crushed outline of himself on the grass. "This becomes interesting and mysterious. One, two, three hours since Tyndale disappeared, and no sign of either of them yet. If there were panthers in this wood, one would know what to think; but, as it is, I'll give Miss Desmond your hint, Mrs. Sandford, for which, no doubt, she will be properly grateful, and send Tyndale as soon as I find him."

With this cavalier adieu, he sauntered away, leaving Mrs. Sandford—a desperate being in *écrù* linen and blue ribbons—alone on the margin of the lake. She did not throw herself in, however, but was found, in a picturesque, musing attitude, by Miss Grahame and Mr. Tyndale when they came up a little while after.

"What, all alone?" said Leslie. "Has Carl vanished too?"

"Oh, Mr. Middleton is so bewitched by Miss Desmond, and so inconsolable at her absence, that I really could not keep him any longer on my hands!" answered this ingenuous lady. "I insisted upon his going in search of her, and he left only a minute ago."

"I cannot imagine what has become of Norah and Captain Tyndale," said Miss Grahame, "unless Arthur is right in thinking that they have probably taken the boat and gone to the head of the lake."

"I am sure they have done that," said Arthur. "I noticed a short while ago that the boat has vanished from the place where Max usually leaves it."

"But it was very selfish of them to go off alone," said Mrs. Sandford, in a tone of the most genuine vexation. "I should have liked to see the head of the lake, too!"

"Some accident must have occurred to detain them," said Leslie, "else I am sure Norah would have been back before this."

"I think I hear the sound of oars now," said Tyndale, walking nearer to the shore.

This proved to be the case. The sound of oars and of voices was heard, together with a light laugh, which the listener had cause to know well. The next moment, around a curve of the shore, the two delinquents came into sight, Max pulling so lazily on his oars that it was scarcely wonderful they had not arrived before; Norah, with her lap full of wild-flowers, trailing one long, leafy spray in the water, as she had trailed Carl's hardly-won and lightly-thrown-away lily before it.

"Have you wondered what had become of us?" she asked, as Max ran the boat up to the bank and she stepped ashore, being forced to accept, in doing so, a slight assistance from the hand which to avoid she had soiled her boot in the morning. "It is all my fault. I carried Captain Tyndale off whether he would or no, and we found a fairy-land in those beautiful woods at the head of the lake. See! are not these beautiful?" She held up her flowery spoils. "Does anybody know enough of botany to tell me what they are?"

While Leslie was admiring the flowers, and naming the most familiar varieties, Mrs.

Sandford turned to Captain Tyndale, who, having also stepped ashore, was making his craft fast to a convenient tree.

"Unless I should have been entirely *de trop*, I think you might have been kind enough to come back and invite me to accompany you on your expedition," she said, opening a perfect battery of reproachful glances on him. "I should have liked nothing better than to have gone. I *adore* boating!"

"Do you?" said he, lifting his head after having fastened the boat. "But you adore croquettes and Heidsieck, also, don't you? If you remember, you were all going to luncheon when Miss Desmond and I started on our 'expedition!'"

"And, pray, are you and Miss Desmond so ethereal that you are able to dispense with food altogether? or did you find luncheon as well as flowers at the head of the lake?"

"We found a few well-baked blackberries, the very last of the season."

"You must have left the boat to find *those*!"

"Of course we left the boat. I suppose we spent an hour wandering about in search of the flowers Miss Desmond has."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Sandford. She gave a glance at Norah, as she stood with flushed, lovely face and torn dress—for her encounters with bushes and briars had not been few—farther in the shade. Then she laughed her rippling laugh, which sounded like a piano-forte scale. "It is really refreshing to see a woman who knows so well how to make men of use as Miss Desmond does!" she said. "As for me, I am so afraid of being troublesome that I scarcely ever venture to make such downright demands on their time and patience."

"You should not be so modest," said Max, with a tone of irony in his voice. "Men are nothing if not useful."

"I don't think one gains any thing but boredom by modesty, after all," said she; "so, if you are sure you are not tired, you may take me out on the lake for a little while, please."

"Delighted to do so, I am sure," said he, with one of those ready falsehoods which we all tell so glibly, and solace our consciences by thinking it merely "conventional."

So, complying weakly with a feminine invitation, for the second time that day, Captain Tyndale found himself again afloat, rowing across the lake with tired arms, and listening to his companion's emphasized conversation with a somewhat tired mind.

Carl, meanwhile, made his appearance, having caught a glimpse of the homeward-bound boat as he sauntered along the shore, more bent on escaping Mrs. Sandford than on finding Norah. Although he had carried off matters so lightly with the former, he had in truth been sorely offended by Miss Desmond's desertion and long absence. Hopeless as he was, or might have been, for himself, he was ready to be jealous of anybody in the world on whom the light of her eyes should chance to fall, and he anathematized Max Tyndale almost as warmly as he had before anathematized Arthur, while the long hours which the former was spending at her side wore away. "She can no more help flirting than she can help breathing," he thought. "Of course she is making a fool of him!" Now, although the after-effects of being made a fool of are not pleasant, it is nevertheless (with a woman who thoroughly understands her business) a very delightful amusement at the time, and of this Carl was fully aware. Hence, he indulged in savage thoughts of Captain Tyndale, who was just then, no doubt, enjoying this delight. Hence, also, he looked remarkably grave and a trifle depressed when he came up to where Norah, Leslie, and Arthur, were standing on the bank, watching Max as he pulled the little boat vigorously along in the full blaze of the afternoon sun.

"Captain Tyndale must surely be in training," said Carl. "Does he do this sort of thing often? He has been rowing steadily on a stretch for how many hours?"

"He did very little rowing when I was in the boat," said Norah. "We floated most of the time. You have no idea how pleasant it is if one keeps in the shade."

"Very pleasant, I dare say" (a little grimly). "But is he trying to disgust Mrs. Sandford, that he is keeping so broadly in the sun just now?"

"The shadow is on the other side of the lake at present," said Miss Desmond. "In the morning it was on this side. That makes the difference." Then she turned to Leslie. "Have you had much sport since I left?" she asked. "Have you caught many fish? You know Mr. Middleton promised to eat all of your catching."

"He will not be troubled or gratified, as the case may be," answered Leslie. "I have caught literally nothing. In fact, a more harmless set of people never amused themselves by dropping baits in water, I am sure."

"It has been so profitless," said Tyndale, "that I am afraid you must be tired. Suppose we go to the house? Max and Mrs. Sandford can follow at their leisure."

To the house, therefore, they took their way—along the path which they had followed in the morning—rather subdued in appearance and manner as people are apt to be after a day of "pleasure." Certainly it is only when we have set ourselves deliberately to work to capture enjoyment, that we begin to realize what a very elusive thing it is—almost as elusive as the love which—

"will fly away from an emperor's match  
To dance at a penny wedding."

A very elusive thing it certainly seemed to have proved to Carl, who at last broke silence, with a frank expression of his sentiments:

"I knew the whole thing would be a failure," he said, "but really I was not prepared for such an unmitigated bore as it has been!"

"What a pity Mr. Tyndale could not hear you!" said Norah. "It would serve as a warning to him not to invite such an *exigeant* gentleman on another fishing-party."

"Do you mean to say that you have not been bored?" demanded he, turning suddenly upon her.

"Not particularly," answered she, indifferently. "I did not expect anything very exhilarating in the way of amusement, and, when one's expectations are moderate, one's disappointment cannot be very severe."

"Yet you certainly must have been amused after a fashion," said he, quickly and suspiciously, "else you would not have remained away with Tyndale so long."

"I cannot say that I was specially amused, but it was better than sitting on a rug, holding a line in the water, and waiting for a fish to impale itself on a hook."

"I should think it would have been worse than any or all of those things to have that heavy fellow on your hands for such a length of time."

"My experience among 'heavy fellows' has been so great that I have grown thoroughly accustomed to them. I am afraid I should scarcely know what to do with a brilliant one if I were to meet such a *rara avis*."

"Indeed!" said Carl, flushing, and realizing afresh that in any word-encounter he was always sure to get the worst of Norah's keen tongue.

After this, very little more was said. Miss Desmond evidently meant to keep her own counsel on the score of her long *t à e- à t à e* with Max as, indeed, those who knew her were soon forced to learn that she kept it on all subjects. It may have been that she owed to the peculiar circumstances of her hap-hazard, vagrant life, a knowledge of the great worldly wisdom which lies in habitual reticence. At all events, she possessed it in remarkable degree for one so young.

When they reached the house, its cool rooms looked doubly inviting after their green-wood experience of five or six hours, as they all agreed, sitting at ease in the pleasant drawing-room.

"I am sure I should not have liked to be Maid Marian," said Leslie. "I scarcely think Robin Hood himself could have tempted me."

"How different people are!" said Norah. "Now, that life always had the greatest possible attraction for me. I am sure I should have 'fled to the forest' with Allen-a-Dale without compunction and probably been an unrepentant victim of chronic rheumatism six months afterward."

"What an inducement you give one for becoming an outlaw!" said Carl, with a tone of only half jest in his voice.

But she turned from him impatiently—addressing Arthur for the first time voluntarily:

"I have noticed but one thing lacking in your beautiful grounds," she said. "Have you no flower-garden?"

"There is one," he answered, as if taken by surprise, "but it is old-fashioned and greatly neglected. Flowers soon run into weeds, you know. Such as it is, however, will you"—he paused, hesitated a moment, then went on deprecatingly—"will you come and look at it?"

"No, thanks," she was beginning, when Leslie interposed:

"Yes, Norah, pray go! I want you to see every thing at Strafford, and I think the garden will be beautiful when it is put in order again.—Take her, Arthur—and don't forget to show her what a lovely view there is from the terrace just above."

"Will you come?" said Arthur again, more deprecatingly than before.

He looked at her eagerly, so did Carl. Both were uncertain what she would do. To the surprise of both, she smiled suddenly a queer, puzzling smile and, rising, bent her head in assent. "Yes, I will go," she said.

Five minutes later, Tyndale and herself were walking round the terrace alone. The long shadows of afternoon were stretching across the greensward of the park; the golden sunshine, slanting through the brown trunks of the trees, had a mellow glory in it—that serene, pathetic glory which ever dwells in the close of a summer day. Something of this look seemed to rest on Norah's face and in Norah's eyes when she turned at last to her companion.

"Why did you ask me to come with you?" she said, coldly, but more gently than she had spoken to him yet. "Did I not tell you that we were to be as strangers to each other?"

"And has not even a stranger the right to ask you to walk around a terrace, to look at a flower-garden?" said he, with a thrill of passion in his voice. "Stranger though I may be to you, Norah—exiled forever from your heart, infinitely less to you than these men whom I have hated for being at your side all day—can I not even venture to do that?"

"No," answered she, with quick *hauteur*. "You cannot even venture to do that, and so I would have showed you, without an instant's hesitation, if I had not desired to speak to you—to say a few words which must be uttered in private."

"I am ready to hear them," said he, quietly, "more than ready to hear any thing—the worst thing you can have to say to me! Even the worst is better than not to hear your voice or meet your eyes at all!"

"You will not be likely to intoxicate my brain, or to disarm my judgment, by such commonplace flattery as that, Mr. Tyndale," said she, contemptuously. "Instead, you may injure your cause more than you know by words which are gratuitous insults to me."

"They are truth, Norah, if the truth is an insult," said he, passionately. Then he stopped suddenly and looked into her face. "My God, what a mad fool I have been!" he said. "Do you think I do not realize that *now*? Do you think I can look at you—that I can catch a glimpse of your face, that I can hear a tone of your voice without remembering the old, happy days at Baden? As you stand there now—the terrace, the trees, your attitude—all recall that evening when, coming down from the castle, we paused on one of the terraces of the mountain, and I told you how I had learned to love you. Norah, have you forgotten?"

"I remember many things which you might be pardoned for wishing that I should forget," answered she. "But you must have forgotten very much before you could dare to talk like this to me—Norah Desmond!"

The lone in which she uttered her own name, the manner in which she drew herself up, in all the stateliness of her superb stature, would have befitted a princess rather than a young person of very questionable Bohemian descent; but Arthur Tyndale remembered this haughty pride of old; and he remembered, also, that it would have fared ill with any man who ventured to disregard it. In those days of which he had spoken he had known more than enough of the bitter school in which Norah had gained her armor; and he knew, likewise, how well it had served her in the scenes and associations among which her life had been spent.

"Forgive me!" he said, humbly. "I meant to do any thing sooner than insult or offend you. I am too glad to have even a minute, in which to speak to you alone, to be willing to shorten it by a second. But I cannot—Norah, it is impossible—I *cannot* forget the past."

"Is it necessary for you to forget the past, Mr. Tyndale?" asked she, with the mockery, which had so greatly exasperated him in their first interview, in her eyes, and on her tongue. "When one is able to ignore a thing as completely as you have done—when one is emancipated from all trammels of honor or faith—when one is free from all embarrassment attending a plighted word—why should it be necessary to forget the past?"

"Norah," he said, turning pale, and speaking with lips which fairly quivered, "for God's sake, spare me! I am not fit to cope with you—I never was, for that matter—but now I can only feel that I have ruined all the happiness of my life, and that I—I have no one to blame for it but myself!"

"No one to blame but yourself!" repeated Norah, the merciless. "Do you blame yourself, Mr. Tyndale? I should never have fancied such a thing for a moment. I was sure, on the contrary, that you praised and glorified yourself for having displayed a great deal of worldly acumen. Will you tell me," said she, changing her tone suddenly, "what you mean by all these innuendoes? Why do you blame yourself, and for what? It is too late to think of your honor, I should imagine, and I scarcely suppose that even your vanity could make you fancy that my happiness is in jeopardy."

"Your happiness!" repeated he. "No. I see plainly that your happiness has passed beyond my reach forever. I am selfish, as I have been from the first, Norah—I think only of myself. It is of my happiness that I have made utter shipwreck."

There was a minute's silence—a minute in which he felt that Norah's unflinching eyes were reading him through and through. It chanced that they had paused immediately in front of the library; and, if either of them had noticed, just then, a slight rustle would have been heard in one of the windows behind them—if they had glanced around, they might have seen a shadow which advanced, hesitated, then quickly retreated.

"Again I say that you must tell me explicitly what you mean, Mr. Tyndale," said Norah, imperiously. "More may depend on it than you imagine. Do you wish me to understand that you do not love Leslie, and that you are pleased to imagine again that you do love me?"

"I mean," said he, recklessly, "that I have made a desperate and a terrible mistake—that I do not love Leslie; and that, with all the power of my soul, I do love *you*!"

After this declaration, there was another minute's silence—a minute in which Norah looked at him with a scorn, impossible to describe, kindling on her face.

"And these are the creatures to whom we give our hearts!" she said, at length—the passionate cadence of her voice thrilling like music on the still air. "We let such men as this take our love and make a plaything of it! Have you no honor?" cried she, turning upon him with sudden, scorching passion. "Are you true to nothing—to nobody? Are you more unstable than water, more shifting than sand? Or do you think that you will find in me the weak and contemptible material of the woman who allows herself to serve for amusement *twice*?"

"I only think—" he began, as passionately as herself.

But, at this moment, there came a sudden crash in the window behind, which made them both start and turn—the blood rushing guiltily to their faces, their pulses throbbing with a quick alarm. If Leslie—

But, instead of Leslie, it was Mrs. Sandford, who appeared in the window, holding up her white hands, in playful deprecation, to Arthur.

"O Mr. Tyndale," she cried, "are you there?—can you ever forgive me? I—oh, I am so sorry—so very sorry! In looking over your book-shelves, I have been so miserably unfortunate as to throw down this beautiful pedestal, and break the bust of Dante."

## CHAPTER XVI.

"Oh, hadst thou always better thought of men,  
Thou hadst then acted better. Curst suspicion!  
Unholy, miserable doubt! To him  
Nothing on earth remains unwrenched and firm  
Who has no faith."

AT eleven o'clock at night—the night of the day which had witnessed, among a million or so other social transactions, the excursion of Miss Grahame and her guests to Strafford—Arthur Tyndale was walking from Rosland across the starlit fields in the direction of his own domain. Strongly against his inclination, he had been obliged to return with the party to dinner. Max had unequivocally declined this pleasure; but Max was a free man and could do as he liked, despite Mrs. Sandford's appealing glances. Arthur, on the other hand, was bound in the chains of one of the most oppressive forms of bondage on this earth of ours—that of an "engaged" man. However unexacting his *fiancée* may be—and singularly unexacting Leslie was—society demands certain observances and attentions from the man who has entered into an engagement of marriage, which not seldom weigh with a most irksome weight on his spirit.

"You are coming with us, Arthur, are you not?" Miss Grahame had said when they took their departure; and Arthur—who would have given any thing to answer "No"—stood literally devoid of a decent excuse for doing so. He could not say that the day had been so oppressively wearisome that it had rendered him unfit for any other social duty; still less could he say that, to be in Norah's society without any opportunity of obtaining a word or even a glance from her, had grown intolerable to him. The memory of other days was with him all the time—of days when no one in the world had a right to come between them, when she was his, his only, his forever, as he had thought, according to the poor jargon in which we dress up our brief fever-fits of fancy.

Now all this was changed. She was Carl's, Max's, anybody's, rather than his and he was engaged to Leslie Grahame. These were two facts which stared him relentlessly in the face, as he walked through the quiet, dewy fields, watching the sinking, crescent moon, while he smoked his cigar and pondered various things, profitable and otherwise. Chief among the latter class were many thoughts of Norah Desmond. He could not forget that this woman, who stood as far from him now as one of the planets journeying tranquilly over his head, might, a year before, been his wife at a word. It was in vain that he told himself that things were much better as they were; that Leslie suited him incomparably better than her brilliant Bohemian sister ever could have done—his heart, his fancy, his passion, whatever was most concerned, said "Nay" to it all. He felt in every fibre that he was Norah's slave again—that he had been her slave ever since the moment she first looked at him with her imperious eyes.

Yet this folly—this sudden, reckless revival of a passion which, for eighteen months, had lain dormant and made no sign—did not blind his eyes to the position in which he stood. Norah's cynicism was founded on truth in one respect at least—men are not likely to play fast-and-loose with their plighted word when it is passed to one of their own order, to a woman supported by all that wealth and position can give, however lightly they may hold it where the daughter of a Macaire is concerned. To disregard an engagement with Norah Desmond was one thing, to break

an engagement with Leslie Grahame quite another. Mr. Tyndale fully recognized the distinction which made *this* difference.

So it was that his reflections went much in a circle, like a vicious syllogism. Norah and Leslie, Leslie and Norah; the terrace at Baden and the terrace at Stratford made a strange medley in his mind, as he walked slowly through wood and field; and when, after having smoked half a dozen cigars, he found himself at last at the door of Strafford, he was still unable to perceive any ray of light illuminating the predicament in which he found himself. "I'll see Max, anyhow!" he thought. Max had come to fill very much the position of a moral bolster to Mr. Tyndale's wavering desires and resolutions.

But when he mounted to Max's room—from which a light was streaming out on the summer night—he found it deserted. A fresh breeze was blowing through the open windows, and tossing over a number of loose papers on a table in the centre of the floor, but the deep leatheren chair beside the table, in which Max had evidently been lounging, was empty. Into this chair Arthur flung himself—resting his head against the back, and closing his eyes wearily. He would wait for his cousin, he thought, feeling literally incapable of any further exertion in the way of search, just then. To employ his own phrase, he was "dead beat" by the listless wanderings and various emotions of the day. It had been, from first to last, not only a bore, but something much worse than a bore to him. He had been full of intense weariness and passionate jealousy both at once, combined with the absolute necessity of showing neither; and the overwrought strain consequent upon this state of affairs, had caused his insane outbreak of the afternoon. What harm he had done himself by this outbreak he could not as yet determine. Though he could not drive the memory of Norah's last words or Norah's last looks from his memory, he felt that it was impossible to pause and weigh them in their practical bearing. His head was not cool enough for such work. Max, now, might very readily be capable of it, but the very last thing in the world which Arthur thought of doing, was of telling the story of his folly to Max. He knew his cousin's partisanship for Leslie Grahame, and his cousin's stern ideas of honor, too well to venture upon such a recital.

It may be imagined, perhaps, that the thought of having been overheard by Mrs. Sandford—who had so unexpectedly announced her presence in the library-window—was a trifle the reverse of pleasant, and added another complication to those already thickening around him. But there are some fortunate people in the world who, with regard to all matters not absolutely certain, are able to believe just what they *wish* to believe. Probability is for them tinged entirely with the color of their own needs and desires. Conscience itself readily becomes their advocate. To this class, Arthur Tyndale belonged. It was not convenient to him to introduce another element of annoyance into the troublesome imbroglio in which he found himself—therefore he chose to ignore the probability that Mrs. Sandford had overheard any thing of what passed on the terrace. Her presence in the library was, as she had explained, a mere accident. She had just come in—she could have heard nothing—she had evidently been entirely unaware of the near neighborhood of any one else. All this he believed, because it suited him to believe it. There are many people in the world who are unable to give any better reason for much more important creeds.

So, going over the same tread-mill of exasperating thought, he yawned and waited, and waited and yawned, half an hour for Max. But, even at the end of half an hour, Max had not appeared.

"What the deuce keeps the fellow?" Arthur thought, impatiently.

Just then a fresher breeze than any which had gone before swept into the room, waving back the curtains, making the flame of the lamp flicker, and scattering broadcast over the floor the already fluttering papers on the table.

"He'll find his things in fine confusion when he does come!" thought the visitor, lazily.

But it did not occur to him to remedy this confusion by recapturing any of the odds and ends which were wafted past him. On the contrary, he watched them with indolent interest as they were blown to and fro into the nooks and corners—some into the fireplace, some under the bed—

until, glancing back to the table, his eye suddenly lighted upon a letter which lay there idly fluttering as if uncertain whether or not to follow its companions.

As his glance fell on it, he started violently. His complexion flushed, and then paled again; he caught his breath audibly. Blotted and blurred though it was, he recognized in an instant Norah Desmond's writing.

For a minute amazement held him literally motionless. As he sat, gazing stupidly at the familiar characters—for to mistake that bold, black chirography for the writing of any other woman would have been as impossible as to mistake Norah herself for a fashionable nonentity from a boarding-school—a dozen wild thoughts and conjectures rushed into his mind. What was the meaning of it? How did such a letter come to be here? Had it been addressed to Max? Were they either, or both of them, playing *him* (Tyndale) false? Was it a flirtation? Was it a negotiation? His brain felt in a whirl. One thing only was certain: whatever it was, it concerned him vitally, and he must know what it meant. There was no time for scruples or wire-drawn notions of honor when he was being deceived and tricked like this! Had not Max, that very morning, assured him that his intercourse with Norah had been entirely unsatisfactory, as well as very slight; and now, here on Max's table, lay a letter which in itself went far to prove such a statement utterly untrue!

"I could not have believed it of him!" Arthur thought, aghast at the gulf of perfidy which yawned before him. His indignation amounted, indeed, to a sense of absolute outrage—a curious fact, which those will readily credit who have observed what a different standard in love, friendship, faith, or general morality, we have for our friends and for ourselves. We gracefully stretch the truth to meet the pressure of any necessity which may arise; we govern our conduct by the strictest rule of expediency; we allow ourselves the widest latitude in every possible respect, and demand that no evil shall be thought—but, if we have the slightest reason to suspect that others are doing unto us as we have done unto them, disgust and misanthropy are very sure to follow. "This is human nature!" we cry, when we detect in one falsehood the agreeable friend to whom we have probably told a dozen. "This is affection, this is friendship! Oh, who would put faith in either?" So it was with Tyndale. He had felt toward Max as toward a brother; he had trusted Max with every thing; and now for Max to deceive him on such a vital point as this!

But he must read the letter. He must know how far he had been deceived, how far betrayed. No doubt it contained some definite assurance of what Norah meant to do. It was imperative that he should gain this assurance at any cost. He repeated again that it was no time for scruples or hesitation. He was being deceived, and in self-defense he must know in what manner and in what degree.

So, nerving himself to an act from which every instinct even of conventional honor shrank, he at last extended his hand and took up the letter—a letter which seemed destined to be the plaything alike of chance and of the winds of heaven and opened it. The first line told him that it was not addressed to Max. Before he had time to read a second, he heard Max's quick, ringing step in the hall below.

It was the work of an instant to fold the sheet of paper and slip it into the breast-pocket of his coat. There was no time for thought or deliberation. Impulse said, "It is as much yours as his—take it!" and he followed the dictate of impulse. Before Captain Tyndale had mounted the stairs and reached the door, he had thrown himself back, and was shading his eyes from the light, as if half asleep.

"What! *you* here?" said the former, in a tone of surprise, as he entered. "When did you get back from Rosland?"

"At least half an hour ago," answered Arthur, starting as if abruptly roused. "I have been waiting for you until I had almost given you up. Where the deuce have you been all this time?"

"Taking a turn in the park to cool my head," answered Max. "I suppose it is our unusual gayety which has upset it; but I found myself amazingly warm and restless in the house."

"It is warm again; but I should think you would have rowed off all inclination to restlessness to-day."

"I did very little rowing, except when I took Mrs. Sandford out; then I was anxious to bring her back as soon as possible."

"You did bring her back very quickly," said Arthur, in rather an injured tone. "It could not have been an hour after I left her on the lake when, to my surprise, she was smashing Dante in the library."

"Yes, I made short work of it," said the other, complacently. "Rather shorter work than she took to be civil, I fancy; for, while I was fastening the boat, she started off to the house by herself, and, since I was not particularly anxious to overtake her, we did not meet again till after the Dante calamity. I suppose when she came in she thought she would do a little exploring on her own account."

"Confound her!" said Arthur, with the most sincere emphasis. Then conscious that he was verging on dangerous ground he went on hurriedly, lest this subject might lead to some inquiry with regard to Norah and himself: "You see I have been taking life easily while I waited for you," he said, "though you needn't think it is I who have been playing the mischief with your papers. The wind served you that trick, and I was too lazy to set things to rights."

"It is not a matter of any importance," said Max, casting a careless glance at his scattered effects. "You have returned soon," he added, leaning back in his chair, and covering a yawn by pulling his long mustache.

"Soon, do you call it? It can't be less than twelve o'clock."

"And isn't that soon for a summer night, with stars, and bright eyes, and all that sort of thing to keep you awake?"

"The bright eyes were looking rather sleepy when I left Rosland. I don't think we can flatter ourselves that our fishing-party was very much of a success, Max."

"I never flattered myself for a moment that it would be, my dear fellow," answered Max, cheerfully.

"And yet," said Arthur, quickly, "it ought to have been a success in one respect at least. You certainly had a sufficient opportunity to-day for finding out something about Norah's intentions."

"To possess an opportunity and to use it are two very different things. I am sure you are aware of that."

"You mean, then, that you did not discover any thing?"

"I mean that my attempt to do so was rewarded with very little success. Miss Desmond was as reticent as ever, and I was unable to extract any thing at all definite from her."

"That was unfortunate!" said Arthur. The other did not notice the sudden jarring tone in his voice, nor the suspicious look in his eyes. "You know nothing, then, of what her intentions are?" he added, after a minute, endeavoring with only tolerable success to keep all significance out of the inquiry.

"Nothing," answered Max, slowly, "except—" He paused just there and hesitated.

"If your exception does not rest under the seal of confidence, pray don't hesitate on my account," said Arthur. "I can credit Miss Desmond with any degree of resentful feeling and resentful determination to avenge her wrongs."

"You will credit her with something, then, of which I have seen no sign," answered Max, glancing with some surprise at him. "I was about to say—though I beg you to understand that I have received no pledge to such an effect—that I think it likely Miss Desmond may be more generous than you anticipate."

"Generous!" a flush came over the handsome, blond face. "That is an indefinite expression at best. What does it stand for? That she will bind herself to say nothing of the past, and that she will deliver up the letters?"

"No. She binds herself to nothing. You must be as well aware as I am that you are in no position to demand that she should do so."

"The upshot of the matter then is that *she* is to be bound to nothing, and that *I* am to remain entirely at her mercy?"

"I am afraid it is not much more than that," said Captain Tyndale, gravely.

"By Heaven, I will not endure it!" said the other, vehemently. "Max, do you mean to tell me that this is all that you have been able to obtain from her?"

"It is all," answered Max, a little coldly. "But, unless you deliberately go to work to injure your own cause, I do not think that you have very much to fear. She is a proud woman, and a generous woman, this Norah Desmond."

"Do you imagine that you know her better than I do?" asked Arthur, sneeringly. "It is true you spent three hours alone in her society to-day; but the character that Norah Desmond shows you when she means to make a fool of you, and the character she shows you after she has made a fool of you, are two very different things."

"Miss Desmond is not likely to waste her ammunition on me," was the dry response. "You may set your mind at rest on that point. As for the three hours which I spent in her society, they were chiefly spent in your service. As far as I was concerned, I should have preferred a cigar under a pine-tree."

"And yet you accomplished nothing?"

"If you call it nothing to have gained a moral certainty that she will give you no trouble; that you may marry Miss Grahame to-morrow without any fear of what she may do or say."

Arthur winced a little at this assurance. Max would have been still more surprised if he could have seen how very little inclination he felt just then to marry Leslie Grahame, with all her sweetness and all her grace, on the next day, or any other day, for that matter.

"Moral certainties don't count for much," he said, after a minute. "I'd rather have one *proof* that she means it."

"I am sorry to say I have no proof to offer. An ambassador's word should be worth something, however, shouldn't it? I have no reason for deceiving you."

"For deceiving me—no! But you may be mistaken."

"True enough. I advance no claim to infallibility—especially with regard to women."

"Still, you think that she means to let the matter rest?"

"I think so, undoubtedly," answered Max, impatiently. He did not understand the drift of these reiterated questions. It was growing late, he was growing tired, and when he felt like yawning again he did so, without any pretense of pulling his mustache.

Arthur took the hint, and rose.

"I see you feel as thoroughly used up as I do," said he; "therefore I'll leave you to turn in. In fact, I owe you an apology for having kept you up so long. But this cursed business dwells on my mind! I don't believe there ever was a man in such a position before! You've done your best for me, however, Max—I see that plainly—and shall not forget it. I am more grateful than you can tell—especially for your assurance—but, if I fail to give exactly your degree of credit to it, it is because I have the advantage of knowing Norah Desmond better than you do."

"I make no pretensions whatever to knowing Miss Desmond very well," Max answered. And so they parted.

When Arthur went to his own room, his first act was to lock the door—although the danger of interruption was infinitesimally small—his second, to take the letter from his pocket and read it eagerly through, from beginning to end. As he did so, his face would have been a study for any observer of human nature and human physiognomy—of whom, however, there was unfortunately none at hand. The color came and went in vivid alternations of red and white; his lips quivered, and now and then he gnawed the under one nervously. All these were significant signs with him. Once he caught his breath with the quick gasp of a man to whom a startling surprise has come. This was when he found that Norah had learned in what manner he had endeavored to deter Leslie from making any attempt to know her. "She'll never forgive *that!*" he muttered. "It's certain to be a duel to the death now!"

Then he went on, his eye traveling down line after line of the paragraph in which she summed up the various items of her debt against him. Even the written words seemed instinct with the passion which had dictated them. He seemed to hear her voice, to meet her eyes, in every sentence. And, when he reached the climax, in which her fiery energy spent itself—when he read the significant words, dashed out broad and black upon the white paper, in which she declared that, after having added up the debt, she felt constrained to ask what reprisal could ever equal it, his eyes remained fastened on the page for a full minute, as if fascinated.

Then suddenly he flung the letter on the table, by which he had been standing, and, turning away, walked across the room. He felt stunned—as if he had been thrown down suddenly by an unexpected hand. Such vindictive passion, such scornful renunciation, was worse than he had expected—worse even than he had feared—but, what surprised him even more than the spirit here displayed, than all of Norah's anger, or Norah's resentment, was the apparently causeless duplicity of Max. With this letter in his possession, he had not hesitated to say that he had a "moral certainty" of Miss Desmond's intention to ignore the past! With the assertion before his eyes that there was no reprisal great enough to repay her debt, he had talked of her generosity, and given hopes—nay, positive assurances—that she had relinquished all idea of using the power which rested in her hands !

"What a lesson against trusting *anybody!*" Tyndale thought, coming back to the table, and looking at the letter, which lay before him. "No doubt she has turned his head, and won him completely over to her side. I might have expected that. I might have known that would be her first move. And yet Max—I did not think there was the woman in the world who could have made Max act like this! But treachery is a thing which must be expected from everybody who is not tied fast by interest to one's cause," he went on, after a minute's pause. "Good Heavens! how wise I was to take this letter!—how entirely, hereafter, I must rely on myself alone! She had plainly determined to throw me off my guard by insinuating such vague assurances as I received to-night, and then to fire the whole thing upon me when I am least expecting it. Well"—folding up the letter with a defiant air, and placing it in his pocket-book—"we shall see! The battle is opened in earnest now, and it will go hard with me if I cannot even yet outwit this shrewd schemer and her new ally!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

"A lie which is all a lie may be met and fought  
with outright,  
But a lie which is part of a truth is a harder mat-  
ter to fight."

THE morning after the fishing-party at Strafford, Captain Tyndale walked over to Rosland. It was such a rare thing for him to make his appearance so early in the day—the morning being usually esteemed sacred to Arthur—that Mrs. Middleton could not restrain an involuntary expression of surprise when he was shown into the drawing-room, where she chanced to be sitting alone.

"I hope I do not intrude upon you at a barbarous hour," he said, apologetically, as he crossed the floor to her favorite alcove, where, with a desk open, she was inditing a letter, with a gold pen, on the palest sea-green paper. "I came over to inquire how the ladies are after their fatigue of yesterday. Better, I hope, than Arthur, who really seems considerably the worse for his dissipation, this morning."

"Indeed! I am very sorry to hear it," said Mrs. Middleton, in the highly-sympathetic tone in which people usually say such things. "But I thought the excursion a very imprudent one for

everybody concerned. The sun this time of year is exceedingly injurious, and then the dampness—but I am glad to say that nobody seems the worse for it here. They were fatigued last night, but this morning they are all much as usual. I hope Mr. Tyndale's indisposition is not serious?"

"Oh, not at all. He complains of a headache, and of having been a little feverish last night. It is nothing much, I fancy, but I recommended him to keep out of the sun."

"Yes, that is the great point," said Mrs. Middleton, earnestly—everybody has a hobby, and her hobby was, that an ounce of prevention is worth many pounds of cure, with regard to sickness. "People talk of the night air being unwholesome on account of malaria, but I always think that whoever is careful to keep out of the sun is sure to do very well. I sleep with my windows open every night, but I never go out in the sun, and I have not had an attack of fever in fifteen years. If you don't take care, Captain Tyndale, you will be ill," she went on, as if moved by a sudden impulse to utter a word of seasonable warning. "You are not used to our climate, and I think the manner in which Mr. Tyndale and yourself walk over here in the broiling sun, without even an umbrella—"

"But you forget, madame," said Max, laughing—he showed his French breeding in always saying "madame," instead of our curt English "madam"—"that a soldier never carries an umbrella. He would rather a thousand times endure death by a *coup de soleil* than be guilty of anything so opposed to the spirit of military discipline. I flatter myself I know something about your climate. If it means to kill me, it ought to have done so while I was marching some years ago in your army. It will not have such another opportunity soon."

"Things never come when we are expecting them," said Mrs. Middleton, shaking her head.

And, as if to point this oracular remark, a vision arrayed in purple and white—the first below, the latter above, according to the present fashion of piebald costume—whom they were neither of them expecting, appeared just then in the open door.

"O Captain Tyndale!" cried Mrs. Sandford, with a start, "is it possible this is *you*? I had no idea that you were here!"—Robert had only informed her of the fact five minutes before—"I came down-stairs in search of a book. I found" (appealing with infantine blue eyes to Mrs. Middleton) "that I really could not force myself to write my letters. Why can we not telegraph to our friends?" (this to Max). "If we say 'I am well—how are you?' it would be all that is necessary."

"Not quite all, I am afraid," answered he, advancing and taking the hand she offered him with bewitching frankness. "If I were fortunate enough to receive one of your telegrams, I could scarcely content myself with an equally terse reply. I should be constrained to add that I kissed your hands, at least."

"But what would be the sense of doing by telegraph what you never did in fact?" asked she, with admirable *naiveté*.

"Then, in view of future telegraphing contingencies, we had better make it fact at once," said he, raising the hand—a very pretty one, which he still held—to his lips.

Mrs. Sandford did what a foolish woman does on all possible occasions—she laughed; Mrs. Middleton looked as if she was not exactly certain what she thought of such conduct; but Max was so thoroughly at his ease, and so evidently meant his act of gallantry to be regarded in the light of something entirely conventional and free from tender significance, that after a moment she laughed, too.

"Captain Tyndale is initiating you into foreign modes of salutation," she said to Mrs. Sandford.

"What an original you are!" said that lady, surveying Captain Tyndale with a glance of manifest approval. "A thing that most men do in a corner, and look foolish and sentimental over, *you* do in broad daylight and before anybody, with the utmost *sang-froid*."

"It is because we regard the matter from different points of view," said he. "One kisses a lady's hand in France as one shakes it here."

"I confess that this universal habit of shaking hands strikes me very unpleasantly," said Mrs. Middleton. "It proves more conclusively than any thing else the free-and-easy tone which has come over society. The idea of a young lady and a young gentleman greeting each other like a pair of school-boys! In my day people knew how to bow—a thing which they seem to have entirely forgotten now and a lady never shook hands with any but her most intimate acquaintances."

"I am heartily glad that was not my day!" said Mrs. Sandford, enthroning herself on a sofa, and looking up with blue-china eyes at Max. "Fancy living like a set of pokers! I know how to bow, too—in the lancers—but I would rather shake hands any day!"

"So should I," said he, sitting down beside her—as she invited him to do by drawing her drapery aside—"provided I might choose the hands to shake."

"But under any circumstances you would rather kiss them, I suppose."

"Infinitely rather, if they are like yours."

"What a flatterer you are!" cried she, fluttering her fan with delight.

"A flatterer because I have eyes to see that your hands are beautiful? You have eyes yourself, and you can't possibly think that."

In this key the conversation proceeded for ten minutes. Mrs. Middleton went back to her letter philosophically. She had seen enough of modern society to be little surprised by any thing which could be said or done by the most advanced thinkers. As for Max, let that man who has never yielded to the demands for admiration and the invitation to folly held out by a pretty, vain woman, throw the first stone at him. Partly to please his companion, partly to amuse himself, he went on heaping Pelion upon Ossa in the way of compliments, until at last having exhausted his invention it occurred to him to ask where Miss Grahame and Miss Desmond were.

"Leslie drove, after breakfast, to Wexford, to do some shopping," Mrs. Sandford answered, "and Miss Desmond went with her. I really could not think of going! It is too horribly warm!"

"Mr. Carl Middleton went with them, I suppose?"

"No" (with a quick glance to see why he had asked the question). "I have no doubt he would have liked to do so—for it is really quite absurd to see how he is infatuated with Miss Desmond—but his uncle insisted on his going with him to pay a visit to some relation in the neighborhood. What a bore relations are, are they not?"

"Sometimes," answered Max, absently. He looked down on the hideous figures that covered a Japanese fan in his hand. He was thinking that he was glad Norah and Leslie were for once alone. It would give them an opportunity to know each other better; it would give the former, in especial, an occasion to test her sister's feelings with regard to Arthur Tyndale, to judge whether or not he had been right in the opinion which he had expressed, and the course he had urged.

Mrs. Sandford caught the preoccupied tone in his voice, and immediately set it down to the fact that he had just heard of Miss Desmond's absence. Had he, then, come to see her? Instinctively the lady's mind went back to that three hours' absence on the lake yesterday—the absence which had been no more satisfactorily explained by Max than by Norah. Now, it may be said, once for all, that the pretty widow had no *tendresse*, likely to lead to tragedy or despair, for Captain Tyndale; but she was a woman insatiably fond of admiration, a woman who grasped at all opportunities for obtaining it, and relinquished none. In Alton society Max had been something of a lion; in Alton society, also, he had been credited to her, if not exactly as a serious conquest, still as one of the admirers whom she always liked to keep fluttering around her—men whom she did not wish or intend to marry, but with whom it was very good pastime to flirt. She had found it such very good pastime to flirt with a French chasseur—albeit the advances were mostly on her own side—that she had come down to Rosland simply to pursue that amusement,

and, if possible, to "break the poor man's heart" in the course of a few idle, summer weeks. It was a disappointment, therefore, that the poor man evinced very little desire to have his heart broken, even in the most scientific manner. This she saw sufficiently soon, and with sufficient plainness; but it is not in feminine nature—even of the most dove-like kind—to relinquish a possible, probable, or positive admirer without a struggle. Mrs. Sandford perceived, or thought she perceived, that Max had serious intentions of deserting her standard for that of the beautiful Bohemian, who had already secured the only *other* eligible admirer in the field, so she made up her mind to show him at once what kind of a game this beautiful Bohemian was playing.

Max, still absorbed in the contemplation of his fan, and still thinking of what might be going on at that moment in Miss Grahame's phaeton, was a little surprised when a golden head—a head indebted to the chemist rather than to Nature for its gold—was bent toward him, and a sweet voice said, in a mysterious whisper:

"Make an excuse, please, for our going out. I have something very important which I must ask your advice about." Then aloud, extending two wrists, slender and white enough to match the hands already complimented: "See how unlucky I have been! I lost one of my gold bands last night in the shrubbery, and no one has been able to find it yet. I am afraid no one *will* find it, though I have offered fabulous rewards to all the servants of the establishment. You don't know how I should dislike to lose one of these bands. They were poor Mr. Sandford's last present to me, and therefore I wear them *all the time*."

Max thought that if he had any intention of succeeding poor Mr. Sandford, he should hope devoutly that the band might remain lost, and its fellow speedily follow it; but, since he had not the least aspiration that way, he cheerfully proposed—what its disconsolate owner plainly desired—that they should go in search of it.

"I always have wonderful luck," he said. "I don't think I ever looked for any thing that I did not find it; I am sure that I never laid a wager that I did not win it, nor sat down to a gaming-table without rising successful."

"Oh, you are *just* the person to find my bracelet then!" cried she, clapping her hands in an artless fashion. "Let us go at once! I shall not mind the sun at all, if you will only wait until I get my hat and parasol."

As Max acceded to this moderate request, she ran from the room in a tumult of enthusiasm which would have done credit to the affectation of sixteen.

"How very excitable Mrs. Sandford is!" said Mrs. Middleton, arching her brows in a manner more significant than many words, as she looked up from the letter she had finished and was folding.

"Very excitable indeed!" answered Max, dryly. Then he laughed, and added: "It is constitutional with some people, I suppose."

The lady with whom excitement was constitutional met him presently in the hall, arrayed in a hat which seemed fashioned for the especial purpose of affording no shade whatever to the face, and armed with a club-handled parasol, provided with fringe enough to leave a little on the branches of every tree and shrub in the grounds, and still have some to spare.

Leaving the house, they took their way directly to the shrubbery, where she proposed to show him exactly the spot at which the bracelet had been lost.

"If you know exactly the spot, we may expect to find it lying on the ground," he said.

"Oh, I fear I am not so exact as that," answered she, shaking her head. "I looked for it, and Mr. Middleton looked for it, and my maid has spent the morning doing little else, so I fear even your luck will scarcely be equal to finding it. I should not have brought you out into the sun simply on that account," she added, "but you know I told you that I wanted to ask your advice about something very important."

"I remember, and I am all attention."

"Let us sit down here, then," pointing to a garden-seat in a sufficiently shaded position "I never can talk about any thing of particular interest when I am walking."

Max resigned himself to the situation with as much grace as most men manage to display in similar circumstances. He brushed off the seat with his handkerchief, and they sat down; Mrs. Sandford arranged herself in a picturesque attitude, unfurled her fan, and lifted her eyes to his face.

"If you could only know what I feel!" she began, with a deprecation calculated to disarm any thing like harsh judgment or criticism.

"Is it absolutely necessary that I should know?" asked Max. He felt inclined to laugh, only he knew that such an offense would never be forgiven. There are some natures to whom ridicule is the unpardonable sin. Already Mrs. Sandford looked at him a little suspiciously. The tone of his question did not please her.

"It is not *necessary*," she answered, with a serious gravity, calculated to check all levity—her eyes so wide open that he began to amuse himself with a speculation as to whether they could possibly expand any wider—"But if you could know you would understand the great reluctance I feel to saying any thing even to you; yet I am so uncertain about what I ought to do, and I am so anxious to do what is right—"

("What on earth does the woman mean?" thought Max. "Is she going to consult me about her will or her marriage?")

"It was so *purely* accidental," pursued she, dropping her eyes to her fan. "I had so little idea—not the least in the world, in fact—of any thing of the kind when I went into the library, or no *earthly* consideration would have induced me to go!"

"Can it be the Dante she is talking about?" thought Max, becoming more thoroughly puzzled every minute. Then aloud: "Really, Mrs. Sandford, I fear you will think me very stupid, but I have not as yet grasped your meaning at all. What was it that you had not the least idea of when you entered the library?"

"That Mr. Tyndale and Miss Desmond were on the terrace outside," answered she, lifting her eyes again, and looking directly at him.

And, whether it was on account of the glance, or of the tone, or whether it was the significance of the words themselves, it is at least certain that Captain Tyndale started with a quick, nervous motion, foreign to his usual manner. Arthur and Miss Desmond on the terrace outside! What had this foolish, fluttering widow overheard?

"Well," he said, trying to speak lightly, and not achieving a very striking success, "there was nothing remarkable in that fact, was there? Mr. Tyndale and Miss Desmond had certainly a right to be on the terrace, had they not?"

"There was something very remarkable, I think," answered she, with marked emphasis. "You would have thought so, too, if you had overheard the declaration which I—in the most accidental manner in the world—overheard Mr. Tyndale make before I had been in the library five minutes."

"A declaration!" repeated Max. He put up his hand to his mustache, which was a very real and present help to him in times of embarrassment. "There are a great many different kinds of declarations," he added, after a minute a very lame, and certainly not a very brilliantly diplomatic conclusion.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Sandford, in a tone of petulant satire, "I am perfectly well aware of that. There are declarations of war and declarations of peace, and declarations of love. Mr. Tyndale's declaration, as it chanced, belonged to the latter class."

"To declarations of love!" repeated Max, starting again. "You pardon me, but you must be mistaken! It is impossible!"

"Unfortunately, it is so!" said she, emphatically. "Never, in all my life, have I heard a declaration made more plainly. He said, as clearly as possible, that he had made a great and terrible mistake, that he did not love Leslie, and that he did love Miss Desmond passionately. That was his expression—*passionately!*"

"Indeed!" said Max. He was so taken by storm, as it were, that for a minute he forgot that he had any part to play, or any secret to guard. His bronzed skin changed color quickly, and the expanding flush of his eye fairly startled her. "Are you in earnest?" he asked, after a minute, and his voice seemed to lower and quiet strangely. "Did you hear Arthur say that?"

"Yes, I heard him say that—exactly that!" answered she, gratified, according to a curious instinct of human nature, at the sensation she had caused. "But, indeed"—mindful of the special object she had in view—"I do not think one ought to blame Mr. Tyndale very much. You men are so foolish!—you will say *any thing* when a certain kind of woman leads you on! Now, although I did not overhear very much"—she did not add that this was not her fault or her merit—"I heard enough to tell me that Miss Desmond *had* led him on."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Max. He looked at her keenly. Much as he distrusted Norah, he just then distrusted this fair, impulsive, silvery-tongued being still more. "Did Miss Desmond exhibit no indignation at such a declaration from a man who is engaged to her sister?" be added, after a moment.

Still wider opened the blue eyes, and the carefully-darkened eyebrows arched themselves.

"Indignation! I do not think Miss Desmond dreamed of such a thing, I am sure she did not show it. I did not hear much more than Mr. Tyndale's declaration, however, for just then I unfortunately threw down the *Dante*, and that ended the love-scene."

"The love-scene!" repeated Max, sternly, and his brows knit themselves into a quick frown. "Do you mean that you can apply such a term as that to any thing which took place?"

"I scarcely know what other term it would be possible to apply. Romeo was not more passionate than Mr. Tyndale, though Miss Desmond seemed less demonstrative, and struck me rather in the light of a person who was playing a cool, steady game of some kind."

"So she is!" he muttered.

Those last words went further toward removing his doubts of the story than any thing else had done. They at least were true. Norah *was* playing a cool, steady game, of which not even he could flatter himself that he saw the end. He could fancy just how she had listened to Arthur's madness—the madness which had put everything which he most wished to keep secret into the hands of a "prying eavesdropper," as Captain Tyndale did not hesitate to call his fair companion in the sacred recesses of his thoughts.

"It is very evident that Miss Desmond is one of those women who cannot live without the admiration and adulation of every man they meet," said Mrs. Sandford, after a while, in a virtuous tone. "But it is very strange and very dreadful—something I cannot understand—that she should desire to obtain the affections and attentions of the man to whom her sister is engaged!"

"Such wavering affections are worth very little!" said Max, bitterly.

"But, of course, Leslie would not feel that way," answered she, eagerly. "And do you know it is about *that* I wanted to consult you—shall I tell Leslie? Of course, it would be a very painful thing to do; but still, if it were right—"

"Good Heavens, no!" cried he, fairly aghast. "It would be a terrible blow to come upon her without any preparation. Let me beg you most earnestly not to think of such a thing!"

"I will not—indeed I will not!" said she, hastily. "I determined when I was considering the matter last night—I really could not sleep on account of it—that I would ask you what to do, and take your advice. I promise you that I will not say a word to Leslie."

"Thank you," said he, cordially. Then, after a second's pause, he added: "I agree with you that it is hard for any one like Miss Grahame to be deceived in this manner—a manner which I cannot trust myself to characterize either as regards her lover or her sister but our first duty is to think of *her*, and I—if you will allow me, I should like to examine this matter further before I decide to let her hear the truth."

"Oh! I shall be so glad if you *will* take all responsibility off my hands," cried she, eagerly. "It was what I hoped you would do! I know how much you admire Leslie; and then you are such a friend of Mr. Tyndale's that I am sure you will endeavor to show him what Miss Desmond's true

character must be. I confess I shudder when I think of *her*"—the shudder came in play in the most striking and artistic manner—"her conduct shows such an utter want of the commonest sentiments of honor. But, then, what else was to be expected from her rearing? Oh, what a pity that Leslie should ever, ever have brought her here!"

If Captain Tyndale did not echo these sentiments entirely, he at least agreed with them in a measure. Norah had most gratuitously played him false, he thought. With her assumption of frankness, her outspoken scorn and contempt for Arthur Tyndale, she had made him believe in her thoroughly; and all the time she was ready to listen to passionate protestations of devotion from the man she affected to despise, the man who was engaged to her sister! It may be said for Max that he would not have been likely to give implicit credence to Mrs. Sandford's narrative, if other proofs had not confirmed it. But something in the expression of Arthur's face and Arthur's tone when he had spoken the night before of her presence in the library—that presence which the broken bust of Dante attested—came back to him like a ray of light. This was what it meant: There had been a "love-scene" on the terrace with Norah—with Norah, who an hour before had uttered such bitter words of Arthur and Arthur's love! Well, there could be no doubt Mrs. Sandford was right—that she was integrally false. After all, was it remarkable? Could anything else be expected from a girl whose life had been spent among the adventurers and adventuresses of Bohemia? Perhaps she was bent on a bolder stroke than he had even fancied—perhaps she meant to lead Arthur back into the chains of the old infatuation, and then make him marry her! How easily this might be accomplished, Max scarcely ventured to acknowledge to himself. He felt that there was nothing in Arthur's character on which, in any emergency, it was possible to rely. What could be predicated with safety of a man who, in open disregard of his plighted faith, averred that he loved "passionately" a woman whom he had only mentioned in tones of contemptuous repugnance a month before? Thinking of him, Max felt that hopelessness which we have many of us known in similar cases. With a person, however bad, who possesses any thing like stability, it may be possible to know, after a fashion, what to do; but, with one whose opinions, feelings, and resolves, are like the yielding sand, he must be a sage, indeed, who can resolve upon any fixed course of action.

Pondering such thoughts as these, Captain Tyndale walked by Mrs. Sandford's side to the house—the sun having at last forced them to abandon their position—and it was like an echo of, or a commentary upon, his train of reflection when the first person whom he saw on entering the drawing-room was Norah Desmond. Leslie was there, also, and Mrs. Middleton, but it was in the nature of things that the eye should fall first on Miss Desmond. If two or two hundred other women were in the room, she attracted the gaze as naturally and involuntarily as a ray of sunlight or a brilliant flower.

Yet it must not be supposed that there was any thing brilliant or flower-like in her costume, which was singularly simple as a general rule, avoiding all *bizarre* effects, even such as are sanctioned in this heyday of *bizarre* modes. She was evidently determined that nobody should say there was any thing "Bohemian" in her taste. And it was surprising—it was like a revelation to eyes only accustomed to overloaded women—to see how this simplicity of attire enhanced her really extraordinary beauty. Indeed, Mrs. Sandford confided to her maid, in the deep injury of her soul, that it was on this account Miss Desmond dressed so plainly—that she wore few flounces, and still fewer ornaments.

"She wants to show that she can do it!" the acute lady said. "Poverty may have something to say in the matter, but affectation has still more!"

Whatever were Norah's reasons, there certainly was no question of her success in an aesthetic point of view. Just now Mrs. Sandford looked like an overdressed doll, in all her purple and white glories, by the side of the other's plain morning-dress, unrelieved by any thing more than a bit of black velvet tied round her throat. No pendant, no earrings, no sash, no "any thing," Mrs. Sandford would have said, except exquisite freshness and artistic simplicity. Max looked upon her, and his eye was so well satisfied with seeing that, by a masculine result of masculine

logic, he began to ask himself if it were possible that this beautiful, stately creature was, indeed, the consummate actress and scheming adventuress which circumstances seemed to indicate. He certainly would have been something more or less than man if he could have resisted the sunlight of the smile with which she presently turned to him.

"We have been talking of you, Captain Tyndale—Leslie and I," she said. "Have your ears been burning at all this morning?"

"They have been too much engaged in listening," he answered, walking over to where she sat. "I have been in the shrubbery with Mrs. Sandford, and have your ears given you warning that you were a topic of conversation, Miss Desmond?"

"No," she answered, quietly; but she looked up at him as he stood, tall and straight, before her, with a sudden flash of intelligence in her eye, which showed him that she understood at once what he meant. It was not likely that she had forgotten Mrs. Sandford's presence in the library the evening before, and she possessed none of Mr. Tyndale's facility for believing just that which was the least trouble and the most agreeable to believe.

"We have been talking of you—Mrs. Sandford and I," repeated Max, impressed almost against his will by the clear frankness of her glance, the utter want of any shade of detected guilt on her face. "And, if you do not object, I should like to ask some explanation, of a story which she has been good enough to tell me."

She looked at him steadily for a minute before she answered; then another quick, bright smile came over her face.

"You go to your point very directly," she said. "I like that. It answers better, with some people, than the diplomacy of a Talleyrand. Yes, Captain Tyndale, I will give you a full explanation of whatever story you may have heard, because you have thought well enough of me to come and ask for it like a man of honor."

Captain Tyndale winced a little at this. Half an hour before he certainly had not "thought well" of her; but there was something magnetic about this woman. Let him doubt or distrust her as he might out of her presence, he could not do so in it; he could not hear the clear ring of her voice, or meet the frank glance of her eye, and say, "This is falsehood!"

"Will you tell me now?" he asked, eagerly. "Shall we go out on the veranda? I do not think we are likely to be disturbed."

But, even as he spoke, Mr. Middleton and Carl entered the room, and the latter at once came over to Norah. A few minutes later they went to luncheon, and all hope of an immediate explanation was at an end.

At luncheon Captain Tyndale found that there was a social engagement on hand for the afternoon.

"We have to go over to the Covingtons to play croquet," Leslie told him. "It is very tiresome, but they made such a point of it I scarcely like to disappoint them. What a barbarous idea it is to have afternoon amusements in summer, is it not? I think the afternoon should always be sacred to one's *siesta*."

"A croquet-party will at least have the merit of novelty to me," said Carl. "I have heard of the game very often, but I have never seen it."

"Never seen it!"

A note of admiration poorly expresses the tone in which those three words were echoed round the table.

"Never seen it! We could not have imagined such depth of ignorance, even in Germany," said Mrs. Sandford.

Max laughed, and raised a glass of wine to his lips.

"Happy man!" he said. "We drink to your continued ignorance."

"I am not sure that I desire it to continue," said Carl. "A man might as well know a little of every thing. Something like billiards, isn't it?"

This remark was addressed to the company in general.

"Like billiards!" repeated Leslie. "As moonlight is to sunlight, or as water unto wine,' or as the weakest tea you can imagine to good champagne."

"A more tiresome thing never was invented," said Mrs. Sandford, with unction.

"Why do you all play it, then?" asked Norah, also addressing the company. "When one has to submit to being bored in a case of necessity or duty, I can stand it as well as any other woman or man, but, when it is boring, pure and simple, and you call it amusement, I cannot see the sense of it."

"Nor I," said Carl. "I never could."

"Unfortunately, we cannot help ourselves," said Mrs. Middleton. "There are certain social amusements which are social duties. If one shirks them, one must give up society altogether."

"But do you really find no pleasure in your social gatherings?" asked the young Bohemian, curiously. "How strange that you should continue to call them 'amusements,' then! I should be honest, and say 'bores' at once."

"How very evident it is that Miss Desmond has never been in society!" said Mrs. Sandford, with her rippling laugh. "What would she think if she had gone through the exhaustion of two or three seasons, I wonder?"

"I should probably think that I was much the worse for wear in every particular," answered Miss Desmond, quietly.

This was such a keen home-thrust—since everybody who had known Mrs. Sandford in her first youth was so thoroughly conscious that *she* was the worse for wear—that Leslie turned the course of conversation at once by addressing Max.

"Can you not come with us this afternoon?" she asked. "You know that the Covingtons would be very glad to see you."

"I hope you have not forgotten that you have an engagement to drive with me this afternoon," said Carl, speaking quickly to Norah. "The croquet-party need not interfere with it, for I can drive you over to the Covington place."

"No, thanks," said Max to Leslie. "You are very kind, and so would the Covingtons be, but I really cannot agree with Mr. Middleton in thinking that croquet is either worth knowing, or—if one has the misfortune to know it after a fashion—worth playing. I shall go back to Strafford and see how Arthur is coming on."

He had not gone back to Strafford, however, when the carriages consisting of Leslie's phaeton and Carl's new dog-cart drove to the door, and the three ladies, in their pretty croquet costumes, came down-stairs.

"How neatly I settled that fellow!" said Carl, looking at Captain Tyndale as they drove off. "Did you notice how he paused and glanced at you when Leslie asked him if he would not come with us? He would have said 'yes' in a minute if I had not showed him that I had a prior claim upon your time and attention."

"How exceedingly foolish you are!" said Norah, with delightful candor. "It is really astonishing to see how completely you disregard such trifles as fact and reason. If Captain Tyndale looked at me when Leslie spoke to him, it was doubtless in much the same way that you look at your horse when I speak to you."

"It is impossible but that you must see that the man is ready to make a complete fool of himself about you!" said Carl, with jealous and not particularly lucid energy.

"It is perfectly possible that I see nothing of the kind," she answered. "Neither would you, if your eyes had not a glamour of absurdity over them. If you must know the truth," she added, impatiently, "you might have seen it for yourself—by-the-way, Captain Tyndale is in love with Leslie."

"In love with Leslie!" repeated he, in a tone of incredulity, turning to look into her face. "You—you are not in earnest?"

"I am entirely in earnest," she answered. "He is certainly in love with Leslie; and I

think" (this very deliberately) "that he would suit her infinitely better than his accomplished cousin will ever do."

"Do you?" said Carl. "But that is for Leslie to judge, is it not? Unless, indeed—"

Here he broke off abruptly. A sudden strain of new suspicion darted into his mind.

There is something really inexhaustible in the versatility of jealousy—something that can freshly amaze every day and every hour even those who have had most cause to know and best opportunity to study that remarkable passion. It may be said that this was just now the master-passion of Carl Middleton's life. Feeding his love for Norah day by day on the magic of her presence, he had fed his tormentor also on the words and smiles which she gave so freely to others, until he was ready to believe any thing, to see any thing, to fancy any thing, that might tend to add to his discomfort, however improbable it might intrinsically be.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Sandford was doing a little mischief-making on a small scale with Leslie. She was too mindful of her promise to Max, to attempt any thing of the kind on a great scale; but the desire to meddle and to talk, to advise wisely or to hint what she was not allowed to confide, was too much for her—as it has been too much for many another woman since the days of Eve. If she did not venture to disregard entirely the embargo which had been laid upon her tongue, it was not because she attached any particular binding significance to a promise, but rather because she was not prepared to brave the anger which she knew Max would feel, or to sacrifice the advantage she had gained by discreet confidence and appeal. She began, therefore, on the outskirts of the subject, began discursively to talk of Miss Desmond, expressing herself with all the moderation and good sense which usually characterized her conversation:

"So charming, so beautiful, with such a peculiar gift of fascination!" she said. "I never knew before what a real enchantress a woman can be—an enchantress such as one reads of, you know. Miss Desmond seems to possess such a peculiar attraction for men! I have never seen any thing like it."

"I am afraid Carl is more in love with her than is good for him," said Leslie, flicking Romulus and Remus lightly with the whip. "But I am not aware that she has displayed her conquering talent with regard to any one else as yet."

"That is because you have not observed," said Mrs. Sandford, with a shake of the head. "If you had—But I think there is nothing more beautiful than that perfect and *implicit* trust which you seem to feel in every one you love."

"I certainly could not love any one whom I was forced to suspect," answered Leslie, flushing. "If you are speaking of Norah—"

"My dear, I am not speaking of anybody—that is, of anybody in particular," interrupted the other, quickly, "Of course, it is no affair of mine. I am, unfortunately, *too* observant—I see and know too much. I often feel as if I would give *any thing* to have your delightful repose and confidence."

"You are right in saying that I trust implicitly those whom I love," said Miss Grahame, with some *hauteur*—for it is slightly trying to be politely accused of obtuse stupidity—" but, with regard to other people, I am not conscious of wearing a bandage over my eyes. I make no very great claim to worldly acumen, but I think I can see as clearly as most of my fellows."

"I never implied or meant to imply for a moment that you wore a bandage over your eyes," said Mrs. Sandford, with the sweetest conciliation. "I only meant that you are blind—quite blind—where your affections are concerned. You acknowledge that yourself."

"Not that I am blind, but that I do not suspect readily. There is a distinction between the two things."

"Is there? I suppose I am very stupid, but I really cannot see it. It seems to me that one is blind if one does not suspect when one is deceived, for instance."

"When one is deceived!" Something in the tone which uttered those words—a scarcely-veiled significance and meaning—struck with a cold chill to Leslie's heart. She felt suddenly that Mrs. Sandford was not talking at random, that she had a particular object in view, and that her

words pointed like arrows directly toward that object. If Miss Grahame had followed her impulse, she would have turned authoritatively and said, "What do you mean? For Heaven's sake, speak plainly!" But she was a woman of sufficient worldly experience to know that such an impulse was not a wise one. To bid some people speak plainly is simply to offer them a premium for further innuendo and mystery.

"Of course if one is deceived, one may desire and should endeavor to know it," she said, after a minute. "Self-respect—which is often, however, merely another name for selfishness—teaches that much, at least."

"But if one does not suspect—if one does not open one's eyes and *look*, how can one know?" asked Mrs. Sandford, more meaningfully than ever. Just then she felt so much sincere compassion for Miss Grahame, that it required her strongest thoughts of Captain Tyndale to refrain from telling the whole truth, as she conceived it.

Leslie looked at her with a half-pathetic keenness in her soft gray eyes.

"I would not turn away from any proof of deception which came to me," she said, gravely, "but I would never lower myself sufficiently to go in search of it."

"Oh, my dear, I am sure you never would!" cried the other, who began to think she had gone far enough. She had put Leslie on her guard, and she had not broken faith with Max. While congratulating herself on the diplomacy which had secured both these ends, she felt that this was the golden moment in which to retreat. Enough (for her purpose) had been said, and not too much: another word might involve her in the necessity of an explanation, and spoil all. "I am sure you never would!" she repeated. "I always thought you had the keenest sense of honor I have ever known in any one. How strange it is to consider how unlike the nearest relations may be!" (This hint was so tempting, that she could not resist throwing it in.) "By-the-by, do tell me if there is no talk of any of these Covington girls being married? Do they mean to grow into a whole houseful of old maids?"

The conversation was easily turned in this way—for Leslie was too proud to make any effort to continue a subject which the other evidently wished to drop—but Mrs. Sandford was safe in thinking that she had sowed a seed which was destined to ripen into fruit, and worked mischief not likely to pass harmlessly away.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"A woman is a foreign land,  
Of which, though there he settle young,  
A man will ne'er quite understand  
The customs, politics, and tongue.  
The foolish hie them post-haste through,  
See fashions odd, and prospects fair,  
Learn of the language, 'how d'ye do?'  
And go and brag that they've been there."

ON the evening of the same day, dinner was over at Rosland, the lights were turned low in the drawing-room, and the party—somewhat tired and languid after their croquet—were assembled on the veranda, when Arthur Tyndale came across the lawn in the shadowy moonlight and joined them.

They were a little surprised to see him, and he had to run a gantlet of inquiries about his "indisposition," all of which he answered with remarkable brevity, and then dropped into a seat under the shadow of the vines by Leslie's side.

"I am sorry to hear you have been unwell," she said, in her tender voice—a voice which sounded like a C minor chord in music "has it really been serious? Do you think the fishing yesterday had any thing to do with it?"

"It has not been in the least serious," he answered, in a tone of subdued irritation. "A little headache—nothing of any importance. I cannot imagine what induced Max to say that I was ill."

"He did not say that you were ill—only unwell."

"But I was not even unwell—lazy would have been much nearer the truth. This weather pulls one down horribly," he added, impatiently. "I have almost made up my mind not to leave the house again while the sun is above the horizon."

"Have you?" said Leslie. She did not say any thing more, for, like a flash, it occurred to her that, if Arthur discontinued the morning visits which he had paid ever since her arrival at Rosland, it would effectually put an end to all their private interviews. She was too fastidious in taste and breeding to withdraw from the circle of the evening in any marked manner, and there are few of us who have not learned that the intercourse of two people, in which half a dozen others more or less participate, is rarely satisfactory. She did not suggest this fact to him, for it also occurred to her that he might be as well aware of it as herself. A new sense of distrust had come over Leslie since Mrs. Sandford had uttered her enigmatical warning. It was very vague, as yet—for she did not know whom or what she had been advised to suspect—but it existed, and this was more than could have been said twelve or even six hours earlier. Tyndale's words—which in truth were little more than the random utterances of a man impatient with circumstances and with himself—jarred on her as they would not have done had they been of much stronger import a little while before. She was not a woman to display any thing like petulant exaction, however, and so she made answer very quietly:

"I think it would be a very prudent resolution. Aunt Mildred would certainly applaud it, for she blames the sun for every ill that flesh is heir to in our climate, and fancies that, if we only stay under shelter from sunrise to sunset, we can sleep out in the dew all night if we have a mind to."

"There might be a more unpleasant necessity on such a night as this," he said, throwing back his head and looking up, so that the soft moonlight fell on his fair, delicate face and silken blond hair. Then he turned abruptly to Norah. "Miss Desmond, do you remember—I mean, does not this moonlight make you think of moonlight nights in Germany? Something just now reminds me of one night which I cannot forget—of a moon in her first quarter hanging over Coblenz, of the Rhine murmuring below, and of Ehrenbreitstein, with its towers showing dark and massive against the purple sky above!"

"Your imagination must be very lively, Mr. Tyndale," answered Carl's voice out of the shadowy half-light—for Norah said not a word—"I confess I cannot possibly see any thing to suggest the Rhine or Ehrenbreitstein in the present scene. The moon is a very slender link of association—if it is the only one."

His slight pause before the last words made them very significant, and other ears besides those of Tyndale and Norah caught the meaning which filled them. To Mrs. Sandford they brought a sudden illumination that absolutely startled her, and made her cry "Eureka!" to herself. With Leslie they deepened the vague sense of suspicion which began to stir within her. Something was going on! Her newly-sharpened faculties of observation told her that much at least. Others knew or suspected something about Arthur or about Norah, which must of necessity concern *her*. She had a strange, puzzled feeling, as of a child newly waked—what did it mean? As yet the faintest conception of the truth had not come to her.

"Why did not Captain Tyndale come over with you?" said Mrs. Sandford to Arthur, by way of breaking the awkward pause which followed Carl's remark. She was good-natured in the main, and, although she meant to know all that was to be known about this mystery which piqued and puzzled her, she had no objection to smoothing matters socially, meanwhile. "He might have felt a little interest in learning whether or not we survived the croquet."

"He might have come if he had been aware that I intended to do so," Arthur answered, carelessly. "But I strolled off without letting him know."

"And pray why *did* you stroll off without letting him know?" asked she, petulantly.

"Because I thought him quite as well acquainted with the path as I am," returned he, coolly.

Then there was another pause. Everybody felt instinctively that something had "happened" between these two men, who, in an undemonstrative masculine fashion, had represented "Damon and Pythias" in modern costume a short time before. Nobody fancied for a moment that any thing overt or violent, or even tangible, had taken place, but that something had come between them—some coolness, some barrier, some change in the old, affectionate intimacy—was evident, for it is astonishing how much the mere significance of accent can convey to ears which are on the alert. After Arthur's last speech, Norah, Leslie, Mrs. Sandford, and Carl, were all as well aware as himself of his altered feeling toward Max. Mrs. Middleton was the only person on whom the subtle inflection of his tone fell unperceived. As for Mr. Middleton, he was taking a comfortable doze in a shaded corner of the drawing-room, having outlived his fancy for moonlight, and inclining to the opinion that the night-air had malaria in it.

"How stupid we are!" said Mrs. Sandford after a while, with a candid yawn. "Can't somebody do something for the general amusement? Miss Desmond, won't you go and sing for us?"

"Pray do, Miss Desmond," said Mrs. Middleton, courteously. It was the best thing this lady knew of Norah, that she could sing.

Miss Desmond yielded without demur—she was unusually quiet this evening, more than one of the party remarked—and, as she rose to enter the drawing-room, Tyndale rose also, somewhat to Leslie's surprise, greatly to Carl's indignation, and followed her.

Being in advance, Norah was not aware of his presence until she reached the piano. Then, turning to say, "What shall I sing?" she found herself facing him instead of Carl, as she expected.

She started a little, a flush which he knew to be one of anger rose to her face, and her lips unclosed impetuously. But sometimes it is possible to pause in the very act of utterance, and so Norah paused now. The reason of this was not far to seek. She had caught a glimpse of the bald top of Mr. Middleton's head, and, although several audible sounds indicative of slumber were proceeding from his nose, she was too cautious a woman to utter aloud the haughty words of impatience trembling on her tongue.

"I thought you were Mr. Middleton," she said, with a quietness that amazed Tyndale; for he did *not* see the bald head or hear the sounds which it would have been an insult to call snoring.

"I thought that I might venture to come instead of Mr. Middleton," he answered, uncertain whether to augur good or ill from her sudden change of manner. "You asked what you should sing," he went on, quickly. "May I answer that question? May I say that I should like of all things to hear once again that little German song which you sang—do you remember?—that night at Coblenz to which I alluded a little while ago?"

"I remember," said Norah.

She looked at him intently, almost curiously, as she spoke. Of what was this man made, that he ventured to brave her like this? Was he mad that he, who had every reason to conciliate her (if such a thing could be done), instead brought forward memories which might have hardened the heart and strengthened the resolution of a far less proud and passionate woman? It is impossible to say whether she felt most contempt or puzzled indignation as she stood looking at him with her keen, brilliant glance, but it is at least certain that she understood him far better than he understood her when she answered at last.

"You mean the little German ballad called 'The Pledge?'" she asked. "Yes, I will sing it for you—that is, if I can remember it. I do not think I have sung it since that night at Coblenz,

when I sat on the balcony with one who was to leave the next day, and watched the moon go down behind the vine-clad hills, with the voice of the Rhine in our ears."

"My God! how I remember it all!" he said, passionately; but, as he spoke, a warning glance in her eye made him stop short.

"Will you go yonder, across the room, and look for my fan on one of those tables?" she said, quickly.

While he obeyed, she sat down to the piano, and, when he came back, a single glance at his face showed her that he had seen Mr. Middleton.

She smiled, and, secure from any further allusion to the past, it may be that she was not averse to showing him her indifference to it.

"This is the song you mean, is it not?" she asked, striking a few chords, and then beginning to sing.

It was a very beautiful ballad, though sufficiently simple in subject and execution—only a pledge of faith which a maiden gave her lover when they parted—but the theme was treated as only the Germans know how to treat such a theme, lifting it out of the region of commonplace into the realm of pure artistic simplicity.

Norah sang it exquisitely, with a pathos and sweetness which thrilled even those who were gathered on the veranda in the moonlight.

"How charming!" cried Mrs. Sandford, "and with how much expression Miss Desmond is singing! *You* understand German "(this to Carl); "tell us what it is about."

"It is the promise of a girl to be faithful through all things to her lover," he answered—a coldness and constraint in his voice which it was impossible for him to disguise.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Sandford. To do her justice, she uttered that long-drawn exclamation involuntarily. It was little more than a thought spoken aloud. "How pretty such promises always are in poetry and music," she added, after a minute, "and how pretty Miss Desmond looks while she sings it!"

"When does not Miss Desmond look pretty?" asked Carl, in a sharp, quick tone, full of mingled tenderness and jealousy, which was any thing but soothing to the ears or the feelings of Mrs. Middleton.

He rose, as he spoke, from his own seat, and crossed over to where Mrs. Sandford was sitting, just outside one of the open windows. It was like looking at a picture to stand there in the fragrant darkness, and gaze down the long room, with its mirrors, and paintings, and polished floor, to where Norah sat at the piano in her filmy white dress, with one scarlet flower glowing on her breast, another in the rich masses of her hair—only Carl was not exactly in that calm, esthetic frame of mind necessary for the appreciation of a work of art. He did not take in the general effect of the scene; his eyes were fastened on the face which just then wore its most lustrous beauty. How could he imagine what bitter memories of the past, what overpowering scorn of the present, had made that face blossom into such vivid loveliness of light and color?

Even Tyndale thought that he had never seen it more beautiful; even he thought that it was the spell of the song—that subtile association which dwells in music as in odor—which had brought such glowing light to Norah's eyes, such brilliant carmine to her cheeks. If the first cadence made him remember that September night on the Rhine until his pulses throbbed, how must it be with her in whose mind the brief romance which ended then had dwelt more deeply and more constantly? It must not be supposed that he forgot, meanwhile, the letter resting safely in his pocket-book—that letter in which Norah said that her love for him had died so utter a death—but it was easier to believe that she had deceived herself, or that she meant to deceive her sister, than that such an assertion could possibly rest on fact. Beyond a certain point, credulity cannot go. This point in the general masculine mind is reached when it becomes necessary to believe that a woman has learned to forget, to ignore, or to despise, as the case may be, the man whom she once loved. Let this man have good cause, or sometimes no cause, to imagine that any thing like a passion or a tender sentiment has been entertained for him, and, in the face of reason,

fact, and probability, he will retain a firm belief in his power to the last. So it was with Tyndale. He knew that Norah had loved him once, and consequently he no more believed that this love was dead than he believed that he was a fool, or any other patent absurdity.

"I wonder what Leslie thinks of this pretty scene!" said Mrs. Sandford, in a discreet aside to Carl. "Upon my word, it is quite lover-like, is it not? What is Mr. Tyndale doing now? Looking over the music? But I thought it was one of Miss Desmond's affecta—peculiarities, never to sing by note."

"So it is one of her peculiarities," said Carl. "That is Leslie's music he is turning over. What he means by setting it up before Miss Desmond, I don't know. She does not sing any of those mezzo-soprano songs."

"He has a reason for it, you may be sure," said Mrs. Sandford, philosophically.

A minute later this reason became apparent—much more apparent than Mr. Tyndale intended or desired. The piece of sheet-music which had been set up as a screen unfortunately fell down just as he was in the act of offering a folded paper—apparently a note—to Norah, which Norah, on her part, seemed hesitating whether or not to receive. The tableau only lasted a second. As the music fell forward on the key-board, her hesitation ended—she quietly accepted and slipped it unread into her girdle. Then she turned back to the piano and began singing again.

Mrs. Sandford and Carl Middleton instinctively looked at each other. Both had seen so plainly and palpably what passed, that there was no room for evasion, no need for silence.

"What a mysterious and dramatic bit of by-play!" said the former, with her light, empty laugh. "Why cannot people say all that they want to while they are together, I wonder?"

"Perhaps they lack opportunity to do so, and desire to make one," said Carl, bitterly.

But the words were scarcely uttered before he repented himself, and would have given much to recall them. This was because he appreciated the folly of having spoken so plainly to a woman like Mrs. Sandford. His repentance would have been still deeper if he had known that Leslie was standing at his elbow when he uttered them.

Let no one condemn Carl for absolute want of sense when it is recorded of him that he did not close his eyes in slumber during the short hours which remained of that moonlit summer night. There are two or three facts which may be pleaded in part extenuation of this act of folly. First, as Norah had once said in magnanimous excuse for him, he was young—and when one is young, one cannot only be guilty of a great deal of nonsense, but one can also dispense with a great deal of sleep with impunity. Secondly, he was in love—desperately, hopelessly in love, according to the impetuous though oftentimes short-lived fervor of the mercurial disposition. Thirdly, he was jealous—savagely jealous of the man who, he felt sure, was Norah's lover, even while he was Leslie's *fiancée*. Fourthly, he was puzzled, more puzzled than can readily be expressed, by Miss Desmond's inexplicable conduct. Fifthly, the night was very warm—one of those breathless Southern nights when one's bed, instead of being that "heaven of rest" which Hood calls it, is strikingly suggestive of St. Lawrence's gridiron; and, sixthly, he had just received a new box of very excellent cigars.

All of these causes, combined and operating together, were not conducive to somnolence. With a mind irritatingly wide awake and bent on thoughts of love and jealousy, he could see no reason for leaving the balcony, where he sat at ease, smoking cigar after cigar, and obtaining the benefit of any breeze which chanced to be stirring, for restless tossing on a mattress within. There are some fortunate people who, in the face of any trouble or annoyance, can take their usual quantum of rest—and of these we may confidently predicate that they will safely weather any storm which Fate may send upon them—but Carl was not one of them. It was also necessary to look at his face to read the sign - token of that high - strung, nervous organization which consumes itself with its own fire, and tears itself with its own strength. It would be as wise to bid such natures stop breathing as to bid them "take things easily," as we too often do. Stronger than any thing else in this strange world of ours—stronger than circumstances, resolution, love, or hate—is the restless and mysterious strength of that which we have agreed to call temperament.

Concerning the thoughts which occupied Carl's mind during the hours—first moonlit, and then starlit—that elapsed between the last good-nights down-stairs and the first lightening glow in the east, which told of breaking day, it is not necessary to enter into detail. His suspicions were, as yet, unformed, his gathering wrath somewhat vague, not in itself, but as regarded the object against whom it was directed. At this time, a trifle might have made it waver again as it had wavered before. Afterward it was too late for this. Afterward not all the eloquence of men or angels could have turned him from his fixed belief, or his fixed purpose.

Weary at last from his night's vigil, and conscious of being a little sleepy, he threw his last cigar away, as the glow of the east brightened and deepened into roseate splendor, and, leaning back with a yawn, made up his mind that he would "turn in." To make up one's mind to do a thing, however, and to *do* it, are occasionally very different things. Just now they proved very different indeed with Carl. He had scarcely taken his resolution, and he certainly had not as yet moved an inch toward carrying it into execution, when the sound of an opening blind near at hand made him start. This start was not because there was any thing remarkable in the fact of a blind being opened at daylight on a summer morning—though people sleeping on the eastern side of the house would have been more likely to close theirs—as because sleeplessness and tobacco had together produced their natural effect of nervousness, together with the fact that the sound appeared to proceed from Miss Desmond's room, which chanced to be in the neighborhood of his own. A minute later it was repeated, and then he knew that it proceeded from her room. Immediately Suspicion sprang up, ready armed and on the alert. What was Norah doing awake at that hour? It was impossible to fancy it could be a servant, for the servants at Rosland had far too much regard for their own comfort, and knew the habits of their master and mistress too well, to rouse themselves at such a time.

For ten minutes Carl sat listening intently, with strained attention, for any further proof of matutinal rising on Miss Desmond's part. All night he had spent in going over and over (according to the distracting fashion of night meditation) that little scene at the piano—all night he had taken an active part, as counsel for the defense, in an exhaustive mental argument to prove that there *could* have been nothing of importance in that folded paper which looked so suspiciously like a note. Now, he found, in the most discouraging manner, that his trouble had all been for naught. At the first sound from Norah's room, his thoughts flew back to the suspicion-point of the night before. What was in that note? What was the meaning of this early rising? Reason said it did not follow of necessity that there was any connection between the two facts. Instinct said, "You may be sure that there is a connection of the closest kind." Between the two, Carl felt not a little puzzled; but he inclined toward instinct, as, in little or in great, we all more or less do incline. Besides, there was reason on that side, too. He had known Miss Desmond well enough and long enough to be aware that she had nothing of the lark in her composition. Only the day before he had heard her say that there was nothing she detested so much as early rising; and now—

Well, he thought, the man would be fit for a lunatic asylum, indeed, who expected consistency in a woman; and, after all, the fact of the open blind did not prove that she had risen. She might have wanted a little air (of which there was not the least stirring), or she might have wanted to admire the sunrise. This last idea was so improbable that he caught himself smiling over it; and, as he did so, the sun, which had been reddening the tree-tops for some time, rose in full majesty; the first level, golden lines of light came slanting across the green, dewy earth, and

" .... in the crystal cup of day  
Lay melted the pearl of dawn."

The marvelous stillness, freshness, and beauty of the scene arrested even Carl's unobservant gaze. For a minute he forgot his passionate, jealous thoughts, in admiration of the picture outspread before him—the shadows, long and deep as those of afternoon, the sunlight full

of still glory, the sparkling freshness of grass and foliage, the purple mist clinging softly to the distant hills, the lucid clearness and brightness of the air. As he looked and listened—for, from copse and tree rose the matin song of many feathered choristers—another sound made him start, and diverted his attention in a moment from all the glory of Nature. This sound was the soft unclosing of a door immediately beneath his balcony.

Instantly he leaned forward and looked over the railing. As he did so, a light-gray dress fluttered below, a figure wearing a straw hat stepped into full view, and the next moment he recognized Norah Desmond as she walked with her quick, stately tread across the dewy grass.

Careless whether or not she should turn and see him, Carl sat motionless, staring after her as she crossed the lawn and disappeared along a winding path of the shrubbery. What did it mean? This was what he asked himself—ignoring the fact that Miss Desmond was at liberty to take as many walks at sunrise as she felt inclined to, without any one possessing the right (he, least of all) to inquire why she did so. "She has gone to meet that scoundrel!" he said, after a while, striking his clinched hand violently on the railing against which he leaned, hurting it severely, by-the-by—only people do not mind such trifles as this when they are excited.

Having decided that she had gone to meet the scoundrel in question, Carl felt himself fired with the spirit of one of Mr. Wilkie Collins's detectives. There was only a single objection to following her and settling the point at once: this was an inconvenient sentiment of honor, an inconvenient feeling that, as a gentleman, he had no right and little excuse for prying into Miss Desmond's affairs, and sitting in judgment on her conduct. But then, if he meant to serve her as he did mean to serve her, by showing Arthur Tyndale that he could not, with impunity, play such a part between herself and Leslie was it not necessary for him to know the truth? This view of the case struck him forcibly, and seemed unanswerable. Certainly it was necessary that he should know the truth; certainly, also, there was no other means for learning it than this which seemed to him in a measure dishonorable. Yet, after all, was he not regarding the matter in rather an exaggerated light? Was it dishonorable to satisfy himself—by sight, merely—of a matter concerning which it was vitally important that he should possess satisfaction? The strictest of moral casuists might have been excused for answering "No."

At least, this was Carl's view of the case. Just then, probably, he was a particularly strict moral casuist. Few of us are when our own desires and interests are at stake. Unquestionably the matter ended as might have been expected. He entered his room, dressed quickly, and, going down-stairs as quietly as possible, passed out of the door which Norah had left ajar, and followed the path which she had taken into the shrubbery.

Ten minutes later, he came in sight of the Dutch summer-house toward which the instinct, that occasionally serves as a mariner's compass on dry land, led his feet. It was there that Norah had gone, he felt sure; it was there that he would learn the best or worst of that which he desired to know.

Full of this conviction—a conviction approaching to a positive certainty—he paused in the shrubbery at some distance from the summer-house, contenting himself with commanding a good view of the door. All he desired was to see; no casuistry could have convinced him for a moment that it was honorable to hear.

He waited for some time without any thing occurring which justified the suspicion that had brought him there. "I am a fool!" he thought, and was about to turn away and to resume his search in another direction, when suddenly his heart gave a great throb that almost suffocated him. Framed in the summer - house window at that moment he saw Norah's beautiful, grave face gazing out over the bright landscape which he had showed her first; and, almost simultaneously with this picture, his eye caught a glimpse of Arthur Tyndale's graceful figure advancing rapidly from the opposite direction.

## CHAPTER XIX.

"Woman, and will you cast,  
For a word, quite off, at last,  
Me, your own, your you  
Since, as Truth is true,  
I was you all, the happy past  
Me do you leave aghast  
With the memories we amassed?"

NORAH was standing, with her back to the door, gazing half absently out of the open window, when the sound of Tyndale's step, as he entered the summer-house, made her start and turn around. By the quick lighting-up of his eye, the quick flush of pleasure which rose to his face, it was evident that he had not been at all certain of finding her; but the expression of *her* face did not change in the least as she walked slowly forward and paused at the table in the centre of the floor. Evidently she was there for a purpose, and evidently, also, it was one with which pleasure had little to do.

"You are late," she said, quietly, before he could utter any salutation. "I have been waiting for some time."

"Have you? I am sorry, very sorry!" he answered, with the flush deepening on his face. It is always awkward to be late in keeping an appointment which one has made one's self; but Tyndale was a man who piqued himself on the observance of the little things in which high-breeding consists, and he knew that for a gentleman to be late in keeping an appointment with a lady is an unpardonable social offense. "How can I ask you to pardon me?" he said. "I had no idea you would be able to leave the house so early—it is very early, you know."

"Is it?" said she, carelessly. "But, after all, early is a relative term. If one had been awake all night, for instance, one might call it late."

"*You* have not been awake all night, I trust?" (rather tenderly).

"No" (very indifferently). "But I slept brokenly, and the heat was intense. What is it Hood says?—

'They must be wretched who cannot sleep  
When God himself draws the curtain!'

Well, I was not particularly wretched—not wretched at all, in fact—but still I did not sleep. I had bad dreams, and bad dreams always upset me for the day. I dreamed about you!" (with startling directness).

"I hope you don't mean to imply that your dreams were bad because they were of me!"

"Yes, I mean to imply just that they were bad because they were of you! But I dreamed of other disagreeable things, also, and therefore I was glad when day dawned, and the night was over. I did not come to talk of my dreams, however," said she, sitting down. "Suppose we proceed at once to business? Early or late, I cannot spend much time here."

"I have not yet told you how glad, how happy I am to find you!" he began, eagerly; but she interrupted him.

"There is not the slightest reason why you should be either glad or happy. I am here simply because your note seemed to indicate that there was an urgent necessity for you to see me. The more briefly you tell me what this necessity is, the more indebted to you I shall be."

"You will not even allow me to thank you—"

"Have I not explained that there is nothing for which to thank me?" she interrupted, again. "I have not come on your account, or because you desired it. Pray understand this at once. It will save time and words—neither of which I like to waste."

"Then, if you did not come on my account, or because I desired it, may I venture to inquire to what I am indebted for your presence?" asked he, irritated, against his will, by the self-possession of her manner, the contemptuous indifference of her tone.

"I have already told you," said she, "that you are indebted to the assurance of your note—an assurance given on your honor—if such a trifling form of asseveration has any weight with you—that there was an imperative need for you to see me. I credited this," she added, "not so much because you asserted it as because I was myself able to imagine what the need in question might be."

"Were you, indeed?" said he. The ever-changing flush on his face deepened again. He could not be with her five minutes without being galled to the quick, and yet he was so far gone in madness that he would not have exchanged this bitterness for all the honey that ever dropped from lips of coral. "In that case, it may save time and words if you will be kind enough to tell me what you have imagined this need to be."

"Is that necessary?" asked she. "Is there more than one thing which I could have imagined it to be?"

"There is certainly more than one thing which you could have imagined," answered he, with more coolness than he had displayed before, "since there is more than one thing of which I desire urgently to speak to you."

"A desire is one thing: a need is quite another. You said nothing of the first, but a great deal of the last, in your note."

"I fancied that the latter would have more weight with you than the former."

"You were quite right," she rejoined. "The former would have had no weight at all." Then she added, impatiently: "The purpose for which I am here has nothing to do with listening to idle speeches, however; and any thing more idle than a discussion of your desires it would be impossible to imagine. Since the interview is of your seeking, I might insist that all necessary explanation should come from you; but perhaps it may shorten matters to say at once that, when I read your note, I felt little doubt but that the 'urgent need,' upon which you laid so much stress, was the need of telling me a fact of which I am already well aware—that Leslie is on the eve of knowing, if she does not already know, the whole story of that folly in which you were overheard at Strafford the other day."

"Leslie on the eve of knowing the folly in which I was overheard at Strafford the other day!" repeated he, too thoroughly astonished to do otherwise than echo her words. "I do not understand. What do you mean?"

"What do I mean?" repeated she, losing patience altogether. "Are you crazy or stupid that you do not know what I mean? Is it possible you have forgotten that there was a spy ambushed in the library - window at Strafford, who overheard all that you were foolish enough to say on the terrace that day?"

"I trust that I am neither crazy nor stupid," answered he. "I remember now. You are speaking of Mrs. Sandford. But I do not think there is any thing to fear from her. In the first place, it is not at all probable that she overheard any thing. In the second place, even if she had done so, I have no idea that she would think of interfering to make mischief!"

"Have you not?" said Norah.

She looked at him with a glance which he had often before encountered, and felt to be of an uncomfortably keen nature. With all her hardly-earned worldly wisdom, one thing, which this daughter of Bohemia had not learned, or disdained to practise, was the important art of never appearing to see too much or read too clearly. Especially in a woman is this art essential. Last of all things which a man can forgive, is the consciousness that the companion of his hours of relaxation, the smoother of his pillow of cares, has regarded him with steady, level gaze, has sounded the depths of that oftentimes shallow well which he calls his mind, has ventured to sit in criticism on his errors of judgment, and learned to know his weak points as well or better than he knows them himself. Thoroughly aware of this fact, many women keep their lids drooped on

system, only lifting them to look up in that meek attitude of adoration fit for the weaker vessel and humbler creature.

"I have known Mrs. Sandford a long time," he said, in answer to the incredulity of her glance, "and I have never seen any trace of malice in her. She is foolish and vain, but I do not think she would act in a dishonorable manner."

"But Mrs. Sandford may not think that she is acting in a dishonorable manner in putting Leslie on her guard against two such gross deceivers as you and I," said Norah, with a sudden gleam of laughter, which Tyndale felt to be very *mal à propos*, indeed, coming into her eyes—that devil-may-care gleam of Irish humor which there is not trouble enough on all this round earth of trouble to quell. "No doubt she defends the step or would defend it if it were assailed on very high moral grounds. Can you not imagine what they might be, Mr. Tyndale?"

"I cannot imagine in the least," answered he, coldly, suspicious of the satire lurking under her words. "My imagination is neither so ready nor so brilliant as your own. I am only confident that you do her injustice."

"It is bad policy to be 'confident' of any thing or of anybody," said Norah. "That is article first of my worldly creed. Let me recommend you to make it an article of yours. If you had done so a little earlier, you would not be astonished when I tell you that Mrs. Sandford has already made one confidant, and may soon make another."

"One confidant!" repeated he, aghast. "Good Heavens! are you in earnest? Who? what? when?"

"Your cousin, Captain Tyndale, was the 'who;' the 'what,' I have no doubt, was all that she knew, together with as much as she could invent; the 'when' was yesterday morning in the shrubbery."

"Max! has she told Max? Are you sure?—is there no mistake?"

"I scarcely think there can be any mistake. He implied as much very plainly when speaking to me yesterday; but, before he could enter into any explanation, we were interrupted."

"Max!" repeated Arthur. He did not say so, but he felt that he would almost as soon it had been Leslie. "The meddling, prying eavesdropper!" he said, alluding to Mrs. Sandford. "To think that she should take advantage of a mere accident to interfere in a matter which does not concern her in the least! In the name of"—a pause—"Heaven, what can be her motive?"

"Have you generally found that it is at all worth while to trouble one's self with regard to people's motives?" asked Norah, calmly. "When one finds them, they are generally so very small and so very shabby that one hardly feels repaid for the search."

"What did Max say?" asked he, eagerly. "How did he take it?"

"I have already mentioned that we were interrupted before he had time to say any thing."

"And Leslie; do you think she knows? Do you think that that woman has told her any thing?"

"I cannot tell; but she was alone with that woman for two or three hours yesterday afternoon."

"Was there ever a man so deceived and betrayed as I have been!" said Tyndale, in a Hamlet-like tone. "You think that *I* have acted badly," he added, turning impetuously to Norah, "but, if you could only know how others have treated me! There's Max, for instance; I would have trusted Max, if all the women in the world had proved false, and yet even he has failed me!"

"I should scarcely have fancied that," said Norah.

She wondered a little what had come between these two men, one of whom had so warmly advocated the other's cause two days before, but she did not choose to ask. Max Tyndale was nothing to her save the hopeless and deserving lover who might probably, at the end of the drama, marry Leslie Grahame.

"None of this is of any importance," she went on, in her decided fashion. "The question is not 'Who has deceived or who betrayed you?' but 'What is to be done?' Will you tell Leslie the truth, or shall I?"

"Tell Leslie the truth!" he stammered. Such a downright and uncompromising demand almost took away his breath. Was she mad—this beautiful, imperious creature, of whom his fear was even more lively than his admiration?

"Yes, the truth!" repeated Miss Desmond, looking at him steadily. "Does the word frighten you? Well, it is sometimes a hard thing—this truth—but, at its worst, it is never so hard as the consequences of that other thing called falsehood. You might have learned this fragment of wisdom some time since."

"You are plainly determined to teach it to me," said he, with paling lips. "God knows it would have been better if I had told Leslie the truth at first, but now it is too late!"

"Too late for what?" asked Norah's trenchant voice. "Is it ever too late to step out of the mire on to dry land? Do you mean too late on account of Mrs. Sandford? If you speak bravely and openly, even Mrs. Sandford's story will weigh little with Leslie. But I warn you frankly that it is only by speaking openly that you can save yourself. Sooner or later, Leslie must know the truth. If you and I are silent, she will learn it from others."

"Apparently *you* do not mean to be silent," said he, catching at her last words.

"You are mistaken," she answered. "I decided yesterday that Leslie should not hear the truth from me; I made up my mind that I would go back to the old vagabond life at the first excuse, and leave her unmolested in her fools' paradise. But you see that the matter has been taken out of my hands. Your own folly has betrayed your secret to a person who will not hesitate to use it unscrupulously. Hence I—who have no interest in the matter save the interest of honestly desiring to serve Leslie, who has honestly attempted to serve me—I tell you that your only hope of saving yourself in her eyes is to go and speak the truth, as a more honorable man would have spoken it long ago."

"You are hard on me," he said, changing color from white to red and red to white again. "You have been hard on me from the first! Can you not comprehend that a man may be *led into* things without meaning to act falsely or dishonorably? If you could only understand how little I meant to act toward you as I have done—!"

"Your conduct toward me requires no apology," said she. "You have greatly misunderstood all that I have said if you think it necessary to offer one."

"I have not misunderstood a single word that you have uttered," answered he, quickly. "I am not offering an apology. It is the last thing I should think of offering to *you*. I only hope you will grant as much credence and attention to what I am about to say as I have given you."

"I am afraid I must ask you to be kind enough to speak briefly," answered she, glancing at her watch. "I have already spent more time than I intended."

"Can you not even spare me a few minutes? demanded he, half angrily—"you who give long hours to Max, and that Middleton puppy, whom I suppose you intend to marry!"

"Do you?" said she, indifferently; but she did not add, "I am or am not going to do so." Plainly Mr. Tyndale must understand his position was that of a mere acquaintance—of one to whom she allowed no part or interest in her life. "But this is wandering from the subject of which you intend to speak," she added. "I hope you mean to explain that 'urgent need' for my presence which you have not explained yet—since it seems that I was wrong in my idea concerning it."

"How can I explain any thing when you treat me like this, when you remove me to such an infinite distance from you?" said he, with a sudden vibration of passion in his voice which startled her, for she was not expecting any thing of the kind just then. "You must know, you must feel, what it is that I wish to say! That 'folly' of which you talk, at Strafford the other day, was nearer wisdom than folly. You urge me to tell Leslie the truth. Do you know what it would be if I did tell her? It could only be that I love you, Norah—you only, you forever, you so far above all other women, that I would rather be miserable with you than find myself condemned to live without you!"

"That is unfortunate!" said Norah—her clear, cold voice making an indescribable contrast to the passionate eagerness of his—"since you are not likely to possess the option of being

miserable with me! I fear, on the contrary, that you will find yourself reduced to the necessity of being happy without me—only, for your consolation, I can honestly say that I do not think a gentleman who changes his mind and his fancy so often, will be likely to find an exceeding amount of happiness in any position of life."

"For God's sake, spare me your mockery!" said he, hoarsely. "If you could know what I have suffered during the last few days, you would pity me. I never knew what the hell of jealousy was until I have endured it in seeing you surrounded by other men, each of whom has had a better right to your time and attention than I! At last I could bear it no longer, and I determined to make one effort to gain an opportunity—this opportunity—to tell you all that is imperative you should know—"

She interrupted him here.

"Imperative to whom?" she asked.

"To me principally; to you, I hope, in a measure," he answered. Then he leaned across the table which divided them, and would have taken her hands if she had not drawn back haughtily. "Norah," he said—and the supreme excitement of his voice seemed to clash on the still air "I swear to you that I love you more passionately, more intensely, than I did when we were so happy two years ago, at Baden! You are infinitely dearer, infinitely more necessary, to me than on the night we parted in Coblenz. Norah, have you no love left for me? Is it all dead? Can I bring none of it to life again by the devotion of a lifetime? O love! love!—they say that women never forget. Oh, if I could only hope that you would come to me again as you came to me once before!"

He stopped abruptly, partly because he was out of breath, and partly because there was something exceedingly discouraging to any prolonged effort of eloquence in the steady brilliance of Norah's eyes. Not for a moment had this gaze wavered from his face; not once had the long lashes drooped in becoming maidenly shyness, or the flush on her cheeks deepened. Her self-possession was simply imperturbable, unruffled by any sign of confusion or trace of indignation. When he ceased speaking, she answered him as quietly as if he had made the most commonplace proposal in the world:

"And if I came to you, Mr. Tyndale, pray what would you do with me? We do not live in Asia, and I believe you are engaged to marry Leslie."

"*But I was engaged to you first!*" answered he, with a sudden flash of hope lighting up his face. Surely, this girl, with her passionate Irish blood, her reckless Bohemian rearing, would never have taken his declaration so coolly as this, unless she meant to grant all that he desired. "Norah, have you forgotten that? I can never forget it. I was engaged to you first, and I love you—hence my first duty is to you."

"In other words," said she, leaning on the table, and looking more intently than ever into his face, "you are kind enough to offer to break your engagement with Leslie for me. Is that it? I always like things put into plain English."

"I offer to put the engagement aside, and act as if it did not exist, which, in truth, it does not," he answered, with a ring of defiance in his voice. "A man cannot be bound to two women, and I gave my faith and my heart to you two years ago. Do you remember the pledge we exchanged when we parted in Coblenz? What I desire, above all things, now is, to redeem that pledge."

"How?" demanded she, laconically.

"Is there more than one way?" asked he, thinking that surely no man, in making a proposal, was ever assailed by such pointblank questions before. "We promised to marry each other, Norah; and I am more than willing to fulfill that promise now."

Men seldom talk well when they are making love—unnumbered novelists and poets to the contrary notwithstanding—but, if Tyndale talked unusually badly, it can at least be said for him that he talked at a remarkable disadvantage. Very few men, at such a time, have the misfortune to address an attention critically on the alert, much less to feel a pair of steady eyes gazing through and through them.

Into those eyes there came a sudden gleam at his last words; but, as it came quickly, so, also, it vanished.

"How kind of you!" said she, but so quietly that only the words themselves betrayed their irony. "Have you made any arrangement by which this generous intention can be converted into an accomplished fact?"

He looked at her doubtfully. Never had he felt more thoroughly puzzled how to "take" her. Was she in earnest, or was she only amusing herself with him? She had been so little in the habit of amusing herself with him of late, however, and it was so exceedingly improbable that she would select such a subject as this on which to begin, that he finally decided she must be in earnest.

"Arrangements are easily made," he answered. "I have thought of one plan which seems to me feasible. It is, that to-day—to-night—to-morrow—any time you choose, but the sooner the better—you should meet me at some appointed rendezvous, from which we can drive to Wexford, and take' the train for Alton. As soon as we reach the latter place, we will be married; and then, if you desire it, we can sail at once for Europe."

"Are you in earnest?" asked she, changing color for the first time. "Do you really mean this?"

"Try me!" said he, passionately. "That is all I ask. Appoint the hour, and let me show you whether or not I am in earnest."

She was silent for a minute, which seemed an hour to him. Then she said, abruptly, with the air of one who baa definitely made up her mind:

"There is a train which passes Wexford at ten o'clock at night for Alton, is there not? How would that answer for your purpose? I should say our purpose, should I not? You know there will be some people here for dinner this evening, and Leslie talks of a moonlight croquet-party. It will afford an excellent opportunity for leaving unobserved."

"It will be an excellent opportunity," said he, eager still, but certainly amazed. He had not flattered himself with any anticipation of such quick success as this, and—and it rather astonished him. He attributed it, however, to the restless passion which, despite all her asseverations to the contrary, Norah still felt for him; and, being somewhat beside himself with passion for her, he had little disposition to find fault with it. "To-night, then!" he said, quickly. "And now, my darling, how can I—"

Do what, was never determined; for at that moment she rose to her feet, looking at her watch again as she did so.

"I find that I have considerably exceeded the time which I allowed for your explanation," she said, coolly. "Its novel and engrossing nature must be my excuse. I have never before been invited to elope much less to be actively instrumental in the jilting of my own sister. Let me thank you for a new sensation, Mr. Tyndale, as well as for half an hour's excellent entertainment. And now, good-morning!"

She bent her head—the mockery which, of all her moods, he hated most, quivering about her lips and shining in her eyes and would have swept past him to the door, if he had not stepped quickly forward and barred her path, as he had done once before in that very spot.

"By—" he said, forgetting himself far enough to utter a deep, bitter oath under his breath, "you shall not go like this! You shall tell me the truth at least, before you do go! Have you deliberately been making a fool of me? Have you been lying to me with your eyes and with your tongue all this time? Do you not mean to marry me, after all?"

"Marry you!" repeated she, turning upon him with a scorn in her face and in her voice which was fairly majestic—"marry you, Arthur Tyndale—you ! Not if there was never another man on all God's earth! And when you talk of my eyes or of my tongue lying to you," she went on, indignantly, "it is you .who lie! you whose lips the truth seems literally incapable of crossing! I have only questioned you, and gauged, or tried to gauge, the depths of your deceit. In doing this, I have not only found you false in thought, word, and deed, ready at a moment's notice to act

toward Leslie as you have already acted toward me; but I have also found you devoid of one sentiment of generosity or one idea of honor. Well as I knew you, I came here to offer you my best services and my best advice for Leslie's sake. Now, I am heartily glad that you accepted neither. It leaves me free to act as I think best. Let me pass, sir! I dare you, at your peril, to detain me one half-second longer!"

A man of thrice Arthur Tyndale's moral courage would have fallen back at that imperious command, and before the look of defiance which accompanied her last words. As he fell back, she passed out, and he—thus left alone—sat down like one half-stunned, and, flinging his arms across the table, buried his face upon them.

When Norah reached the house, she found that even yet no one was stirring. The servants had arisen in the interval of her absence and done their work, so that all the lower apartments stood open, fair, and cool, and fresh, to the early summer morning; but an enchanted palace could not have been more still. She glanced at the large, old-fashioned clock—Mr. Middleton's special pet, for it had been brought over from England by his grandfather—which faced her as she entered the hall. It pointed to seven o'clock, and she knew that breakfast was never ready before nine.

"What am I to do with myself all this time?" she thought, with a slight feeling of dismay.

Somehow one feels an odd, incumbent necessity to do something with one's self—something useful or virtuous—when, by an extraordinary chance, one is astir very much in advance of one's usual time of rising. Then Norah's pulses were still thrilling with an excitement which even yet had not quieted down. The first thing which occurred to her was that she must change her dress, her dew-draggled skirts bearing significant witness to the wet grass which she had crossed, the damp paths she had followed; but, with two unoccupied hours stretching before her, she felt that there need be no hurry about this. If she went up-stairs at eight o'clock, there would be quite time enough for a much more elaborate toilet than any she was likely to make. Meanwhile the sitting-room looked temptingly cool and delightful, with its half-closed Venetian blinds, through which the long, golden sunbeams of early morning were stealing. She crossed the hall and went in. After all, she must take time for reflection; she must consider at once what she meant to do; and there could be no better opportunity for such consideration than the present.

As she entered the room, with her hat still on her head, she was thinking of this so deeply, and expecting so little to see any one, that she had more than half-crossed the floor before she became aware of the presence of a gentleman, who rose from the depths of Mrs. Middleton's favorite chair with an open newspaper in his hand.

"Good-morning, Miss Desmond," he said.

And then, looking up with a start, Norah found that she was advancing directly upon Max Tyndale.

## CHAPTER XX.

"For a chance to make your little much,  
To gain a lover and lose a friend,  
Venture the tree and a myriad such,  
When nothing you mar, but the year can mend!  
But a last leaf fear to touch. . . ."

"GOOD-MORNING, Miss Desmond."

"Good -morning, Captain Tyndale," answered she. "Excuse my inattention, but I was not expecting to see any one."

"You could not have been expecting it less than I was," said he, smiling. "I know the habits of the household so well that I had resigned myself to at least two hours of prospective solitude."

"Your resignation was apparently accompanied with philosophy," said she, glancing from the newspaper to the arm-chair. "Don't be alarmed, and imagine that I have come to disturb you! I am on my way up-stairs to change my dress before breakfast; but I felt a little tired, and this room looked cool and inviting."

"You seem to have been walking," said he, glancing in turn from her hat to her dew-stained boots and skirt. "Pray sit down"—he drew a chair forward. "You are not disturbing me in the least."

"Thanks," said she, sinking almost involuntarily into the soft depths. As she did so, he saw that she was evidently more than "a little tired." Indeed, she looked so exhausted that for a second he was absolutely startled.

"Shouldn't you like a fan?" he asked, glancing round vaguely in search of one. "Or water? I can ring and have some brought, if you say so."

She shook her head.

"I shall do very well, thank you, without any thing. I am only tired because I am not accustomed to such matutinal exertion."

"If you are not accustomed to it, I scarcely think you are wise to begin in this climate, and at this time of year. Do you not know that it is a maxim of health with all Southern people to stay in-doors until the dew is dried?"

"If it is a maxim of health, it is one which you seem to disregard with impunity," said she, looking at his boots.

"Oh, a soldier should not mind trifles, you know," said he. (Max always fell back on his profession when a question of health came up.) "Besides, I was restless last night, I could not sleep—something in the atmosphere, I suppose—and there was nothing for it but to turn out early this morning. Arthur left the house before I did, and, fancying that he was coming over here to breakfast, I followed. But it seems I was mistaken. If he is coming, he has not yet arrived."

He looked at Norah very steadily as he uttered the last words, and Norah returned his glance unflinchingly.

"I do not think Mr. Tyndale is coming," she said. "At least, he did not mention such an intention when I left him ten minutes ago."

"You have seen him, then!" said Max. He could not help starting, though he added—almost involuntarily, as it seemed—"I suspected as much."

"I have had the pleasure of seeing him by appointment," she proceeded, with a coolness so unruffled that it amused even while it perplexed him. "You suspected *that*, also, perhaps."

"No," answered he, sitting down again in the chair from which he had risen, and looking at her very doubtfully—much as he might have looked at a spot where he had reason to suspect the existence of masked batteries—"no, I did not suspect that."

"Yet what could have been more natural? Think how ruthlessly your friend Mrs. Sandford interrupted the most tender point of our interview at Strafford the other day, and then wonder, if you can, that we should have been anxious to resume it as soon as possible."

"I have ceased to wonder at any thing which a woman may say or do," answered he, dryly. "Whether you are in earnest or whether you are in jest, Heaven only knows—but, in either case, your conduct is quite inexplicable to me."

"Is your cousin's conduct any more explicable to you?" asked she. "Or have you ceased, also, to wonder at any thing which a man may do? Of the two, that would be the more useful frame of mind."

"My cousin's conduct is sufficiently explicable," said he, with his whole face darkening. "He is not the first man whom I have known to forget where his honor and faith are due!"

"It would be rather difficult to decide to whom your cousin's honor and faith are due, would it not?" said she, carelessly. "A little while ago, he thought that they were due to Leslie. Now he decides that they are due to me."

"Does he?" said Max, his face darkening still more; "and I suppose you agree with him?"

"Could I do other than agree with him? I ask *you*, Captain Tyndale—you who have been prejudiced against me from the beginning—whether his honor and faith (as much as he has of either) do not belong to me by a better right than they do to Leslie?"

"If you mean that he was bound to you first, I grant that" (a little reluctantly). "But still—

"But still," her lip curling proudly, "a Bohemian like myself—a bit of vagabond, flirting material—should know better than to take *au pied de la lettre* all that a fine gentleman may chance to say in the course of a summer idling!"

"I was not going to say that, Miss Desmond. You know I was not going to say that!"

"What does it matter whether you were going to say it or not? *You meant it*. And you are not far wrong. Of course, it would be nonsense to talk of Mr. Tyndale's being bound to me if he was not good enough to allow the fact himself."

If she had not taken pleasure just then in mocking herself in the bitterness of her spirit, she might have laughed outright at the expression of Max's eyes as he regarded her—it was so grave and so thoroughly puzzled. What to make of her he certainly did not know. She had been an enigma to him from the first. One while he thoroughly distrusted, and again as thoroughly trusted her. Now he did neither; he simply wondered what she meant.

"Captain Tyndale," she said, suddenly, with impetuous decision, "why should we not speak plainly and understand each other? We have nothing to lose; we may have something to gain by it. I am a waif and a stray, who may naturally be supposed to want a home, who may naturally be excused for taking one, even under slightly unfavorable circumstances, if it were offered. You are in love with Leslie. Nay"—holding up her hand imperatively, as he attempted to speak—"hear me out. We may serve each other's interests better than you think—at least I may serve your interests. What will you give me, for example, to accept an offer of marriage which Mr. Tyndale has generously made to me this morning—the fulfillment, you know, of our two years' engagement—and in this way leave the coast clear for you?"

"Miss Desmond!"

It was fairly a gasp. Never had Max Tyndale been so thoroughly astonished—never had his breath been so completely taken away by any creature born of woman as by this audacious girl. She had pushed her hat back from her flushed, beautiful face; her defiant eyes faced him fully. If she was not in earnest, it was at least certain that no one ever appeared more thoroughly so.

"Well," she said, after a minute, quite impatiently, "I am waiting for your answer. You cannot deny that you are in love with Leslie. I have seen that from the first, and my eyes never deceive me. Now, if I elope with Arthur, as he is kind enough to propose that I should do, you will be able, with the least possible exercise of discretion and judgment, to step into his vacated place."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Max, deliberately, "that you are in earnest—that Arthur has seriously asked you to elope with him?"

"I am so entirely in earnest that the affair is all arranged. We are to take French leave of Leslie's croquet-party to-night, to drive to Wexford, and take the ten-o'clock train for Alton. Arrived in the latter place, we can be married at once, and sail for Europe immediately thereafter. *Voilà tout!*"

"Arthur proposed this!" said Max, his breath coming short and hard, "and you—may I venture to ask what you said to such an arrangement?"

"Can you doubt that I dropped a courtesy, and thanked very humbly the gentleman who was kind enough to reward my long constancy by such a gratifying offer?"

"I can imagine any thing in the world sooner than that you accepted it," said he, bluntly.

"And pray why not?" asked she. "Is it not more than good enough for me? Bah! Captain Tyndale, a truce to nonsense. Tell me, instead, whether you are prepared to take advantage of the golden opportunity which Arthur and I—liberally aided and abetted by Mrs. Sandford—mean to give you?"

"If you will excuse me," said Max, "it is you who are talking nonsense. I no more believe that you have agreed to elope with Arthur—well, than I believe that you have agreed to elope with *me*!" Then, after a short pause: "If you will only meet me frankly, as you did once before, and tell me what he has really said, and what you really mean to do, I shall be infinitely indebted to you."

"That is exactly what I don't know. I have no idea what I mean to do, or what I ought to do," answered she, suddenly dropping her tone of defiant mockery, and looking at him with grave, anxious eyes. "What shall I do? Shall I pack my trunk, and tell Leslie the truth, or shall I simply leave her to learn, suspect, or guess it, as best she can?"

"God knows!" answered he. "The matter has grown so complicated that it is far beyond my diplomatic abilities, which, as you are aware, were never of the best. It seems impossible to leave Miss Grahame in ignorance of Arthur's conduct, and yet it will be a terrible thing to tell her the truth."

"But if we leave it untold, there is Mrs. Sandford ready to enlighten her," said Norah.

He glanced at her quickly and keenly.

"You know, then, that Mrs. Sandford was in the library at Strafford when—"

"When our *preux chevalier* offered me his hand and heart—or I believe it was only his heart on that occasion?" she said, as he paused. "Yes, I know it. So Leslie may hear the truth—or at least a garbled version of it—any day."

"There, I think, you are mistaken," said he. "Mrs. Sandford promised me yesterday that she would, on no consideration, mention the matter to Miss Grahame."

"Mrs. Sandford promised!" repeated Norah. She leaned her head against the back of her chair and laughed. It was impossible to avoid it; she had heard something like this so very recently. "How you men do believe in women—sometimes!" she said. "In pretty, innocent widows especially! I have discovered the 'open sesame' to your affections and trust, and, when I am thirty, I shall act as if I were six. Then I may be able to play eavesdropper in a library-window, and yet be credited with the most high-minded and honorable sentiments imaginable."

"It is scarcely fair to call Mrs. Sandford an eavesdropper," said Max, who liked Miss Desmond's caustic tone with regard to her own sex least of any thing about her. "It was purely accidental her being in the library, and she regretted it exceedingly."

"Indeed!" (very dryly). "I confess my credulity is not as great as your own—perhaps because my appreciation of infantine blue eyes is less lively. It seems to me that if Mrs. Sandford had regretted the accident which revealed to her a matter in which she had no possible concern, she would—have held her tongue."

"I think she will hold it as far as Miss Grahame is concerned."

"That is to say, you have faith in your influence over her. Well, you can best judge of the extent of that."

"I see that you have very little faith in it."

"You are mistaken. I only think that she does not love Caesar less, but Rome more—in other words, her devotion to you is great, but her devotion to mischief-making is even greater."

"We shall see."

"Yes, we shall see. Meanwhile, have we decided upon any course of action? I must determine what to do."

"It is a hard matter to tell," said he, having recourse to the ends of his long mustache, and beginning to twist them very hard indeed. After a short time spent in this way, he looked up with a deprecation which sat oddly on his face.

"Don't think me very weak-minded, Miss Desmond, if I beg you to defer any definite action for—say twenty-four hours! Give me this time in which to sound Arthur, and find what he really desires and means to do. I—you can't tell how hard it is for me to make up my mind to the necessity that Miss Grahame must hear the truth."

"And yet how eagerly many men in your position would grasp such an opportunity!" said she, looking at him meditatively.

He flushed—a very unusual thing with him. "Permit me to say that your imagination has led you entirely astray with regard to the feeling which I entertain for Miss Grahame," he said. "I will not deny that she charms my taste more than any other woman I have ever known, and no doubt, if she had been free, I should very easily have fallen in love with her; but she was not free—even in fancy—when I met her first. Therefore, that which might have been love stopped short at sincere friendship."

"Indeed!" said Norah again. It must be confessed that she arched her eyebrows a little incredulously. The young Bohemian had learned to look with very much the eye of a cynic upon any thing verging on platonics.

"Well," she said, after a short pause, "I am quite willing to give you twenty -four hours in which, to decide what 'sincere friendship' may dictate with regard to telling Leslie the truth. But I should not advise you to be influenced by any thing which your cousin may promise or affirm. Captain Tyndale," she said, with sudden energy, "there is no truth in that man! If you do not realize and remember this, you will regret it."

"I realize it fully," answered he, somewhat sternly, "and I do not think there is the least danger of my forgetting it."

At this point the conversation ended. The clock struck eight, and, like another Cinderella, Norah rose. "I must go," she said. "I have my breakfast toilet yet to make, and if I stay longer, some one may come down and find us *t àe-àt àe*, which would be awkward—for you!"

"Pray don't trouble yourself on my account," said he. "I am not particularly afraid of Mrs. Grundy."

But, as he spoke, she left the room.

At breakfast everybody seemed languid—a very usual result of the exhausting heat of a Southern summer-night. As they came in one after another, the gentlemen in cool linen, the ladies in their lawns, significant signs of lassitude showed in their faces and movements. Mrs. Middleton did not appear at all, and Leslie looked unusually pale as she sat at the head of the table pouring out coffee, which was as clear as brandy and "strong enough to knock a man down," the cook had said. Mrs. Sandford seemed to have fared better than any of the party, though she was most voluble in her complaints of enervation and heat. When Norah came in, she found her describing graphically her attempts to sleep during the night. "What between the mosquitoes and the heat, one was in a regular quandary," she said. "One could not put up one's bars, on account of the mosquitoes, nor keep them down on account of the heat. I confess I spent the night doing first one thing and then another."

"And I spent it in smoking," said Carl, dropping a lump of sugar into his coffee-cup and motioning the cream-jug disdainfully away. "What a pity you had not thought of that! It would have enabled you to defy both mosquitoes and heat."

"I will take a supply of paper and tobacco up-stairs with me to-night, and amuse myself making cigarettes," said she. "Miss Desmond, will you join me?—Or, better still, can't we *all* sleep to-day, and spend the night on the lawn?"

"Some of us might be very well disposed to sleep to-day, without any ultimate design of spending the night on the lawn," said Mr. Middleton. Then to Carl: "Will you tell me what possessed you to get up and knock the chairs about over my head at daylight this morning?"

"I had really forgotten that your head was below me," answered Carl, "but I cannot remember that I did any particular knocking about of chairs. I chanced to be up at daylight simply because I had *been up* all night."

"It was you, then, whom I heard going down-stairs somewhere about five o'clock?"

"It may have been I: I did go downstairs shortly after that hour."

He looked across the table at Norah as he uttered the last words—it was a look compounded strangely of misery and triumph—a look which said as plainly as words could have done, that he was aware of her interview with Tyndale; and unfortunately others besides Norah were able to read its jealous significance. These others were Mrs. Sandford and Leslie—Max might be added, only Max understood the full meaning of the glance, which they did not. A sharp pang seized Leslie's heart. At that moment she thought only of Norah. What was Norah doing?—what was going on between Carl and herself?—what did that glance mean? It was too plainly, too desperately in earnest, not to mean something. In truth, Carl had forgotten himself and shot a veritable thunder-bolt of war out of those brown, laughter-loving eyes of his. Norah received the thunder-bolt composedly, but Mrs. Sandford gave a little dramatic start and looked at Max. She remembered the note of the night before, and it suddenly occurred to her, as it had occurred to Carl, that it might have meant an appointment.

Nothing more was said on the subject, however, and breakfast passed rather more silently than this sociable meal usually did at Rosland. After breakfast Max pleaded "business" as an excuse, and went back to Strafford, much to Mrs. Sandford's disgust. She had flattered herself that her presence was the magnetic attraction which had drawn him forth at such an early hour, and she had intended to take him into the shrubbery again for the benevolent purpose of confiding to him the whole history of the note at night, and the appointment of the morning. But Max was deaf to her hints, and blind to the imploring glances of her eyes. Back to Strafford he went, and the pretty mischief-maker was left disconsolate. Carl, meanwhile, had met Norah in the hall after breakfast, and spoken in the most open and decided manner.

"I must see you alone," he said. "Will you come and take a walk with me?"

"Is there any necessity why you should see me alone?" she asked. "It is very warm for walking."

"We can go to the summer-house," he answered. "It will not be much warmer there now than it was at five o'clock this morning."

In making this remark, he was not aware that Mrs. Middleton was coming down the staircase just behind him, else he might not have spoken either so loudly or so significantly. Norah, who was aware of the fact, saw at once that she could not provoke any further allusion to her five-o'clock appointment. She extended her hand, therefore, and, lifting her hat from the table near by, said, coldly:

"We can take a short walk, if you desire it."

He had no cause to congratulate himself, however, for no sooner were they safely out of the house than she turned upon him haughtily.

"What is the meaning of this?" she 'asked. "What right have you to demand an interview with me in such a manner as this?"

"As much right as Mr. Tyndale had to appoint one, I suppose," answered he, losing all control of himself.

But he saw in a moment that he had made a mistake. There was nothing of tameness in the lightning that flashed upon him from Norah's eyes.

"You forget yourself!" she said. "The distinction which makes a difference between Mr. Tyndale and yourself is the distinction of my choice. I chose to meet him this morning: I do not choose to walk with you now. Therefore, I shall return to the house."

She turned majestically; but, as she did so, he turned also, and, keeping close to her side, spoke with imploring haste.

"Pray forgive me!" he said. "I have offended you. I should not have said that. But, if you could know how wretched, how miserable, I am!—"

It was almost identically the same thing which Tyndale had said before him. At this repetition, Norah's patience—never, as we are aware, of particularly long tether—altogether gave way.

"And, pray, why should I desire to know?" she asked. "It cannot be particularly interesting to learn exactly how wretched and miserable you may chance to fancy yourself. On the contrary, you must excuse me if I say that a spy deserves to be miserable!"

"And you think I am a spy!" he said, a deep, burning flush overspreading his face.

"Can I think otherwise?" she asked, pausing for the better convenience of facing him. "Can you deny that you watched, that you even followed, me this morning? What is that but the conduct of a spy?"

"It is the conduct of a man who loves you too well to think of any thing but that love!" he answered.

But the manner in which her short upper lip curled was not particularly encouraging to this plea. "A man of honor loves like a man of honor," she said. "He may forget every thing else, but he never forgets his honor."

Carl's brow knitted, and his hands involuntarily clinched themselves. It was hard work to keep down the excitement within him, hard work to allow no expression to the overmastering force of his jealous and resentful passion.

"I do not think that I have quite forgotten my honor," he said, with a sort of forced calmness that sat strangely on him, and did not promise exceedingly well for fair weather ahead in the way of temper. "At least I have never made love to one woman while I was engaged to another."

"What extraordinary self-control!" said Norah. "But, if a man has never robbed a henroost, is that any reason why he should feel particularly virtuous in stealing a hare?"

It was now Carl's turn to draw himself up haughtily: the homeliness of the comparison made it doubly odious.

"You misunderstand me entirely if you think that I acted as a spy upon your movements this morning," he said. "I spoke the honest truth at breakfast when I said that I had been up all night, and I was just thinking of turning in when I saw you leave the house and cross the lawn. I was very much surprised—you can credit that, I am sure—and, suspecting that you had gone to meet Tyndale, I—I simply wished to set my suspicions at rest one way or another. So I followed you, and, as soon as I saw that you *had* gone to meet him, I came away."

"Naturally after having gained all that you wanted," said she.

"And now," said he, ignoring the contemptuous indifference of her tone, "I want to ask if this is to continue? How has this man so much influence over you, that you—you whom he has denied and insulted—will accord him private interviews, and keep appointments which he has made?" Then, waxing more passionate: "How does he dare to trifle with you like this? Is it because he knows, or thinks, that you have no defender? O Norah—Miss Desmond—only say one word, and I will show him how far you are from being defenseless!"

All this, which might have been very absurd and melodramatic, was, in truth, so deeply, tragically earnest, that even Norah felt no inclination to laugh. Young as she was, she had seen much of the mischief which the passions of men sometimes work even in this eminently practical age of ours, and therefore she felt a little uneasy as she faced the desperate, passionate eyes of the man before her. She certainly did not want another complication of trouble on her hands. Perhaps it was on this account that her voice was softer when she spoke again.

"How often must I tell you that I need no defender? I am able to take care of myself if a dozen Arthur Tyndales were matched against me, instead of one!"

"Are you sure of that?" he asked. He did not say, as he had done once before, that he knew she was. Besides being desperate and passionate, his eyes were just then full of painful doubt. Like Max, he too was puzzled what to think of her.

"You know how I love you," he went on, wistfully, after a moment. "You know how happy I should be if you would only make this love of some account to you!—if you would only let *me* make it a shield to hold between you and the world! If you would only give me the right which, if you do not give me, I may take for myself, to call this scoundrel to account! I have tried to be patient, but I can bear it no longer—Norah, is there *no* hope for me?"

Norah looked at him intently as he stood before her—eager, impassioned, desperately in earnest. The protection that he offered was much, the love that he offered was more, the wealth and position that he could give were most of all in the scale of temptation to this girl who had been an outlaw from her birth. But outlaw and Bohemian though she was, the instinct of the woman was strong within her—that divine instinct which, unwarped by social training, recoils even from love, when love in turn does not rise to welcome it.

"Why should I give you hope?" she asked at last, very slowly. "I suppose I ought to thank you for loving me—though really I should have much preferred you had not—but I do not love you."

"That may be because you still love Arthur Tyndale," said he, bitterly.

It would have been an ill-advised speech to make to any woman. To Norah Desmond it was a speech which signed and sealed his metaphorical death - warrant at once. She drew herself up to the full height of her stately figure, the eloquent blood flashing into her fair cheeks, her eyes expanding with their superb full-orbed glow.

"A few minutes ago I was foolish enough to imagine that the sentiment of love included that of respect," she said. "You are kind enough to show me my mistake. At least, it is impossible to imagine that you can entertain the faintest semblance of such a feeling for the woman whom you insult by declaring that she may be in love with the man who is engaged to her sister! Understand, once for all, that this subject is ended between us!" she went on, with a sharp edge to her voice. "If you have clung to a single thread of hope up to this time, I snap it now! Henceforth you have no concern with me or my affairs. It does not matter to you what I choose to do, or whom I choose to meet. When you made yourself a spy upon me, you ended at once and forever any regard which I felt, or might have learned to feel, for you!"

Pitiless as youth is prone to be, and too angry to care what dangerous strife of passions she might have awakened, she turned and walked away, leaving those stinging words behind her. This time Carl made no effort to follow. He only felt, as he watched her cross the shadow-dappled lawn and enter the house, that he had, with rude, impatient hand, shaken down his last leaf of hope.

## CHAPTER XXI.

"Not from the heart beneath  
'Twas a bubble born of breath,  
Neither sneer nor vaunt  
Nor reproach nor taunt  
See a word how it severeth!  
Oh, power of life and death  
In the tongue, as the preacher saith!"

"LESLIE," said Mrs. Middleton, gravely, "I really do not like the manner in which things seem to be going on between Carl and Miss Desmond."

For a wonder, the two ladies of the house were alone. After Max had taken his departure, and Norah and Carl had disappeared, Mrs. Sandford had retired to her chamber—in a fit of misanthropy, probably—and Mrs. Middleton, entering the sitting-room, found Leslie quite alone

and quite idle, with a strange, preoccupied look on her face. It was so unusual to see Leslie idle; and so entirely without precedent, to see her wear that introspective expression, that her aunt might have been startled into uneasiness if her thoughts at that time had not been full of Carl's infatuation and its probable consequences. As it was, the significant attitude, and more significant expression, only made a momentary impression upon her.

"What has happened, auntie?" asked Miss Grahame, looking up. "What is going on between Carl and Norah that you do not like?"

"You might see what is going on," answered the elder lady, in a vexed tone. "Of course, you may say that flirtation does not generally mean any thing; but when it is flirtation between a man as headstrong as Carl, and a girl who is naturally anxious to establish herself in life, like Miss Desmond, it may come to mean a great deal."

"I am afraid Carl is very much in love with Norah," said Leslie, in the tone of one who makes a reluctant admission. "But I really do not think she is in the least in love with him."

"In love!" repeated Mrs. Middleton, impatiently. "Who talked of her being in love? Do you suppose that a woman like Miss Desmond is likely to marry *for love*?"

"I don't know," answered Leslie, doubtfully. Somehow the question brought a slight cloud over her face. Was she only just beginning to realize how little she knew of this strange sister of hers?

"The mere idea is absurd!" said her aunt, with decision. "Women of Miss Desmond's stamp—I put the unfortunate circumstances of her life entirely out of consideration—are the last women in the world to introduce a matter of sentiment into the important business of their establishment. If Carl is mad enough to offer himself, you may be sure that she will accept him without any hesitation on the score of what she may or may not feel for him!"

"Carl has been in love very often before," said Leslie, by way of consolation.

"That makes it all the worse," promptly rejoined Mrs. Middleton. "He has now passed the age for boyish fancies, and this is likely to be a serious matter. You know his temperament—you know how impulsive he is about every thing. Leslie, I am sorry to reproach you, but if you had only listened to the advice of your uncle and myself, none of this trouble would have come to pass."

"Yet I did not think of myself—I meant to act for the best," said Leslie. She spoke more to herself than to her aunt. She seemed to be answering some inward appeal. She had not thought of herself, she had meant to act for the best—for Norah and for Kate—why, then, should this strange, new suspicion, this complicating trouble of more than one kind, have sprung from what she had done?

"My darling, who knows that better than I?" said Mrs. Middleton, coming over and kissing her. "Don't think that I am blaming you—I would not do that for the world—I only mean, *if* you had listened, Leslie!"

"Yes, I know it is all my fault," said Leslie. "You may blame me as much as you like, and I am very sorry that I have brought anxiety to Uncle George and yourself; but still I have a conviction—it is borne in upon me, as the Quakers say—that Norah will never marry Carl."

Mrs. Middleton shook her head. Just then she stood as the personification of worldly wisdom, and worldly wisdom declined to credit the idea of a girl, without a shilling, refusing to marry a man who was young, sufficiently good-looking, of fair fortune, and unexceptionable social position.

"There is no question but that she will marry him if he is foolish enough to offer himself," said the worldly-wise woman. "If you could have heard what I did a few minutes ago! I was coming down-stairs, and they were in the hall. Carl asked Miss Desmond to go to walk, and she answered that it was too warm. Then he said, in the most significant tone—a tone which plainly meant something which they both understood—that they could go to the summer-house, where it would not be warmer than at five o'clock this morning. Miss Desmond was apparently about to refuse, but, looking up at that moment and seeing me, she took her hat and went. Now, Leslie, I

would not say any thing in the world to hurt your feelings, but you can ask yourself whether any but a very fast girl would be likely to act in such a manner as that."

"In such a manner as what? It does not follow that Norah was at the summer-house at five o'clock, because Carl said that it is no warmer there now than it was then," answered Leslie, though her heart sank. She remembered the glance at the breakfast-table—a glance which did not look much as if Carl had been the companion of Miss Desmond's walk, or the person with whom she kept an appointment.

"The tone was more significant than the words," said Mrs. Middleton, whose eyes and ears were both more than ordinarily quick. "My dear, there was something connected with the summer-house at five o'clock, you may be sure. When Miss Desmond saw me she changed color, and you may judge whether she was likely or not to have done *that* without cause."

Leslie answered nothing. She knew Norah's supreme self-possession too well to deny this telling point.

"Besides," said Mrs. Middleton, "I asked Robert, whom I met a moment later, if he knew whether any one had left the house very early this morning. He said that the glass door at the end of the side-passage was ajar when he first opened the house, and that about seven o'clock Miss Desmond came in from the shrubbery."

"But this only shows that she took a walk," said Leslie. Her heart was growing sorer every moment with a soreness of which Mrs. Middleton did not even faintly guess; but she fought loyally for Norah all the same. "Surely, dear Aunt Mildred, there is no harm in that. I don't think the straitest-laced person in the world could call it improper to take a walk in the shrubbery and come back at seven o'clock. As for an appointment with Carl why should she make an appointment with him when they can see each other at any and every hour of the day?"

Mrs. Middleton only shook her head again. Proof she had none; but her conviction was as a mountain.

"There was something more than a mere walk in question," she said. "Carl would never have spoken, Miss Desmond would never have looked, as they did, if there had not been! Leslie, what did I tell you the day that she came? Did I not tell you that I distrusted her? This distrust has grown with every hour since that time until now—now I feel confident that she is playing some underhand game which will shock us dreadfully when it comes to light!"

"How can you say such a thing?" said Leslie. She grew suddenly pale. That feeling which the French call a *serrement du coeur* seized her in its terrible constriction. For a minute she could not utter another word. The scene of the preceding night rose before her with startling vividness; she seemed to be looking again out of the shadowy darkness down the long, lighted room to where Norah sat in all her brilliant beauty at the piano, with Arthur Tyndale's fair, handsome face bending over her. She saw the slip of folded paper pass from one to the other; she heard again Carl's bitter, jealous speech, the memory of which came back to her like a flash of illuminating light: "*Perhaps they lack an opportunity, and desire to make one.*" Was that what five o'clock in the summer-house meant?

But she had a brave, proud heart, and she refused to be overcome by the dark thoughts and darker doubts which rushed upon her. She set her back, as it were, against a wall, crying out to her foes as they came, "I will not yield to you! I will not lower myself, and, it may be, wrong others, by listening to these demons of suspicion and jealousy which I have all my life held in scorn!" And she controlled all outward expression of that which wrung her heart as few women of twice her age could have done. It was strange, but it is nevertheless true, that at this moment of all moments—this moment when, in a lower nature, the iron of suspicion would have entered the soul to poison every generous impulse—a dim, struggling sense of something akin to the grand old *noblesse oblige* came to Leslie. "This is the hour of trial," an inward voice seemed to say. "Now prove whether or not you are able to rise above it! Prove whether or not it is of necessity that this pang should debase as well as torture you!"

And she rose above it for the time, at least. There was something almost heroic in the effort which it cost her to turn to her aunt and say quietly, though with slightly quivering lips:

"I think—I hope that you wrong Norah. I do not believe that she would play an underhand game of any kind. As for Carl, I am almost sure that she has no idea of marrying him."

"I can scarcely believe that," said Mrs. Middleton. "But, if it were possible to find out what she really means to do, I should be in a measure relieved. Leslie, I don't want to ask you to do any thing disagreeable, but she is your sister, after all, and—and if you could find out something definite about her intentions—"

"I fear it is impossi—" Leslie was beginning, when the sound of a step, the rustle of a dress in the hall, made her start and turn. She expected to see Mrs. Sandford, but instead it was Norah, who, having advanced to the door, stood there, framed like a beautiful picture.

For a moment that slight, embarrassing pause fell which even the most highly-bred people are sometimes unable to restrain when a person of whom they have been talking suddenly appears.

Then Mrs. Middleton broke the silence with one of her courteous commonplaces.

"I am afraid you found the sun too warm for walking, after all, Miss Desmond."

"It is very warm," answered Norah; but she did not say in words, or imply in manner, that she had returned to the house on account of the heat. "Shall I disturb you if I come in?" she added, after a moment. "You seemed so much engaged that I hesitated."

"There was no need to hesitate; you will not disturb us in the least," answered both ladies.

"Indeed, we were just speaking of you," said Mrs. Middleton, taking the bull by the horns with an ease which did her infinite credit.

"Perhaps for that very reason I had better not come in," said Norah. "You may not have quite exhausted the subject, and, in that case, it would be a pity to interrupt you."

"We were not discussing, but only speaking of you," said Leslie, with her sweet, frank smile. "Is there not a difference? But I think you might trust your character in my hands."

"I think I might," answered the other, looking at her with a quick glance—a glance compounded strangely of various expressions—as she entered the room and crossed the floor.

"Did not Carl come in with you?" asked Mrs. Middleton, looking at her in turn with rather keen scrutiny as she sat down and untied her hat.

"No," was the reply. "I left him in the shrubbery."

"You did not go to the summer-house, then?"

"No" (as indifferently as before), "we did not walk so far."

"It is too warm for walking," said Leslie, quickly. This identical remark had been made, on an average, at least fifty times a day during the last week; but Miss Grahame was too anxious to change the conversation to make any effort for novelty at that moment.

"It *is* very warm!" said Mrs. Middleton, with an equal degree of original brilliancy. Then she opened her fan, and, rising, walked away. "I had almost forgotten that I must see Betsy," she said. —Betsy was the housekeeper, and quite a character in her line.

So it was that the two sisters found themselves alone. Leslie understood perfectly that her aunt had gone, because she was anxious to give her a fair opportunity to sound the depths of Miss Desmond's intentions with regard to Carl; but Leslie, who would not have felt a particular aptitude for such a task at any time, was peculiarly conscious just now of her utter inability to cope with Norah's reticence and self-possession. She might have been a little surprised if she had known that Norah was at that moment endeavoring to determine how she could best sound the depths of *her* character and intentions.

A minute of silence passed, which Leslie was the first to break half timidly:

"We have seen so little of each other since you have been here, Norah! I wonder if you have felt it as well as I? It has really pressed upon me with a constant weight of regret. I have been sorry that there should have been so many people to come between us, so many social engagements to separate us. We are not half so well acquainted as I should like for us to be."

"Perhaps we are sufficiently well acquainted," said Norah, in her careless way. "Perhaps, if you knew me better, you might not like me at all. I think that you do like me a little now," she added, with a slight, wistful cadence in her tone.

"I like you very much, indeed," said Leslie, frankly; "and I am sure I should soon grow to love you dearly. How can you think that, under any circumstances, I could possibly not like you at all?"

"Because we have been reared so differently," was the response. "Because we must, of necessity, possess so little in common. We belong to different worlds; we bear the stamp of different trainings—bear it not only outwardly but inwardly—and hence it may be better that we should see each other (at least, that you should see me) in the superficial manner which you regret."

"I do not believe it," said Leslie. Despite the suspicious tugging at her heart, it was impossible for her to believe it, as she looked at the face before her. "You wrong yourself when you talk so! You do not know what some—some people might imply! They might think that there was a radical defect in your character or your training."

"They would not be far wrong," said the other, bitterly. "A radical defect, did you say? There might be a hundred, for all the effort to the contrary any one ever made—except Kate—Kate, who has been an angel ever since she was born! That is a queer thing to say of the daughter of a Bohemian adventurer, is it not? But, then, she comes of Irish blood. And every man and woman and child in Ireland has the blood of saints and martyrs in their veins. You would never guess it from some of us—from papa or from me, for example—but it comes out in Kate."

"I should like to know Kate," said Leslie, smiling a little. "But, still, I am glad to know you—very glad! And we are sisters, Norah," she added. "Don't forget that! I feel half envious as I see your eyes light up when you talk of Kate. She has had you, and you have had her but *I* have had nobody!"

"You may envy me the possession of Kate as much as you please, and with good cause," said Norah, "but you need not envy Kate the possession of me. I have given her any amount of trouble all my life, or, rather, all her life, for I am the oldest."

"If you have gone through the world turning men's heads and breaking men's hearts as you have done in the short time you have been here, I scarcely wonder," said Leslie. She saw her opportunity, and took advantage of it after a fashion; but she could not help feeling mean as she did so. It seemed like making an attempt to surprise Norah's confidence. She might have spared her compunctions if she had only known how little Norah's confidence was likely to be surprised.

"Have I turned anybody's head or broken anybody's heart since I have been here?" asked that young lady. "I really think you must be mistaken. One cannot work destruction at least, not that kind of destruction without being aware of it."

"Oh! I think one can," said Leslie. "At least, I mean one may learn that one has worked it too late." ("She is thinking of Captain Tyndale!" commented her hearer mentally.) "But I am sure you will not pretend to deny that Carl is in love with you!"

"Why should I deny it?" asked Norah. "It is no fault of mine, even if it is a discredit to him. But I thought you were talking of something which had occurred since I came here."

"And had *this* occurred before you came here, then?" cried Leslie, astonished, but somewhat relieved.—"It has not been my fault, after all!" she thought.

"Perhaps I ought to refer you to your cousin for an answer to that question," answered Norah. "He had never done me the honor to ask me to marry him, before we came here; but, of course, any woman, with a grain of common-sense, knows when a man is in love with her."

"And now that he has asked you—for, of course, he has—" said Leslie, eagerly, "do you mean to marry him? O Norah, if this is so—"

"But it is not so!" interposed Norah, sharply. "What have you seen in me to make you fancy such a thing?"

"I have seen nothing whatever to make me fancy that you are in love with Carl," said

Leslie, thinking that she would sound boldly, since she was sounding at all. "But some women—that is, all women—do not wait for love in making up their minds to marry."

"That is very true, indeed; and it would ill become any one like me to talk high-minded sentiment on such a subject, would it not? But still I may be permitted to say that, if there are other things besides love to be taken into consideration, there are also other things besides carriages and horses—excellent as they are!"

"Nobody can deny that," said Leslie; but she looked a little puzzled what was coming next?

"Sympathy is the first of these things," said Norah. "I don't mean romantic sympathy—union of heart and soul, and all that absurdity—but the rational sympathy of tastes, habits, breeding, and inclinations. This is essential. I would rather share a garret and a crust of bread with a thoroughly sympathetic person, than live in a palace with one whose ideas, tastes, and opinions jarred upon, wearied, and yet controlled me. The next great essential is freedom. I have belonged from my birth to the Bedouins of civilization. A tread-mill of commonplace domestic or social life would prove so utterly unendurable to me that no paraphernalia of wealth—no carriages, diamonds, millinery, or furniture—could reconcile me to it. I should like money very much—as much, I suppose, as anybody else in the world—but money would be to me what it was to Robinson Crusoe on his desert island if I could not go into the world—my world—to spend it. And, in speaking of my world, you must not think that I mean Bohemia—I would gladly shake off that to-morrow, if I could—but I mean the great world, the world in which people *live*, instead of merely vegetating! So, you see"—smiling faintly and a little scornfully "that your uncle and aunt may quiet their anxiety. Though your cousin offers me several very good gifts—himself among the number—they are gifts in a form which would be worse than useless to me. When the first restlessness of youth is over, he will settle down into the groove in which his fathers and grandfathers have walked before him. Do you think that *I* could share such a life? Not with the wild blood that is in my veins—not with the wild love of change and excitement in my heart."

"But do change and excitement make happiness?" asked Leslie.

"Does any thing make happiness?" was the cynical rejoinder. "Of happiness as a positive state, I know nothing. I am only able to make my comparison by the greater or lesser degree of misery and discomfort."

"O Norah!"

"You see, I told you that perhaps it is as well that our acquaintance heretofore has been superficial," said Norah. "If we knew each other well, I should only shock you. One who has been tossed about the world as I have been is not likely to look at things as you do, and I have always observed that happy people regard with suspicion and distrust the unfortunate class for whom life has not been painted in rose-color. They look upon it as a striking instance of the depravity of human taste that anybody should choose to be miserable in such an agreeable world."

"Where did you learn such ideas?" asked Leslie, in a tone of absolute pain. "Would you believe me if I were to say that you are entirely wrong?"

"I am not sure how far I might perjure myself if you looked at me with such wistful eyes as those," answered Norah, smiling. "So perhaps I had better go" (she rose as she spoke). "I was awake very early this morning, and I feel like anticipating my *siesta* by several hours."

"Awake very early this morning!" Those words brought back the doubts which, for a moment, Leslie had forgotten. Her change of countenance was so great and so entirely beyond her control, that Norah saw it and stopped short. "She suspects or knows part of the truth!" she thought; "shall I tell her the rest?" The words necessary for doing so rushed to her lips. In another second they would have found utterance, if the recollection of her promise to Max Tyndale had not risen up and checked them. "Give me twenty-four hours!" he had said, and she had promised to give them to him. To break that promise was impossible, or seemed impossible to her. Still she could test Leslie—she could see if she were ready to meet the truth. That would be something gained.

"We spoke a little while ago of marriage," she said, slowly, "and—of love. Do you agree with me in thinking that if one had put one's whole freight of happiness—you believe in happiness, you know—upon the truth or falsehood of a single person, and that person was false instead of true, it would be better to know it—better to face any bitterness or desolation—than to live a life, however sweet, that was built upon a lie?"

The earnestness of her voice, the steady glow of her eyes, said even more than her words. A great fear suddenly seemed to come over Leslie. She felt as if she were standing on the brink of something terrible, of something that would shatter her whole fabric of existence, of something which she could not bear to know. For the first time in her life, she shrank like a coward.

"I—I cannot tell," she said. "Why should you say such things? No one whom I know could possibly deceive me. But even if it were so"—with a pale, quivering ghost of a smile—"you know that where ignorance is bliss it is always folly to be wise."

"I know it!" said Norah. "Pardon me—it is the last thing in the world which I know or desire to learn. Give me the truth always, at all times, and under all circumstances, even if it crushes my heart and ruins my life! It is entirely a matter of taste, however. Let those live on lies who like them. I have no disposition to force my choice upon any one."

She turned away as she spoke; but Leslie, moving forward quickly, laid her hand on her arm.

"Stop!" she said shortly, almost sternly. "You must tell me what you mean. I scarcely knew what I said, a minute ago. I have no more desire to live on lies than you can have. If—if you know any thing which I ought to hear, for Heaven's sake tell me what it is!"

But Norah had already said more than she intended, and now bound in the fetters of her promise to Max she found herself involved, greatly to her disgust, in the absolute necessity for an evasion.

"I merely put a case to you," she said. "Every one does not think as I do. I was anxious to know how you felt. I am glad that you are brave enough to be able to face the truth if it should ever be necessary for you to do so. None of us can tell how soon such a need may arise. But you must forgive me if I have startled you. I did not mean to do that."

"Did you not?" said Leslie, and the faint, quivering smile passed over her face again. "Yet you spoke very much as if you meant to speak with a purpose. Of course it rests with yourself, however, to give an explanation or not."

But, as she uttered these words, her eyes were less proud than her lips. *They* asked this explanation so plainly, so imploringly, that Norah's conscience smote her as she turned away. She felt that it would have been hard to tell the truth; yet it was still harder to leave it untold. She could not force herself to say, "I have nothing to explain;" so, murmuring some half - incoherent words of regret, she passed from the room, conscious that she left behind an aching heart and a lost opportunity.

This consciousness was not particularly conducive to amiability, as she mounted the stairs to her own room. She felt that every thing was going wrong in the most exasperating manner. Arthur, Leslie, Max, Carl and Mrs. Sandford in the background were so many different sources of annoyance and anxiety. "After all, had I not better pack my trunk and take the train to-night alone?" she thought. "This state of affairs cannot continue long—there is too much electricity in the atmosphere. Perhaps it would be well to escape the explosion."

Full of these thoughts she passed quickly, and, as it chanced, almost noiselessly, across the matting-covered floor of the upper hall to her own chamber. As she opened the door, she paused on the threshold. Had she mistaken the room? A quick glance at the familiar furniture, and her own familiar belongings, assured her that she had not, yet a graceful figure in a Nansook *robe de chambre* was standing at the toilet-table, apparently engaged in critically overlooking its miscellaneous articles.

When Mrs. Sandford retired to her own room after breakfast, she felt as much out of sorts as a very pretty widow, with a satisfactory account at her banker's and a charming wardrobe in

her trunk, could possibly feel. Gratifying to her eyes had been the sight of Captain Tyndale at the breakfast-table, and still more gratifying to her feelings the prospect of a demi-flirtation under the convenient guise of confidential disclosures touching the unquestionable guilt of Arthur and Norah. To have a summary end put to this prospect, was more than she could bear with equanimity. Outraged by Max's departure, she found it necessary to blame some one besides himself. "That creature has been talking to him!" she thought—for it is astonishing how vexation will sharpen even dull wits—"she has been making out *her* case! Oh, if I only could speak to him for a moment—if I could only tell him about the note last night!"

Following hard upon this thought came another. "If I only knew what was in that note! I am sure that it was an appointment! I am sure she went out this morning to keep it—but if I only knew! He could not refuse to believe such clear proof as that; and it really seems an incumbent duty to expose her duplicity. To think of poor, dear Leslie! And then, there is Max himself; if I don't show him beyond doubt what game she is playing, *he* may be in her train next. Men are *such* fools—and I think two strings to her bow are quite enough!"

Moved by such high-minded reflections as these, the next step was to consider how to obtain a knowledge of what was in the note. Clearly there was but one way of doing this—from the note itself. "If I could only see it!" mused she. "If there was only any way of seeing it!" Then, impatiently, "If I could only *think* of any way of seeing it!" When any one has gone as far as this, it is not difficult to go farther, it is not difficult to resolve, "I will *find* some way of seeing it!" To this point Mrs. Sandford soon came. She was not a person who was accustomed to think much of right or wrong, of honorable or dishonorable deeds. What she wished to do was generally her criterion for what she did do. She had never before wished to interfere with any one's private correspondence, but, now that the emergency had arisen, she could see no just cause or reason why she should not find, read, and perhaps appropriate, Mr. Tyndale's note, if Miss Desmond had been obliging enough to leave it within her reach.

Of course, in order to institute such a search, it was necessary to enter Miss Desmond's chamber, but of that Mrs. Sandford thought lightly. It was so easily done that really, as she said to herself, it seemed no more than crossing her own floor. She had only to step through one of her windows to the balcony upon which it opened, and to walk a few steps to find herself at the corresponding window of Norah's room. If they had been established in their present quarters with a view to possible contingencies of this kind, every thing could not have been better arranged. To plan a campaign and to execute it, the greatest generals have sometimes found to be very different things; but, in the present instance, there was no more difficulty in the execution than in the plan. This fair general knew that Norah had left the house with Carl; she fancied her safe for at least an hour's flirtation in the shrubbery; hence, she felt no hesitation in leaving her own room, in walking down the balcony, in opening the half-closed Venetian blinds of the adjoining chamber, and in boldly stepping within.

Everything was cool and fresh and in perfect order. The housemaid had finished her work and gone. None of the loose odds and ends, the thrown-off dresses and discarded ribbons, of a later hour, were lying about. The wardrobe had engulfed the first, the toilet-table, drawers, and boxes, had, no doubt, received the last. Mrs. Sandford's glance traveled critically round the room, as she paused for a moment by the window. "It is handsomer than mine!" she thought, resentfully. "What do they mean by giving it to *her*!" It made little difference in her resentment that, as a matter of fact, any one not accustomed to appraising furniture might have been puzzled to decide which was the most luxurious of the two apartments; those infantine blue eyes knew to a shilling the probable cost of every article on which they rested, and they wandered now from the carved bedstead in an alcove, with its tentlike canopy and draperies of white netting, over the deep chairs and couches, the swinging mirrors, the china, and marble, and lace, and upholstery, which made a very pretty "interior." On none of these things did they rest, however. That distinction was reserved for a small table standing near an end window, on which a large and more substantial writing-desk than ladies generally use was placed.

Now, confident as she was that there was no danger of being surprised, Mrs. Sandford had yet no disposition to waste time; and, crossing the floor, she at once began examining this desk. To her infinite disappointment and disgust, it was locked. She had by this time so fully entered into the spirit of what she was doing that, on making this vexatious discovery, she at once seized a penknife which lay open on the table, and, regardless of consequences, tried to force the lock. If it had been the toy which is usually placed on ladies' desks, she could easily have succeeded, but, for a wonder, it was firm and strong, and guarded its trust faithfully. After a minute she relinquished the attempt as hopeless, and threw the knife impatiently down. "Yet this proves that she has something to conceal!" she said, aloud, almost triumphantly. "If I could only open it—if I only could!"

Since the gratification of this moderate desire was impossible, save by recourse to more desperate measures than any she felt inclined to adopt, her next step was to look about the room and see if she could find any thing of a criminative nature which Norah might have neglected to secure under lock and key. Here, however, she found herself baffled at all points. In the course of her life, Miss Desmond had evidently learned that the best of all policies is the policy of caution. "With an extended knowledge of young ladies' habits, and of the nooks and corners into which they are most likely to cram letters or notes, Mrs. Sandford found herself entirely at fault. A moderate number of laces, ribbons, and frills, rewarded her search; but absolutely nothing of more importance. The only scrap of any thing bearing writing which she found was an envelope that Norah had evidently addressed to her sister, and then thrown aside because a blot of ink had fallen upon it. This she at once put into her pocket. "It may serve to compare with some of her writing," she thought, from which it will be perceived that Mrs. Sandford was in training for a very excellent detective, indeed.

This envelope she found in a side-drawer of the toilet-table. There was a corresponding drawer on the other side, which she had not yet examined. Encouraged by her first measure of success—success which a less sanguine nature might have esteemed very scant—she turned to explore this receptacle. Blank disappointment awaited her blank disappointment, and a dozen or two long-legged hair-pins. It was while she was surveying these with irritation that the door opened, and Norah stood on the threshold!

For at least a minute Mrs. Sandford remained in ignorance of her presence. She glanced over the whole toilet-table critically, opened the powder-box, sniffed at a bottle of Farina cologne, tried the effect of a mosaic ear-ring against her face, and finally, shrugging her shoulders with an air of disgust, turned away, to face the owner of the castle which she had so coolly invaded.

She started violently, blushed crimson, and for a moment was too much disconcerted to find any words with which to account for her presence. In truth, Norah's face and manner were not particularly reassuring. She made no attempt to conceal her indignant surprise and anger as, after a second, she advanced into the room, closing the door behind her.

"Can I do any thing for you?" she asked. "Were you looking for any thing which I can furnish?"

If Mrs. Sandford had been in the palace of truth she would certainly have replied that she was looking for something which Miss Desmond could furnish; but, as it was, she recovered the use of her tongue to answer with ready, though rather lame apology:

"I beg a thousand pardons! I had no idea—I mean I thought you would not mind if I came in to try the effect of your mirror. Mine is one of the horrid broadening kind, and it makes such a fright of me that I never know how I look, or how my dresses sit. My maid complains of it all the time, so I thought I would just step over and try yours. I was sure you would not object!"

The last sentence was uttered with an appealing look, which would have gone straight to the heart of any man in the world. Perhaps it was because Norah was not a man that her heart rather hardened than softened under its influence. She had an instinct of the business which had brought this beguiling creature into her chamber, and she did not feel inclined to deal very gently with her.

"At the risk of seeming rude, I must say that I *do* object to my room being entered in my absence," she answered, even more coldly than she had spoken before. "It strikes me as a little singular, also, that you should never have thought of trying the effect of my mirror until you knew that I was out of the house."

"I am sorry that I should have thought of trying it at all!" said Mrs. Sandford, crimsoning again, partly from mortification, partly from anger. "I certainly did not expect such a reception as this! But of course one must make allowances," she added, bitterly. "Courtesy is not cultivated in Bohemia, I suppose."

"We certainly think it of less importance than honesty," answered Norah, in her clear voice. "You may spare your taunts, Mrs. Sandford! You could not sting me if you were to try all day; and how little you could increase my knowledge of yourself, I may perhaps let you know in the simple fact that I am not at all surprised to find you here in my absence. We are both guests in this house, and, down-stairs, we must of necessity meet on neutral ground; but, in my own room, you are certainly well aware of the reasons why I feel no inclination to receive you!"

"I am perfectly well aware of a reason why *I* might decline to come here," said Mrs. Sandford, thinking that the sooner she carried the war into Africa the better. "You cannot help knowing, Miss Desmond, that, if I chose to open my lips and betray your—your conduct to Leslie, your hours as a guest in this house would be numbered."

"If I might venture to ask you to do me a favor," said Norah, "it would be to open your lips and betray my conduct to Leslie as soon as possible. But, in truth, you dare not do this; you are not certain enough of the ground on which you stand; you did not learn enough in the library window at Strafford. Perhaps it is to a natural desire to increase your knowledge that I owe the pleasure of finding you here to-day?"

Her piercing eyes seconded this point-blank interrogation so well that, with a discomfited sense of getting the worst of this war of words, Mrs. Sandford had no alternative but to turn away.

"I have already told you why I came," she said. "I must repeat, however, that I am exceedingly sorry for having yielded to my impulse. I am so foolish—I always *do* yield to my impulses, and then I often regret it. In spite of your great rudeness, I have no intention of betraying to Leslie any thing which I learned—by pure accident—in the library of that window at Strafford. I may be weak—I have no doubt that I am—but I really cannot think of inflicting such a blow upon her. How you can reconcile your duplicity with your conscience, Miss Desmond—" "

"My duplicity is my own affair," interrupted Norah, "and I fear that my conscience is too callous for even your eloquence to make any impression upon it. Will you excuse me if I say that I came up-stairs to rest, and that solitude is always my great essential for rest?"

"I can excuse any thing that you choose to say on the score of your deficiencies of breeding," answered Mrs. Sandford. "The difficult thing to do will be to excuse myself for having incurred such treatment. I shall not forget it, Miss Desmond you may be sure of that!"

"If your memory is equal to your invention, I can readily credit that," said Norah, coolly. Then, walking to the door, she held it open, while the other swept angrily out.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been;  
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell;  
Unto thine ear I hold the Dead-Sea shell,  
Cast up thy life's foam-fretted feet between;  
Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen  
Which had Life's form and Love's, but by my  
spell

Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,  
Of ultimate things unuttered the frail screen."

IT was probably a good thing—it was certainly not a thing to be regretted—that, when Max reached Strafford, he found Arthur absent. The latter had returned to the house, breakfasted, ordered his horse, and ridden off, without telling any one where he was going or when he would be back, the servants reported. Questioned respecting the time which had elapsed since he left, they agreed in affirming that it had not been more than an hour—at which information Max frowned impatiently. If he had only been a little earlier, he thought—and yet he was conscious that he was not in fit condition to see Arthur. Though of a cool temperament, and accustomed more than most men to holding himself well in hand, he was at that time suffering such a revulsion of feeling against his cousin, that, if he had found him at once, he might not have been able to restrain its expression within any thing like reasonable bounds. Not that he was in any sense carried away by passion, but a stern sense of wrathful indignation, largely seasoned with contempt, possessed him, and seemed to demand immediate and strong utterance.

This utterance it would certainly have found, with doubtful results, if Arthur had been within reach. It has been already said that perhaps it was a good thing he was not. The process of relief called "speaking one's mind," rarely does much good to any one concerned, save to the speaker; and, in this instance, it might have done a great deal of harm. Without any taint of Phariseeism, Max's sentiments were certainly stronger than most men of the world would have sanctioned, since it is the fashion of the world to deal leniently even with what it disapproves. There are men and to spare of conventional integrity who would have regarded lightly enough such an offense as that of Tyndale's, but Max was not one of them. Perhaps his profession might account for a certain rigidity in his manner of viewing things, but undoubtedly there seemed to him no excuse for Arthur's conduct. A record of such mingled weakness, perfidy, deception, and cowardice, had, in his eyes, nothing to redeem or palliate it. "If he had only been true to anybody or any thing!" he muttered, more than once, as he paced the terrace, in sentinel-fashion, to and fro. But that was the darkest point of all; he had been true to nobody—to nothing! Regarding the latter, as he had of late been in the habit of regarding it, from a double point of view, Max felt unable to decide whether Norah or Leslie had been most wronged. "The Bohemian girl has been his match, however!" he thought, with a certain grim triumph and then he melted into absolute tenderness over the recollection of Leslie's wasted love and abused faith.

The latter consideration brought his mind back to Norah's recommendation of the morning—her assertion that if Arthur were once removed from Leslie's life, he (Max) might, by the exercise of common discretion and judgment, step into the vacated place. Still pacing back and forth, watching the shadows shorten toward noon, and waiting for Arthur's return, he let his reflections turn from the more vexatious view of the subject to dwell on that audacious proposal. "Was she in jest or in earnest?" he thought—puzzled as many a straightforward man has been puzzled before him by a woman's chameleon moods. "Did she take me to be a scoundrel or a lover on the melodramatic model, ready to profit on another man's dishonor? or was she only amusing herself by an attempt to play upon my credulity?" This question being rather difficult to answer by one not versed in the abstruse study of feminine ethics, our *chasseur* shook his head over it. But, like moths around a candle, his thoughts still fluttered about the memory of Norah's eyes and smile. Not at all a woman in his style—not in the least a woman whom he admired—still, a woman with a charm, he could not but confess. A creature of infinite variety, energy, and resource, to whom he could not deny the grace of fascination, however much he might prefer something gentler and more feminine. Then his thoughts received a new impetus of indignation in the recollection of how Arthur had distorted every feature of her character in his description of it—how he had drawn its noble outlines rudely, and dashed its fine tints with vulgar coloring. What could be said of a man who thus willfully added slander to deception? This was the text of

Max's meditations, when suddenly a graceful figure which he knew well, but was not at that moment expecting to see, mounted the terrace-steps and advanced toward him.

The encounter was a surprise on both sides. Although Arthur had emerged from the large gate which shut in the stable domain, and followed a path which led to the foot of the terrace, he had not noticed Max, while Max, on his part, had seen nothing of him. Both men, therefore, started, and involuntarily drew back a little.

"By Jove! are you here?" said Arthur, in no very gracious tone.

"So you are back at last!" said Max, rather curt in turn.

"Is it remarkable that I should be back?" asked the former, with a touch of defiance in his manner—a manner which a great many people, who ought to know better, assume when they desire to place themselves on the defensive.

"Not at all remarkable," was the reply. "I was only surprised to see you so unexpectedly."

"I came up from the stable—I have been over to Wexford," explained the other, carelessly. Then he gave a somewhat forced laugh. "I should rather express surprise at seeing you!" he said. "I supposed you were over at Rosland—you must have gone out very early this morning, for you were not here at breakfast."

"I was very little behind yourself in going out," answered Max, thinking, perhaps, that he might save time by plunging into his subject at once. "The only difference was, that you came back to breakfast, and I did not."

"Behind *me*!" Arthur echoed. According to his usual fashion, he changed color vividly this time more from anger than confusion. "I was not aware," he said, haughtily, "that my goings - out or comings -in concerned you in the least."

"You are quite right," returned Max, deliberately. "They do not concern me in the least—except in so far as they concern a matter in which you have more than once explicitly requested my interference."

"If I was fool enough to request your interference at one time," said Arthur, angrily, "understand that I quite as explicitly request your non-interference now! Whatever I may choose to do, or leave undone, is none of your affair."

"You are mistaken about that," said Max. He did not lose control over himself, though the manner of the other did not incline him to adopt any great degree of conciliation. "What you are proposing to do or to leave undone may be more my affair than you imagine."

"Indeed!" said Arthur, with an angry sneer, which was not a striking success as a sneer. In truth, angry men should never attempt to employ this potent weapon of offense, for, in order to be effective, a sneer should always be passionless. Perhaps Arthur felt this, or perhaps there was something in the keen dark eyes regarding him which made him change his tone. At all events, he did change it. "Don't be a fool, Max!" he said, impatiently. "You know, as well as I do, that this is nonsense—more than nonsense, indeed, if I chose to resent it! I was absurd enough to give you some excuse for your interference, and so I shall let it pass. But I insist upon your dropping the subject at once and finally!"

"Suppose I decline to do so?"

"Then I shall decline to listen to you. I have had enough—more than enough of this!"

"I scarcely think you will decline to listen to me when you hear that I come from Miss Desmond."

"And, pray, why should I not decline to listen to you even then? What is Norah Desmond to me that I should give any more attention to her messenger than to herself?"

"What was she this morning when you asked her to elope with you?"

"So!" said Arthur, drawing in his breath with a sharp, quick sound. "You have heard that, have you?" Then, with a short, harsh laugh: "You were fool enough to believe it, were you? How completely she must have drawn you into her net! But I should have thought even you knew Norah Desmond better than that!"

"Do you deny it?" demanded Max. There was a tense chord in his voice which the other scarcely understood. Something like a slight quiver passed over him. As yet he held his indignant passion well in leash; but, if the denial came—

It did not come. Even Arthur Tyndale shrank from such downright perjury. Not so much because it was a perjury, as because he had a wholesome fear of Norah. It was one thing to insinuate that she had spoken falsely, another thing openly to declare it. His courage, which was quite equal to the first achievement, failed a little at the last. He turned in wrathful impatience upon his cousin.

"I shall say nothing about it, one way or another!" he cried. "Again, I repeat that it is no affair of yours. Why the devil do you insist upon interfering like this?"

"Because I mean to know definitely what you intend to do!" the other answered, sternly. "It is too late to take this tone with me. You invited my interference in the first instance; there are others who have as good a right as yourself to do so, who have invited it, in the second."

"I suppose you mean Norah Desmond?" said Arthur, with the bitter inflection of contempt which invariably accompanied his utterance of her name. "But, by Heaven! there is no interference which I will not tolerate sooner than hers!"

"I see that you have lost all sense of reason for the present," said Max, curtly. "It will be useless to attempt to talk to you unless you can listen in a different spirit from any you have displayed as yet. I shall walk to the end of the terrace," he added. "If you are gone when I come back, or, if you still refuse to listen to me, then I shall go, and your last chance of obtaining any consideration at Miss Desmond's hands will be over."

As he uttered these words, he turned away without giving the other time to speak, and walked slowly around the terrace. When he gained the end, he paused and stood still for a few minutes. Probably he felt that he, as well as Arthur, needed this little breathing space. It was the thought of Leslie which had made him exercise so much self-control, and now he was conscious of a necessity to gird himself up, as it were, with that thought afresh—with the memory of her tenderness, her sweetness, her grace, her devoted love for the man behind him, her (he thought) entire unsuspiciousness. If it seemed hard that she should never know of what poor clay her idol was made, that, as Norah had said, she should "go through life holding a lie for truth," still Max was enough a man of the world to know that she was not singular, either among men or women, in that fate. If it is true in countless instances that—

"We loved our lost loves for the love we gave them,  
And not for any thing they gave our love,"

it is still more true that there could be no sadder revelation on this sad earth of ours than the revelation of the wandering of those hearts which we have fancied truest, tenderest, most our own. This pang Max was determined should be spared Leslie. "It is not as if she could make another life for herself!" he muttered. "It is not as if she had the facile power of forgetting of an ordinary woman; or her sister's pride and courage. It would be a shock which might darken her whole life. Arthur's impressions are so evanescent that, when Miss Desmond goes away, he will most likely return to his allegiance, and be all that he was before. Not worthy of her—never, under any circumstances worthy of her—but one of the necessary compromises of which life is full!"

Braced by this cheerful view of things, Captain Tyndale turned at last to retrace his steps. The terrace-walk curved so that he could not see the spot where he had left Arthur, and his mind was naturally full of uncertainty concerning that unmanageable person. Would he still be there? Had he definitely taken leave of his senses, or was it only a temporary aberration which might be over, in a measure, at least, by this time? In another second he would turn the corner of the house, and the question would be answered. As he turned it, a quick, blank feeling of disappointment settled over him instantly. "He has gone," he thought. The next moment showed him that he was mistaken. Arthur was pacing up and down the path which he had himself followed an hour before.

Seeing his approach, the young man paused abruptly. His handsome face was paler and firmer than Max had ever seen it before; his violet eyes had a steady, angry lustre in them. Plainly, if cooler thoughts had come to him, milder ones had not.

"Well," he said, before the other could speak, "you see I have waited for you. But it has not been to listen to any thing which you may have to say either in your own character or in that of envoy. It has only been that I may request an explanation of your extraordinary conduct that I may learn how it is that you think yourself at liberty to treat me in such a manner as this?"

"I did not come here to discuss my own conduct," answered Max. "Think what you like of it! Just now I am occupied with yours. Just now I must repeat the question which I have already asked: What do you mean to do with regard to your engagement?"

"And I repeat what *I* have already asked: How does any thing connected with it concern you?"

"Granting that it does not concern me at all, you certainly cannot deny that it concerns Miss Desmond. You may consider me as her envoy, if you prefer to look on me in that light."

"Her dupe and tool, more likely!" was the bitter response. "But why should she make such an inquiry?"

"Simply because it is necessary with reference to her own conduct," answered Max, who was beginning to lose patience. "Are you aware that you may do yourself infinite harm by this obstinacy?" he asked. "Unless you desire to break your engagement, Miss Desmond, on her part, is willing to leave the truth untold, if you will pledge yourself to keep faith with her sister."

"Miss Desmond is infinitely generous!"

"She is certainly more generous than many women would be!" said Max, with growing sternness. "If you reject her offer, however," he added, turning away, "my interference is at an end. I have the honor to bid you good-morning!"

"Stop!" said Arthur, quickly. "Don't go like this! Are you in earnest? does Norah offer to bind herself to—to tell her sister nothing?"

"I think I may safely say that she offers even that, in case *you* bind yourself in turn to keep faith with Miss Grahame, and to suffer her to suspect nothing."

"By Jove!" said Arthur. For a minute he looked quite astounded. It seemed Norah's special province to go through life astonishing people. "I did not expect this," he said, slowly. "I thought it was all over this morning. She left me like a tigress, and I was sure she had told Leslie every thing before the present time. I was so confident of it that I have made my arrangements to leave!" he added, shrugging his shoulders. "It would be too hot for me here after things came out. My ticket is in my pocket. I meant to go up to Alton to-night, and—and anywhere else that I felt inclined afterward. It would have been rather a relief to be rid of the whole infernal business!" he said, with a tone of genuine regret in his voice. "But, if it is to go on, of course this arrangement will be best. Only you must understand one thing: I shall not trust Norah Desmond's pledge or promise, either given or sent. I must have *proof* that she does not mean to play me false at last."

"What kind of proof?"

"My letters—the letters of which I have spoken before. Let her return those, and I will know she is in earnest."

"I do not think it likely that she will accede to such a request," said Max. "But I will lay it before her. One thing, however, I know that I am safe in demanding on her part—the return of *her* letters, if you still have them."

"Her letters!" repeated Arthur. "Good Heavens! do you take me for a woman or a fool, that I should be treasuring up such relics? I have not, to my knowledge, a shred of one of them, else she should certainly have it. God knows I want to keep no recollection of her, or the part she has played in my life!" he added, with sudden, bitter passion.

And, little as Max was inclined to trust him, he saw that he was speaking truth, and he knew, moreover, that it is the rarest thing in the world when a man does keep such tokens of the past. It is women, preeminently, who love to make packets of old letters, over which they weep

and sigh, or smile and laugh. Men's lives are too busy, and, as a rule, too practical, for such tender, foolish acts of remembrance.

"And if Miss Desmond refuses as, in my opinion, she is very likely to refuse to return your letters," said Max, "what then?"

The other drew the railroad - ticket of which he had spoken from his pocket and held it up.  
"This is what then!" he said.

Max made one quick step forward—then checked himself and fell back. After all, violence would serve no good purpose. But it was almost a minute before he could command his voice sufficiently to speak.

"Do you mean it?" he asked, hoarsely. "Do you mean that you will dare to leave Miss Grahame like that!"

"I mean," answered Arthur, "that I will not trust Norah Desmond! If she refuses to return my letters, I shall know that she has a trap laid for me, and I am not quite fool enough to walk into it with my eyes open. You may tell her that if you like. I will not live such a life as I have been leading lately! It is infamous!—it is too much to expect of any man! If she refuses to return my letters, I shall leave the country, and she may take the burden of explanation on her own shoulders! It is all *her* fault from beginning to end! It was a cursed day for me when I first saw her face!"

"This is your ultimatum, then," said Max, feeling that he must get away—that he would not be able to restrain himself many minutes longer. "You make the return of your letters an absolute condition for keeping faith with Miss Grahame?"

"Yes, an absolute condition!" said the other, emphatically.

With this understanding they parted. As Max went across the park to Rosland, he could not restrain the indignation which possessed him; and yet even indignation was subordinated by uneasiness. "Is it doing well? is it a thing which can be excused under any circumstances, to put Leslie's happiness into such keeping?" he asked himself. "Is one so false likely to be more constant or more honorable in the future than in the past?" There was only one answer to such a question as this—Leslie had put her own happiness into his hands. No outside person had been to blame for that. The sole point to be considered now was whether to leave her in happy ignorance, or to wake her to bitter knowledge; and this point, as we are aware, Max had long before decided. He shook his head many times, however, as he strolled slowly along through the woods and across the fields. He began to realize that it was a dangerous business—this interfering, even with the best intentions, to make or mar the happiness of others' lives.

When he reached Rosland they were at luncheon, and his entrance created a slight stir of interest in what was else a very languid company. "We did not expect you back so soon!" said Mrs. Sandford, with a subdued flutter, as he sat down by her. She felt, no doubt, that it was on her account he had returned. His heart, or his conscience, or both together most likely, had smitten him after his return to Strafford, and he had come to seek pardon in the depths of her beguiling eyes. Those eyes looked at him with the faintest shade of reproach imaginable gleaming through their gratification.

"You don't deserve to be spoken to!" she confided to him. "Why did you go away this morning and leave me to be so frightfully dull? It was very, very unkind of you!"

"I really cannot flatter myself that I should have had any power to keep the dullness at bay," he answered, impatient of herself and her eyes, yet seeing no means of escape. A glance round the table showed him that everybody was dull and somewhat silent, as people are apt to be in the midst of "one of the warmest days of the season." Carl was the only exception to this rule. He looked restless instead of dull, and Max encountered more than one glance expressive of any thing but amiability leveled at himself by the brown eyes out of which all laughter seemed to have died. "Something uncommon is the matter with that fellow!" he thought, as he seasoned his chicken plentifully with Worcestershire sauce, and answered Mrs. Sandford's remarks with discouraging brevity. Carl, meanwhile, was debating gloomily in his mind whether "that fellow"

was in love with Norah himself, or was merely acting as the envoy of his cousin. The suggestion that any thing but Norah could have brought him to Rosland, would have been scouted contemptuously by this infatuated young man. "He who is giddy thinks the world turns round," and Carl was very giddy indeed at this time. Indeed, he was half mad with love and hopelessness and jealousy, and no more accountable for his thoughts or actions than a lunatic in a strait-jacket.

It is a good thing that there is no Asmodeus to lift the roofs from off our heads, or to open the doors of our hearts and show what thoughts and feelings possess us. If there had been such an inconvenient sprite, he might have revealed the fact that it was a very uncomfortable party who talked commonplaces about the heat, and the coming guests of the evening. Of them all, Norah took things most philosophically. "When the worst comes, I shall simply pack my trunk and leave!" she thought. This resolution was possible to her, who had no keenly personal share in the annoyances—she was not tortured by doubt, or stung with pain, as some of the others were. Next to Norah, Mr. Middleton took things most placidly. He was emphatically of the opinion that the whole business (Carl's infatuation, Norah's visit, and Leslie's engagement understood) was a confounded nuisance—it may even be that he characterized it still more strongly—but a man cannot excite himself with impunity when the thermometer is at eighty-five degrees, and Mr. Middleton dismissed his share of anxiety until cooler weather.

When they were leaving table, Mrs. Sandford said, in a whisper, to Max: "I must speak to you as soon as possible, and *alone*. I have something of the *utmost* importance to tell you. Can you make an opportunity, or shall I?"

"I—oh—I'll do it!" answered he, cast down to the very earth by this bold assault. Where was any hope of rescue or escape? If he allowed himself to be entrapped into a private spot to receive Mrs. Sandford's overflowing confidence, where would it end? when should he be able to see Norah? Just then he could have echoed most heartily Mr. Weller's well-known sentiments with regard to widows. He felt desperate and a desperate idea entered his mind. "I'll make an opportunity as soon as possible," he said. After this, he hurried away in search of Norah.

Instead of Norah, it was Leslie whom he found in the sitting-room, where he had spent so many pleasant hours. It looked as pretty as ever, though he felt instinctively that the charm of repose, which had chiefly made it so delightful, had vanished. The same green stillness brooded behind the half-closed blinds; the table was covered with work and books—new magazines and novels principally; the fragrance of roses was heavy on the air; every thing was outwardly the same that it had been ten days before; but the unseen stir and strife of passion had changed the place. The air, which before was full of peace and serenity, now seemed full of fears, doubts, suspicions—Max wondered if it was only his imagination which fancied this.

Leslie was standing by the centre-table, in the middle of the room, when he came in. He thought how pretty she looked, her slender figure "gowned in pure white," her graceful brown head drooping like that of a classic statue! But there was something pathetic, as well as classic, in this drooping head, and she seemed fingering, half absently, the flowers which filled a large vase in the centre of the table.

"See!" she said, turning with a smile—faint, and evidently forced—when Max came in. "Our poor roses! the heat is too much for them. These are all that the garden affords, and see how imperfect they are—really scarce worth gathering!"

"Very different from those you showed me in May," said he, coming and standing by her. "Do you remember that evening in Alton? How lovely the roses were! and how you laughed at me for not knowing more of their nomenclature!"

"I remember," she said. "You mean the evening that Mrs. Sandford came in, and—and Arthur was there? Yes, they were lovely—every thing was lovely—that evening. But we cannot have the roses of May in July."

"No," said he, looking at her face, out of which its delicate roses had fled. "You are not well," he added, abruptly. "I—I am afraid you may be worrying about something."

"Why should you think that?" asked she, looking at him with a quick keenness in her soft gray eyes. "I am perfectly well, and what should I worry about?"

"Women find a thousand things to worry about, of which a man knows nothing," answered he. "I thought perhaps you might have fancied, imagined something—you are *not* looking well!" he repeated, positively. At that moment he felt a strong and very ungallant inclination to choke Mrs. Sandford. "Had her tongue done this mischief?"

"I was never a person to fancy or imagine things," said Leslie, lifting her lily-like neck proudly. "I have always had a great contempt for people of that kind. They not only make their own misery, but the misery of all around them. They are mean, and suspicious, and—and jealous at last, perhaps! I would die sooner than give way to such an inclination!" cried she, with a sudden pang a rush of unshed tears in her voice, which told her listener the whole story of her struggle.

And what could that listener say? Neither reassurance nor comfort was his to give. Besides, what right had he to offer it to Arthur Tyndale's future wife? His heart was touched as it might have been by the bravely-borne suffering of a child. But Leslie Grahame was no child. She was a woman whom he might once have loved, who might have made his life as different as he would certainly have made hers, if the caprice of Fate had not decided otherwise. Now there was no thought of love in his heart—only pity akin to tenderness, as he watched the quick flush of pain coming and going in her pale cheeks.

"I told you once on that evening of which we were speaking a minute ago," he said, "that, even if one crushed a lily, its fragrance would remain. If you were crushed by the worst trouble in the world, I am sure you would still be yourself, and therefore incapable of an ungenerous thought. But why should you think of such things? There is no need for you to do so."

"Is there no need for me to do so?" asked she, turning suddenly and facing him with a breathless look in her eyes. "On your honor, Captain Tyndale, do you know of no need for me to do so?"

On his honor! What could Max say? Some men have an idea that they can better tell a lie on any thing else than on their "honor." Others, as we are aware, hold that abstraction very lightly indeed. Max was one of the former class. He hesitated, flushed, looked uncomfortable and awkward, when called upon to perjure himself. Leslie turned away with a little dreary laugh in which there was a heart-sick sound, if he had been quick enough to catch it.

"How foolish I am!" she said. "How should you know any thing about it? See what nonsense you have led me into talking! Where is Norah, I wonder? Do you know? And Mrs. Sandford seems to have vanished, too."

"You must not misunderstand my silence," he began; but she interrupted him quickly: "Have I not told you that I am the last person in the world to misunderstand any thing? Tell me whom you would like to take in to dinner, this evening, and I will try to see that you are gratified. Mrs. Sandford?"

"Good Heavens, no!" he answered, in genuine dismay; but, before he could say any thing further to avert such a fate, Mrs. Sandford herself appeared in the open door.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

"How often one dead joy appears  
The platform of some better hope!  
And, let us own, the sharpest smart  
Which human patience may endure  
Pays light for that which leaves the heart  
More generous, dignified, and pure."

SHE was armed and equipped for conquest. Max saw that in a moment, with a sinking of the heart impossible to describe. He was rather blind to the details and intricacies of feminine costume as a general rule, but a sense of danger sharpens the eyes wonderfully, and he perceived at a glance that the brief time which Mrs. Sandford had spent up-stairs had sufficed for several important changes of toilet. He was not sufficiently learned in the names of different articles of dress to have been able to specify that she had donned a different polonaise, and added a butterfly-bow to the already elaborate arrangement of her hair; but he recognized the fact of some change and he knew what it meant!

"I thought you had retired for your *siesta*," said Leslie, turning round from the roses; and then she saw the change of toilet, and knew, also, what it meant.

"I think this is the coolest room in the house," said the pretty widow, with a conscious air. "Mine is really intolerable just now, though it is so pleasant usually. I think warm weather is apt to make one restless. Don't you think so, Captain Tyndale? It must have made *you* restless"—with a little playful arch of the eyebrows—"else you would not have undertaken so many walks through the sun to-day."

"Might not something besides restlessness account for that?" asked Max. He was tired to death of the woman—of her affectations, and mannerisms, and great wide-open blue eyes; but it is not exactly compatible with civility in general, nor with the chivalry due to the fair sex in particular, to turn a deaf ear to remarks which were specially addressed to him, backed by the eyes aforesaid, and a new French muslin polonaise of the latest and most becoming fashion.

"It is not restlessness which draws the needle to the magnet," said Leslie, smiling, for she knew what Mrs. Sandford thought.

"Then, if Captain Tyndale is the needle, somebody else must be the magnet," said that lady.—"Who is it, Captain Tyndale? We insist upon your telling us who it is."

"Do you?" said Captain Tyndale. "But, unless you have thumb-screws at hand, I am afraid there is no chance of your wringing a confession from me."

In this species of nonsense several minutes passed. Max began to feel more and more desperate. Where was Norah? He saw Leslie glance at the clock; he knew that before long she would apologize, retire for her *siesta*, and leave him to his fate—the horrible fate of spending two or three hours of a broiling afternoon shut up in a flower-scented room with Mrs. Sandford. If he could only see or hear any thing of Norah! He began to grow impatient, as well as desperate. She knew—she must have known—that he had come over to Rosland to see her, and yet she had coolly taken herself out of his way. "She might have spared me half an hour from her beauty-sleep, or from her flirtation with Middleton!" he thought. "It was not for myself that I wanted to see her!"

Feeling injured and indignant, he began to meditate how he could best make his escape, when the sudden tramp of a horse's feet on a carriage-drive beyond the veranda made them all start. "Is any one coming?" asked Leslie, in that tone of horror-stricken deprecation which the approach of a visitor so often calls forth. She opened the blind cautiously and looked out. "No; it is only Carl!" she said, with a sigh of relief. "What a strange time of day to be going anywhere!"

"He is a strange kind of person," said Mrs. Sandford, languidly. There was nobody she felt less interest in than Carl, for the very good and sufficient reason that he had not paid her the compliment of evincing the least interest in her.

"An untimely fancy for exercise seems to have seized more than one member of your household," said Max, starting up, and walking to another window—a window which, being on the shady side of the room, stood partly open, and commanded a view of the grounds beyond. "Is not that Miss Desmond yonder?"

"Upon my word, I believe it is!" said Leslie, aghast. "Is she trying to get a sunstroke or a fever, do you suppose, that she has gone to walk at such an hour?"

"Perhaps she has an engagement to meet Mr. Middleton somewhere," said Mrs. Sandford, putting up her eye-glass, and scrutinizing the graceful figure which at that moment was thrown into vivid relief by a deep-green hedge. "Miss Desmond has a fancy for that kind of thing, I believe. It gives a spice of—of what you might call Bohemianism to her intercourse with gentlemen."

"I think you are mistaken," said Leslie, quickly. "There are many people who have never lived in Bohemia, who are much more fond of that sort of thing, as you call it, than Norah is; and," added the loyal advocate, proudly, "her society is sufficiently attractive in itself to dispense with any spice of fastness."

"My dear," said Mrs. Sandford, with effusion, "you must really excuse me! I am sure I meant no harm, but my tongue is so heedless, and you certainly are the kindest and most generous person in the world to talk so!"

"I really do not see what my appreciation of Norah has to do with kindness and generosity," answered Leslie, still haughtily in arms.

"Nobody can appreciate her more than I do!" said Mrs. Sandford—which, in a certain way, was quite true. "Nobody can deny that she is very beautiful and very attractive—Good Heavens! Captain Tyndale, what are you going to do?" she cried, breaking off with a sudden exclamation of alarm.

"I don't think Miss Desmond ought to be allowed to take a sunstroke or a fever without a warning," answered Max, who had swung himself over the low sill of the open window to the ground outside. "I am going to warn her, therefore. If she does not choose to listen to me, my conscience will be clear at least."

He stepped ruthlessly across a flower-bed which made a mass of bloom in front of the window, and walked quickly, away in the direction Norah had taken so quickly that a looker-on might have been pardoned for thinking that he was afraid of being called back.

But Mrs. Sandford was speechless. She gazed after him with crimson cheeks and angry eyes; but she had sense enough to say nothing. Leslie, who felt sorry for her, was the first to speak.

"Captain Tyndale will be back in a few minutes, no doubt. He cannot mean to go far in this sun!"

"If he comes back instantly, he will not find *me*," answered Mrs. Sandford, in a voice that quivered with anger, not with tears. She rose as she spoke. Leslie could not help thinking how pretty she looked. Excitement had, as it were, torn off her habitual veil of affectation; the real woman was in arms against the slight which had been passed upon herself and her elaborate toilet. Her cheeks were like carnations, her eyes flashed fire. It was a tempest in a teapot, but even tempests in teapots may sometimes work mischief. At that moment it was a gratifying thought that she could, at least, break her promise to Max, and in that way cause him a little annoyance.

"If Miss Desmond even walks across the lawn, other women must, of course, expect to be forsaken immediately!" she said, with that faint, scornful laugh which is significant of any thing in the world but amusement. "For a young lady who keeps so many strings to her bow, she manages them all with a great deal of skill!"

"It was not Norah's fault that Captain Tyndale went after her," said Leslie. "Pardon me, Mrs. Sandford, but you must really understand that I cannot listen—"

"It is not my affair, of course," said Mrs. Sandford, interrupting her, but without any of the honeyed apology of a little while before in her words or voice. "Miss Desmond's admirers, or lovers, or whatever they may be, do not concern *me*. It would be well, perhaps, if everybody could say the same thing; but when a woman has that *insatiable* love of admiration, there is no telling where it will stop!"

"Is it Norah whom you mean has an insatiable love of admiration?" asked Leslie, dully conscious that it was even in this woman's power to add to her pain. "I have not observed it."

"My dear," said the other, solemnly, "what *have* you observed? It is beautiful to see your *perfect trust*, your generous blindness; but, indeed, it is not wise, it is not doing justice to your—"

She stopped short, for Leslie turned toward her with a look on her face such as nobody had ever seen the fair, serene features wear before.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "You said something like this yesterday, but I am not quick to read innuendoes indeed, I should scorn to read almost as much as I should scorn to make them. If you have any thing to say—any thing to tell me—speak plainly, and I will listen to you. But if you only mean to hint and suggest like this, I have heard enough."

"It is impossible for me to speak plainly," said Mrs. Sandford, "at least, not now. But, O Leslie, if you would only open your eyes and look—"

"I have heard enough!" repeated Leslie, haughtily. She turned decidedly and walked away. "I should not be surprised if we had a thunder-storm this afternoon," she said. "The air is sultry."

"I see that I had better go," said Mrs. Sandford, mounting a high horse of injured feeling. "I have driven Captain Tyndale away, and offended you; but it may not be long before you will be sorry for not having listened to me, Leslie!"

"I shall never be sorry for not having listened to anybody who dares not, or will not, speak outright!" said Leslie, turning round again. "I detest insinuation!" she cried, in her proud, passionate, pained voice. "It means something, or it does not. In either case it is the weapon of a—" She stopped abruptly. "Coward," she would have added, if courtesy had not come to her aid in time.

"Oh, pray say what you please!" cried Mrs. Sandford. "People who attempt to serve their friends must always expect to be treated like this. I knew it, of course, but my heart is so easily touched—I could not keep silence! As I said before, you will be sorry—when it is too late, perhaps."

Then she turned hastily and left the room. It was not only the natural feminine desire for the last word, which made her do this; it was a measure of precaution lest she should be forced into a (metaphorical) corner, and made to confess on how little of actual knowledge her insinuations were based. A few broken words on the terrace at Strafford which she had caught, and which might be denied outright by either or both of the parties concerned—it would have been a sore humiliation to be obliged to confess that this was all. No, before she could speak, as she meant to speak, she must have proof, something which could not be gainsaid. "I'll stay here until I find that!" she said to herself, when she gained the solitude of her own room. It was a magnanimous resolution to take, and showed that she was in earnest in her desire to serve Leslie! As a rule, she did not stay at any place where she was not amused, and if Max deserted her standard, amusement (of the kind she liked) would certainly be hard to find at Rosland.

Max, meanwhile, had overtaken, without very much difficulty, the young lady in a purple muslin dress, which had *not* been donned for his benefit, since it was the same in which she had appeared at both breakfast and luncheon, who was sauntering along under a sun-umbrella. Hearing his step, she had paused and turned round brightening into wonderful beauty, he thought, as she smiled at his approach.

"Is that your usual rate of walking?" she asked, as he gained her side. "If so, you must get over a great deal of ground in a very short time."

"Is it your usual custom to come out at three P. M. of a July day? If so, you must be proof against sunstrokes and fevers."

"It is very uncivil to answer a question by asking one."

"I only wanted to show you that other things, as well as your present exercise, may be exceptional."

"My present exercise is for a purpose," said she. "What was the good of attempting to talk to you in the house?—and I saw you had something to say to me."

"You are quite right," he answered. "I *have* something to say to you—something which brought me over from Strafford—but I really cannot imagine how you could have expected me to follow you, without a word to notify me of your intention of going out."

"Are you so stupid that words are necessary for you?" asked she. "I have known some men who might really have dispensed with language. A tone, a glance, was enough for them. One did not need to say, point-blank, 'Monsieur, put on your hat and meet me in the garden.' They knew—they divined—without a word."

"What remarkably clever fellows they must have been!" said Max. "But you might have discovered, some time ago, that I do not belong to such a class. I need words—the plainer the better. The proof of it is that it was only by chance I saw you—only by chance that I am here now."

"You must have been blind if you had not seen me!" said she, impatiently. "What! a woman in a purple dress walk across a green lawn in full view of an open window, and you tell me that it was only 'by chance' you saw her! You ought to have borrowed Mrs. Sandford's eye-glasses! She has so little need for them that she might readily have spared them."

"That would have been turning her weapons against herself with a vengeance."

"You mean that she was so anxious for you to remain? You share the proverbial modesty of your sex, I perceive! But, since you are here, suppose we proceed to business? You did not come for pleasure any more than I did, I am sure."

"Speak for yourself!" said he, smiling. Her dauntless coolness and self-possession amused, even while it piqued him a little. He wondered if it would not be possible to make her cheeks flush, her eyes droop, her ready tongue falter. Nothing was more unlikely, but he had an odd desire to see such a transformation.

"Indeed, I have not the least disposition to speak for you," said she, in answer to his last speech. "You have a tongue: you are able to do *that* for yourself" (this in rather a disparaging tone, as if there might be several other things which he was not able to do for himself). "If it amuses you to walk out here in the heat, I am glad of it; but it does not amuse me in the least, and therefore I wish you would say what you are going to say at once."

"As a preliminary step, can't we sit down somewhere? Perpetual motion is not particularly agreeable in cool weather, but in warm weather it is intolerable."

"There is nowhere to sit, unless we sit on the ground. The rustic seats are all on the other side of the lawn. You might have brought a camp-stool along if you had thought. Then I might have stood over you with an umbrella and a fan."

"The prospect is so entrancing that I have half a mind to go back for the camp-stool."

"Don't expect to find me when you return—that is all."

"Let us try the ground, then," said he, taking out his handkerchief, and spreading it at the foot of a large tree. "Unless you are rheumatic, it is not likely to injure you."

"I am afraid that, if I sit down, you will talk for an hour," said she, frankly; but she sat down, nevertheless. "Now, pray be brief!" she said, as he cast himself carelessly on the warm grass by her side.

"Very well," answered he. "To be as brief as possible, then, I have seen Arthur, and I have found him even more intractable than I expected. His character seems to have undergone the most sudden and wonderful change. He is sullen and defiant, and so impatient of the annoyance, which has been his own work, that I absolutely found him ready prepared to leave the country."

"Indeed!" said she; but she evinced no surprise. "Perhaps his character has not changed so much as you imagine," she added; "perhaps it has only developed. Well, he has made up his mind to leave the country, has he? But how about Leslie? She is not exactly a person whom even Mr. Arthur Tyndale can afford to jilt with impunity. A woman who has wealth, and position, and friends, to shield her, is not like a Bohemian waif. He ought to remember that."

"He is not sufficiently cool at present to remember any thing. But, when I—thinking only of Miss Grahame—ventured to offer forgetfulness, in your name, and silence with regard to the past, he half agreed to keep faith with her."

"Half agreed! Is the man mad? He must fancy himself a second King Louis of Bavaria—able, if he feels inclined, to jilt princesses."

"He professes himself unable to trust your promise. He insists upon some substantial proof that you mean to allow the past to drop into oblivion. I am half afraid to tell you what this proof is."

"Perhaps I can guess," said she, calmly. "He wants his letters, does he not?"

"Yes, he wants his letters."

"Really," said she, with a laugh, "his audacity is greater than even I had imagined! So he thinks himself able to dictate terms to *me*! And suppose I decline to return the letters—what then?"

"I asked him that very question, and he replied by showing me his railroad-ticket. That is 'what, then!' he answered."

"Do you think he means it?" she asked, with a sudden flash in her eye. "Do you think he would dare it?"

"I am sure he means it. I am inclined to think he would dare it. Easiest of all things to a moral coward is the thing called running away."

"But, suppose I run into the house this minute and lay the matter before Leslie's uncle? Cannot he find a remedy? Will he see her treated like this?"

"He would probably insist at once upon her breaking the engagement, and he would certainly forbid Arthur ever to enter his house or claim his acquaintance again."

"Would he do nothing more than that?"

"What else could he do? Gentlemen do not assault each other either with horse-whips or epithets. Dueling is not in Mr. Middleton's line, I imagine; and in any case the man is more than a fool who draws a woman's name into an affair of that kind."

"Then the matter stands thus: I must either tell Leslie the truth, in order that *she* may be able to take the initiative step in breaking the engagement, or I must comply with this coward's demand and return his letters."

"That is the light in which it stands, certainly."

"The coward!" said she, again, between her clinched teeth. "The false-hearted coward! But do you not see that it would be madness to do this?" she cried, turning suddenly, almost fiercely, upon him. "Do you not see that, if I give up these letters, I place myself in Arthur Tyndale's power? My good name lies at his mercy! He could say *any thing* of me, and I should have no power to refute it! You do not think of me—you think altogether of Leslie, Captain Tyndale; but, when it comes to such a point as this, I must think of myself."

"You are mistaken," said Max. He spoke coolly enough, but, as he raised himself with sudden energy from the grass, there was a look of excitement not common with him on his face. "I do think of you; I have thought of you ever since he made the proposal, but I wanted to see what you would say. You are quite right. There are no circumstances which would justify you in resigning those letters to a man whom no pledge of honor seems capable of binding."

"And yet what remains for me?"

"To tell the truth to Miss Grahame."

"You say that?" A look of surprise came into her face. Then she laughed a faint, low laugh, which he did not understand. "You are very generous, Captain Tyndale. I fancied you would have been willing to sacrifice me, and every thing connected with me, to spare Leslie one pang."

"Why should you have fancied such a thing?" said he, almost indignantly. "I know that women are prone to imagination, but still you do not realize as I do, Miss Desmond, what you would be giving up if you relinquished those letters."

"I think I realize perfectly," answered she. "I have seen a great deal of the world, and, as a rule, it does not show its best side to vagabonds. But there are one or two points to be considered," said she, plucking absently at the grass by her side. "In the first place, Arthur Tyndale's life and mine will, after this, lie far apart; it will be out of his power, therefore, to harm me very much. In the second place, he will have no reason to speak ill of me—on the contrary, it will be to his interest to keep all knowledge of our past acquaintance from Leslie."

"It is not safe to trust to such contingencies as those," said Max, earnestly. "You cannot tell how far your life may yet meet, cross, be affected, by that of Arthur. It is as impossible to thrust people as to thrust memories absolutely away; they come back upon us when we are least expecting them. As for his having no reason to speak ill of you, young as you are, you ought to be enough a woman of the world to know better than that. You have stung his vanity, and wounded his pride. Is not that reason enough to make you expect any degree of enmity, any falsity of slander?"

"I must expect those things of necessity," said she. "I have tried them. They are not pleasant, but I can bear them."

"You can bear them!" repeated Max. He stared at her aghast. "You don't know what you are talking about," he said, impatiently. "These things which you talk of 'bearing' are poisoned arrows which have slain many a heart as high and proud as yours. You were right a few minutes ago when you said that you would put your good name absolutely into Arthur Tyndale's power by returning him these letters. Forgive me if I speak plainly, but it is necessary that you should understand why such a thing *must not be done*."

"Not even for Leslie's sake?" asked she, looking at him intently.

"No!" answered he, sharply. "The sacrifice is too great—far greater than the occasion. Not to save your sister's heart from breaking, have you a right to do it!"

She looked at him for a little while longer with eyes that softened momently. Some inner feeling seemed at work. Her lips quivered slightly, a wave of color swept into her face, and then ebbed away. It was not quite the transformation for which Max had wished a short time before, but it was something like it.

"You are very kind," she said, at last, in a voice that struck the ear as being full of more than one emotion. "It is very good of you—you who are Arthur Tyndale's cousin and Leslie's friend—to think of me. I had not expected it. You see I am not used to consideration—admiration, and attention, perhaps, but not consideration. I thought you would think of Leslie and Leslie's interest alone. Well, since you do not think of it, I must," she added. "Captain Tyndale, do you know what Leslie is to me?"

"Your sister, is she not?" said he, doubtfully, wondering what would come next. Surely this was an incomprehensible woman—a woman who made such wild havoc of all his previous opinions concerning her that he began to resign himself to having no opinion at all, but simply accepting whatever view of her varying character she chose to show him.

"My sister," repeated she, doubtfully. "Yes, she is that, and I suppose it mean's something—but not very much! She is more than that, Captain Tyndale. She is the first person who has ever—ever in all our lives—made a kind advance to us, or held out a helping hand. My mother's relations have never taken the slightest notice of us. Papa's relations long ago discarded him. He comes of good people," said she, drawing herself up with all the pride of her Milesian blood; "but, of course, that did not help us, since the good people had long since—before I was born, I suppose—given him up. But Leslie came forward without any need to do so, in the face of all the prejudices of her caste and held out her hand to us. It makes a tie stronger than that of blood!" cried she, with eyes that melted and flashed both at once. "She meant to do *us* good, and shall my coming work her harm? Not if I can help it, you may be sure!"

"But can you help it?" asked he, looking at her, and thinking that he had never seen a more beautiful and majestic creature than she seemed just then.

"I can help it by giving Arthur Tyndale what he demands—his letters."

"You will not!" cried he, quickly almost passionately. "You are not in earnest; you will not do such a thing!"

"Yes, I am in earnest," answered she. "After all, he may have some faint instinct of honor, and the fact that I am in his power may seal his lips."

"I might have thought that yesterday, but not to-day. To-day I know him to be false and treacherous to the very core—to be literally without a single instinct of the man of honor!"

"Still," said she, "I must risk it, since you tell me that this is the *only* alternative; that he will certainly leave as he threatens if I refuse—"

"Upon my word, Miss Desmond," interrupted he, "you tempt me to go to your sister and tell her the whole truth on my own responsibility."

"You would not dare to do such a thing!" cried she. "It is not your secret! You have no right!—it would be infamous!"

"I only said you tempted me; but it would be better than this which you propose."

"I must make one condition, however," said she, imperiously, sweeping his objections away like cobwebs, as he could not help feeling; "my letters, if Arthur Tyndale still retains them, *they* must be returned."

"I made that condition in your name, and he assures me—I am inclined to think, truly—that he has not a line of one of them." Then, as if to apologize, "Men seldom keep such things, you know."

"It does not matter very much whether he is speaking truly or falsely," said she, carelessly. "I am glad to remember that I was not foolish enough to put any thing on record against myself which the whole world might not read. *A propos* of letters," said she, turning suddenly again, "did you destroy, or have you still, the one I wrote to Kate, and which the wind carried to you?"

"Destroy it!" repeated he, starting. "I—I do not think so. Why do you ask?"

"Simply because I feel a natural curiosity to know what has become of it, and a natural reluctance to its falling into other hands. I wrote more freely in that letter than I often do. Ink and paper are unsafe things to trust, if only for the reason that they often outlast more solid things. Since you have not destroyed the letter, I shall be glad if you will return it."

"I am very sorry," said he, looking at her with honest, troubled eyes, "but I am seriously in doubt about that letter. I do not know what has become of it. I may have destroyed or I may have mislaid it; but, at least, I cannot find it. I know there is no excuse for me, but I have looked for it several times, and I will look again."

"How is it possible that you could have destroyed it without knowing?" asked Norah. If she had glanced at him suspiciously, it might have been forgiven her. That experience of the rougher side of life, on which she dwelt so much, did not incline her to a very childlike faith in men or their assertions.

"I am often very absent-minded," said Max, who saw the suspicion, but had sense enough not to resent it. "I have often destroyed a letter, and then wanted it. I may have destroyed this one, or I may have mislaid it, though I can't imagine where!" said he, with a puzzled look.

This look somewhat convinced her of his sincerity. She questioned him closely as to when he had seen the letter last, what he had done with it, and where he had put it, until she finally elicited the fact that it had "probably" been left on his table, with other papers, on the evening of the day which they had spent at Strafford. "Is that your last recollection of it?" asked she, looking at him keenly.

"That is my last recollection of it. I remember I walked out for a few minutes that night" one's memory plays one tricks sometimes: Max honestly thought it had only been a few minutes "and when I came back I found the wind had scattered my papers over the floor."

"But when you gathered them up, did you not notice whether this letter was among them?"

"I did not gather them up at once, because—" He stopped short. A flash of light seemed to come to him. "By Jove!" he said, under his mustache; "could *he* have done such a thing?"

"Mr. Tyndale, do you mean?" asked Norah, whose ears were quick. "I have not doubted from the first but that he has the letter. If you found him in your room on the night you missed it, that is very good proof. Well, I make the return of it a condition also—let him understand that, Captain Tyndale."

"He may deny that he has it—he may affirm that he has destroyed it."

"The first you know to be false; the second is not likely."

"I cannot imagine how I shall constrain myself to meet him, to speak to him!" said the young man, bitterly. "He has proved himself so false—he is so utterly unworthy of the name he bears!"

"If we never met or spoke to people who are false, our list of acquaintances would be a very small one!" said Norah, cynically. "But it has certainly struck me more than once that you have taken a great deal of annoyance and trouble upon yourself from pure friendship—Platonic and otherwise."

"I am not sure that it has been from pure friendship of any kind," said he.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

"Can a man sit mute by a fast-barred door  
While the night-showers cut through the shiv-  
ering skin,  
Yet love in her hardness, love on, love more,  
That cold-eyed beauty who smiles within?  
Such a man—he is dead long since—I knew:  
There was one that never could know him—you!"

IF the events of this particular day have seemed long in narrating—and they are not yet over—they seemed even longer in transpiring to me than one member of the house-hold at Rosland. As Norah, having completed her dinner - toilet, stood before her open window for a moment, looking out on the dying beauty of the summer evening, she asked herself if it had really been only one day since she had looked out of the window on the sparkling freshness of early morning. "It has seemed like two or three days melted into one!" she said, wearily. "And it is not yet over—indeed, its most trying period is yet to come!"

The sound of carriage-wheels warned her, however, that she could not give any more time to meditation; so, taking her fan and gloves, and with a last glance in the mirror, she went down-stairs. The drawing-room was already full, but the hum of conversation ceased a little as she entered. Many of the guests had not seen her before, others were anxious to see her again—a slight, involuntary thrill of admiration passed round the room. Nobody could deny Norah Desmond's beauty. It was for the comprehension and appreciation alike of prince and peasant. She was so well accustomed to the sensation which her appearance always made, that it brought no added color to her face, no tinge of self-consciousness to her manner. She spoke to one or two people whom she knew, and then crossed the room to Leslie, before she perceived that Arthur Tyndale was standing by her side. Recognizing him with a start, she bowed, and then turned to her sister.

"I fear I am late," she said, more for the sake of saying something than because she really did fear it.

"Not at all," answered Leslie. "There are several people yet to come—people who do not understand the necessity of punctuality at a dinner-party. And there is Mrs. Sandford just

entering!" she said, with something like a laugh in her voice. "Fancy how some of our old-fashioned friends are shocked!"

Norah turned. Her first thought was that the old-fashioned friends in question might be excused; for certainly a lady so *d'colletée* as Mrs. Sandford was, is rarely seen in a country drawing-room. Magnificent of train and *bouffante* of overskirt was her lavender silk, with its thread-lace flounces of fabulous value; but the fashionable lowness of her corsage, and the fashionable shortness of her sleeves, were a revelation to the country-bred eyes looking on. "Did you ever see the like of that?" more than one lady said in a whisper to her neighbor, while one unsophisticated young person turned into a corner to blush. The shoulders and arms thus lavishly displayed had some flesh on them, however—which is more than can always be said—and the diamonds which encircled them soon brought public virtue down to a temperate point of tolerance.

Somewhat to Norah's surprise, she found herself assigned to Max Tyndale when dinner was announced.

"This is kinder of Mrs. Middleton than I hoped!" she said, frankly, as they moved out of the drawing-room. "I fully expected to be given over to the tender mercies of a country Philistine—probably that young Covington who took my breath away a few minutes ago by coolly addressing me as 'Miss Norah'!"

"Did you not know that that is the customary form of address in this country?" asked Max. "It is scarcely likely that he intended to be impertinent."

"Do you mean to say that it is the custom of the country among well-bred people?" asked she. "Do you mean to tell me that it is considered good style? Why, it is a badge of vulgarians abroad."

"It is not the custom of the country among the very best-bred people," answered he; "but a great many people who are well bred in every thing else do it, and mean no harm—like our guileless young friend, who never called any woman by her surname for more than ten minutes, I suppose."

"He will not be likely to call me by any thing else again," said she, laughing. "I gave him a stare which petrified him."

"How would you like to be called 'Miss Nonie'?" asked he, smiling. (They had sat down to table by this time.) "I heard a young lady, who was baptized Leonora, addressed by that euphonious diminutive the other day."

"I detest all but a very few abbreviations," said she, "and with silly ones I have no patience. If I were a queen, I would rigorously abolish them. Anybody found guilty, for instance, of transforming the queenly name of Margaret into Maggie, should certainly be imprisoned; and I should make it a capital offense to call a Mary by any of the numerous nicknames of that most holy and beautiful of names."

"I am afraid your subjects would rebel. Nothing is so dear to the feminine heart as abbreviations. There is Mrs. Sandford, for instance, who looks like the Queen of Sheba, or Solomon in all his glory, yet who writes little gushing school-girl notes, and signs them 'Nellie.'"

"Mrs. Sandford will smack of bread-and-butter as long as she lives," said Norah. "By-the-by, she is looking handsome, is she not? But her dress would suit a ball better than a dinner with a game of croquet in prospect."

"Do you remember a little poem of Owen Meredith's, called 'Madame la Marquise'?" asked Max. "Of course you do—everybody does! It might answer for a portrait, don't you think?—especially these verses:

'Could we find out her heart through that velvet  
and lace !

Can it beat without ruffling her sumptuous  
dress?

She will show us her shoulder, her bosom, her

face;  
But what the heart's like, we must guess.  
  
'With live women and men to be found in the  
    World—  
(Live with sorrow and sin live with pain and  
    with passion)—  
Who could live with a doll, though its locks should  
    be curled.  
And its petticoats trimmed in the fashion?"'

"I am sure Mrs. Sandford would be much complimented by the comparison," said Norah, mischievously. "She told me the other day that she 'adored' Owen Meredith. I took it for granted that she meant his poetry."

Observing the precept of charity after this admirable fashion, their conversation flowed like a stream of easy, rippling water. Norah's tongue always had the true Milesian fluency—nobody ever had to "make talk" with her—and Max was not half a Frenchman for nothing. One topic naturally led to another, and it was not until a momentary lull came that he said:

"I did not see Arthur, after all. He had left Strafford when I got back, and he did not return before coming here. So I have not delivered your message."

"Indeed! I am sorry!" she answered. That was all she trusted herself to say; there were too many inquisitive ears around.

According to the English fashion—which was a novelty in M— County—the gentlemen were left over their wine, while the ladies scattered about the drawing-room in knots and groups, talking bits of country gossip, mingled with remarks on the state of the gardens, the state of the roads, and the state of the weather. Everybody knew everybody else—for it was a "nice" neighborhood and general good-fellowship prevailed. Norah was the only person who was outside the charmed circle of sympathy and knowledge. The ladies were shy of her because they were afraid of her; she was stiff with them because she knew very little of women, and because she had a habit of instinctively arming herself against possible or probable patronage. She was tired, too, and the chatter of many voices wearied her; so, stepping through an open window to the veranda beyond, she stood under one of the leafy arches, resting her mind with the soft, fragrant quiet of the outer world, and watching the moon rising in majesty above the tree-tops into the clear eastern heaven.

How beautiful it was! The earth seemed lying in a trance under the silvery lustre which made a brightness like that of day without its heat. The sky was a deep hyacinth-blue, the shadows where they rested were dark without being dense, but where the moonlight fell in broad, white glory, every leaf and spray was clearly visible, every pebble shone like a jewel. It is something for which we should thank God afresh every time it comes—this marvelous, matchless beauty of moonlight, this tender, dazzling radiance, which, putting aside all the colors that deck the day, paints the earth in black and white, and makes it of a something so fair that we are fain to liken it to our earthly imaginings of the "city of the saints of God."

Norah was so absorbed in the beauty of the scene, and so rapt in thought, that she did not notice the entrance of the gentlemen into the room behind her; and she was still standing—a statue-like figure in the lustrous light, with the graceful tracery of leaves and starry flowers all around her—when some one came to her side and said, "I thought it could only be you!"

She turned abruptly—fancying, for a moment, that the voice was that of Arthur Tyndale—but it was Carl Middleton who was looking at her, with something strangely passionate and wistful on his face. She was so much relieved that she smiled.

"Is it *you*?" she said. "I thought it was some one much more disagreeable!"

"I am glad to know that there is any one whom you consider more disagreeable," said he. "I fancied that, in your eyes, I had certainly attained the superlative degree in that quality at least."

"You know that is nonsense," answered she, impatiently. "I do not consider you disagreeable at all, unless—unless you make yourself so!"

"That is to say, if I chose to talk commonplaces, like any other man to whom you were introduced an hour ago, you would tolerate me as you tolerate him. Well, it does not matter. Your toleration, or want of toleration, will soon be over for me. I came to say good-by."

"Good-by!" she echoed. His manner startled her even more than his words; there was something in it totally new, something which she did not understand. "But why 'good-by'? Are you going away—now?"

"Yes, I am going away now. I need change of air—I do not think this climate agrees with me. Besides" (fiercely), "I am done with making a fool of myself! I see at last how useless and hopeless it is! *I came too late!* What can a man do against the spell of old association? I am going—at once!"

"It is a very good resolution!" said Norah, coldly. Nobody can blame her if she was tired of this violent and impracticable suitor of hers. A man who cannot understand a rejection, and who refuses to take it quietly, makes himself worse than a bore in the eyes of a woman. However sorry she may have been for him at first, this sorrow inevitably changes into impatience, disgust, and contempt, if she is annoyed by undesired persistence. Now, Norah had not only been wearied by Carl, but she had been provoked and insulted by him—he had indeed repeated his worst offense in his last words—therefore her voice sounded like ice when she said:

"It is a very good resolution."

"I was sure you would think so!" he said, defiantly. "I was sure I could not bring you better news. But you do not ask me where I am going—I thought you might take enough interest in me for that!"

She looked at him doubtfully. What did he mean? More and more it struck her how unlike himself he was. More and more she perceived what a pale, passionate face it was on which the moonlight shone.

"If you would let me, I should be glad to know—I should be glad to take interest," she said, hesitatingly. After all, he was not accountable, perhaps, for his defiant looks, his significant tones, his reckless words. Men are such fools—that was the result of Norah's experience as well as Mrs. Sandford's—and he was crazy just now, poor boy!

"I am going down to L—County to see my relations there. Even in the short time that I have been here they have given me no peace," he said, after a minute. "That is in the opposite direction from Alton, you know—or perhaps you don't know. I take the down-train which passes which has lately passed Wexford at 9.40, and meets the Alton train at the station below."

"Yes," said Norah. He puzzled her more and more. This information about trains seemed given with a purpose, and yet what could it be? "If your train passes Wexford at 9.40, and you mean to leave to-night, you will have to go very soon, then, will you not?" she asked, more for want of any thing else to say than because she had any disposition to hasten his departure.

"Yes, I shall have to go very soon—at once, indeed," he said, looking at her quickly, with a suspicious, sidelong glance.

But, despite this fact, he stood beside her for a minute longer. Something seemed to rise to his lips; he hesitated an instant, then did not utter it. Steps were heard—approaching voices sounded at the open window. He turned away—then suddenly turned back and grasped her wrist.

"I don't think you will ever know what you have thrown away in throwing away me," he said—this is something, by-the-by, which a great many men think, though most of them refrain from uttering it!—"I would have done any thing to serve you, any thing on God's earth! I would have hesitated at *nothing*, Norah! But you have showed me that you prefer falsehood, and

treachery, and deceit, to an honest man's honest love, and I—what can I do? But if even yet—even yet, Norah—"

"Let go my arm!" said Norah, imperiously, and in the moonlight he saw the haughty lightning that flashed from her eyes. "I have heard enough. I hope that change of air will restore your senses to you; but at present you have certainly lost them altogether!"

"When it is too late, remember that it is your own fault that I gave you one last opportunity!" he said, dropping her arm.

And even in the midst of her anger, his tone startled her again. It was so significant—it so plainly meant something more than met the ear. Had he really gone crazy? What was he talking about? This was what Norah asked herself, puzzled, bewildered, indignant, all at once.

While she still stood hesitating—uncertain whether or not to demand an explanation—Mr. Middleton stepped through the open window behind them, and her opportunity was lost.

"What!—are you here yet, Carl?" he said, in a tone of surprise. "I told your aunt a minute ago that I thought you were gone. She doesn't like it at all, I can tell you—leaving a party in the lurch this way—so perhaps, as you are still here, you had better put off your departure till to-morrow morning."

"No," said Carl, in a quick, obstinate voice, "I shall go to-night. I am sorry if Aunt Mildred does not like it but I must go."

"You know your own affairs best, of course," said his uncle, coldly; "but I think you are likely to miss the train if you stay here much longer."

"It is not quite nine o'clock," said Carl, glancing at his watch. "I can certainly drive to Wexford in forty minutes."

The game of croquet was by this time being organized on the lawn. The hoops were erected, and the opposing parties had marshalled themselves. Some one came up to Norah. Would she play? At first she declined, but, on second thought, consented. The tedious hours had to be got through in some fashion—perhaps croquet was as good a means as any other. So she walked away, and Carl turned into the house. He had his dinner-dress to change, he muttered, for a traveling-suit.

At nine punctually he took his departure. Norah, who was standing, mallet in hand, on the farther side of the croquet-ground, heard a rattle of wheels, and, looking across the lawn, saw the light dog-cart spinning around the drive and out of the gate.

"Who is that?" asked her companion, surprised. "Surely, nobody is leaving at this hour of the evening!"

"I think it is Mr. Middleton—Mr. Carl Middleton," she answered, stooping to give her ball a very unscientific blow. "He said that he had to go away to-night to see some friends, I think."

"Carl's a queer fellow, isn't he?" said the other—the same free-and-easy young gentleman who had called her "Miss Norah." "We've seen nothing of him in this part of the country since he was grown; but everybody always expected that he would marry Miss Leslie, and there was great astonishment on all hands when we heard that she was engaged to Arthur Tyndale. Not but that it's a capital match, you know, but still it was always understood that she was to marry Carl, and so we were astonished."

"Was it understood that she was to marry Carl?" asked Norah, starting. "Such things seldom come to pass as parents and guardians wish them to do," she said.

Meanwhile Leslie was moving among her guests with a very sore and troubled heart. She had been almost, if not quite, ready to forget all her doubts and suspicions when Tyndale had appeared before dinner—the first sight of his fair, handsome face, the first tone of his voice, had made her heart leap up with a loving, grateful sense that all must be well, that in him, at least, could be no deception nor wrong; but afterward she could not banish the sense that some change had come over him. He was not himself. There was something wrong with him. She felt that instinctively. In her society he was constrained—she felt *that* with a pang which only those who

have ever seen this subtle but most impassable barrier coming between themselves and those they love can imagine. After dinner she was dully, sorely conscious that he was avoiding her. He sat down by Mrs. Sandford, and began what looked very much like one of the old-time flirtations. But Leslie had never been jealous of the old-time flirtations. Now she was not exactly jealous, but her heart burned within her; the scene of the night before came back again. "Anybody but me!" she thought, "anybody but me!" Once, when he spoke to her, she fancied—for she was not blind, as many women are—that there was the glow of champagne on his cheeks, the light of champagne in his eyes. Then her heart grew sorcer still. He had never forgotten himself like this before. What did it mean?

Mrs. Sandford was not playing croquet. That might readily have been predicted from her toilet. In the drawing-room, and, after a while, on the moon-lighted veranda, she sat with a court round her, like the Madame la Marquise to whom Max had likened her. She had indulged in more than one innuendo to Arthur Tyndale, but her courage had not been equal to touching openly the subject of his "flirtation" (so she would mildly have phrased it), with Norah Desmond. Opportunity had not been lacking; but she had found it pleasanter to flirt with him herself, to bend her elaborately coiffed head toward him, to shrug her white shoulders, to open wide her blue eyes, to ripple over with exclamations and adjectives. As for Arthur, it was the easiest thing at hand to do—it certainly required no effort either of mind or body—and, remembering what Norah had told him, he had an idea that he might win this pretty widow, his "old friend," over to his side again.

When others claimed his attention, however, he rose and strolled away. A spirit of restlessness possessed him. He looked into the drawing-room. Whist and conversation reigned there. He shrank equally from both, so he wended his way across the lawn to the croquet-party. Even that was better: he might see Leslie, plead a headache, and take leave at once.

On reaching the players, he found that Leslie was not to be seen. She had been looking on for a while; but she had walked away with a stranger who admired the grounds, and wanted to see more of them. This was what somebody told Arthur. He felt vexed and impatient—just then every thing vexed this unreasonable young man. "Why was she out of the way?" he thought. Standing there in the moonlight, a sudden feeling of isolation came over him; the clink of the balls, the merry peals of laughter, the fragments of speech, jarred upon and irritated him. He felt none of the spell of the dreamy, lustrous night—a sublimated day, it seemed—none of the poetry, which youth and happiness always create, in the scene. "Your play, Miss Desmond!" somebody called out. Then he started and frowned. Norah's name was worst of all!

At that moment he made up his mind to take French leave of the party, and return to Strafford. With regard to Leslie, he felt reckless. He had already neglected her so much, that a little more neglect scarcely mattered. He had half turned away, when a young man, who was standing not far off, with a girl, called out:

"Tyndale, can you lend me a pencil?"

"I suppose so," answered Tyndale, involuntarily. He did not feel in a particularly obliging mood; but, when we are asked to lend a thing which we know to be reposing in our pocket, the impulse is with most of us that we do it. He took out a pocket-book, and, drawing a pencil from it, handed it to the other. "What do you want to do with it?" he asked, carelessly.

"I want to write off a capital acrostic for Miss Minnie," the young man answered. "If you'll wait a minute—"

"Oh, the pencil is of no importance," said Tyndale, walking away. He felt a momentary envy for people who could be amused by "capital acrostics," and yet a certain contempt, also. "Vapid fools!" he called them, in his own mind, as he closed the pocket-book, and returned it to his pocket.

Returned it! That is to say, he *thought* that he returned it; but the champagne must have been in his fingers, as well as in his head, for certainly the book slipped, in some unaccountable

way, past the pocket, or out of the pocket, and thence down to the ground, where he, unconsciously, walked away and left it.

There it still lay, a dark object on the moonlit sward, when Mrs. Sandford came across the lawn to look at the game, attended by a brace of cavaliers, with her silken train thrown over her white arm. One of the cavaliers in question struck his foot against this object, and, stooping down, picked it up.

"By George!" he said. "Some fellow has lost a pocket-book, and left all his secrets of love and war at the mercy of the public. Who was it, I wonder? Armistead, have you lost any thing of the kind?"

"Not I," answered the other cavalier. "But it will not be difficult to find the owner.—I say, Courtenaye" (turning round to address the writer of the acrostic), "have you lost a pocket-book?"

"No," answered Courtenaye; "but Tyndale has, very likely. At least he took out his, to lend me a pencil, about ten minutes ago."

"Tyndale!" repeated Mrs. Sandford, quickly. She extended her hand, and seized the pocket-book, before its astonished finder knew what she meant to do. "We can easily settle that point!" she said, opening it.

Mr. Courtenaye was right. On the fly-leaf, Arthur Tyndale's name was written. "It is his!" said Mrs. Sandford, with a thrill, as of exultation, in her voice. Then, somewhat to the surprise of the lookers-on, she coolly slipped the book into her pocket. "I'll give it back to him, with a lecture on his carelessness!" she said, with a laugh.

Almost at the same moment that this scene was occurring on the lawn, Max met Leslie as she was emerging from the house. "Do you know where Arthur is?" he asked, stopping her. "I want to speak to him a moment."

"No," she answered—and, as she turned her face toward him, he saw the look of pain in her eyes—"I have not seen Arthur since scarcely since dinner."

"Indeed!" said Max. He had seen nothing of Arthur himself; had known nothing of the manner in which he was avoiding Leslie, and he was naturally astonished by this information. Anger—quick, hot, overmastering—rushed into his heart and into his eyes. It cost him a minute's effort before he could control its expression for the sake of the pathetic face before him. "He must have gone home," he said, then, with as much carelessness as he could assume. "I don't think he has been exactly—very well to-day."

"Has he not?" asked Leslie. Her eyes were wistful, yet proud. "He said nothing to me of being sick. I do not know where he is," she added, hastily—and turned away as if anxious to end the conversation; as if fearful lest, in word or sign, she might betray herself.

Max stood still for a moment, communing with himself and his mustache. Then he descended the steps and walked across the lawn to the croquet-ground. He felt that this matter could not be ended too soon, and, as a step toward ending it, he must see Norah Desmond.

He found her, by a lucky chance, at some distance from the croquet-ground, sitting in a garden-chair, alone. Some one else had taken her place in the game, she told him; she was tired, and had been obliged to retire. "I fancy Mr. Covington was glad to be rid of me," she added. "I am a wretched player."

"I am afraid this has been a trying day to you," he said.

"Yes, it has been very trying—more trying than you know," she answered.

"And I am going to make it still more so—that is, I am going to show you that you are not done with worry even yet." Then, after a short pause, which she did not break: "I told you at dinner that Arthur had left Strafford before I reached it this afternoon. Therefore I was not able to deliver your message or, rather, your answer to his demand. If you are still determined to surrender the letters, however, I will see him now—he has probably returned to Strafford—and try to end the matter at once."

"I am still determined to surrender them," she answered, "on a condition—do not forget that. I demand the letter of which we spoke, not only because I want it, but as a proof of his good faith."

"If he refuses to deliver it—?"

"I decline absolutely to deliver the more important ones which I hold."

"And if he gives it up—?"

"Then come back and I will give you his letters."

"To-night?" asked he, surprised.

"Why not to-night?" asked she, in turn—rather wearily. "I am so tired—you can't tell how tired—of all this deception and plotting. I can see you alone to-night, hear what you have to say, and, if necessary, give you the letters, without exciting half so much observation and remark as I should do if we waited until to-morrow. It will not take you long to go to Strafford, will it?"

"Not very long."

"Then—if you do not mind coming back—let us get it over to-night. A strange impatience has come over me. I feel as if it could not be ended too soon. These people will not go for an hour or two yet—more's the pity!—and I can easily meet you in the summer-house."

"There is but one objection to that," he began. Then he stopped. He had been about to invoke the powerful shade of Mrs. Grundy, to hint that ill-natured people might say ill-natured things of such a meeting; but he felt instinctively that such a thought had never entered Norah's mind, and that her Bohemian indifference might be quite equal to defying even Mrs. Grundy. After all, innocence is its own best safeguard. The proud, beautiful face before him seemed able to make a law of conduct unto itself; and then, as she said, it would be better to have it ended.

## CHAPTER XXV.

"No! I this conflict longer will not wage,  
The conflict, Duty claims—the giant task—  
Thy spells, O Virtue, never can assuage  
The heart's wild fire—this offering do not ask!"

HALF an hour later, Max Tyndale mounted the terrace-steps at Strafford, and found himself facing a stream of light which issued from one of the flower-wreathed windows of the dining-room. Wondering what Arthur was doing in that particular room at that hour, he walked up to the window and looked in. A glance at the open sideboard, and one or two decanters on the table, showed him at once what Arthur was doing, and made him shrug his shoulders as he entered—stooping his tall head a little in order to do so. Hearing the step, Arthur turned—he had been sitting in a deep chair, with his back to the window and, seeing Max, he frowned impatiently.

"Why the deuce can't you come in by the door, and not startle one like this?" he said, pettishly. "You are back early!"

"Not so early as yourself," answered Max, advancing and taking a seat on the other side of the table. He meant to keep his temper, if possible, let Arthur be as trying as he would, but already it felt inclined to give way.

"I—oh, I could not stand it any longer!" said the latter, in an aggrieved tone. "It is too much to ask of a man to endure such a mob of stupid people for three or four hours on a stretch."

"Some of the people were not stupid, however," said Max. "There was Miss Grahame, for instance. I met her just before I left, and she seemed to feel your neglect. I should advise you to be a little more careful. She is not a woman to endure that kind of thing tamely."

"It makes very little difference to me whether she is or not," said Arthur, doggedly. "I am sick of the whole business, and I don't intend to put any further compulsion on myself! D—n it, Max, it isn't you who have had to play the part of a shuttlecock between these two women!"

"It is not I, certainly," said Max, gravely. He looked at the other with his keen, dark eyes, understanding perfectly the crimson flush on his cheeks, the bright glitter in his eyes. He saw that he had been drinking deeply, and he hesitated, asking himself if there was any use in broaching the subject of the letters to him that night. But, like Norah, he began to feel an impatience of the matter, a conviction that the sooner it was ended the better. Arthur might be sober enough to recognize his own interests, at least. On that hypothesis, he spoke:

"I wanted to see you this afternoon," he said, "but you had left before I returned. If you had waited for me, you might have been glad to hear that Miss Desmond agrees to return your letters."

"Does she?" said Arthur, starting. Deeper color came into his cheeks, brighter light flashed into his eyes. He had not expected such good news. It would be something, certainly—it would be a great deal, indeed—to be safely out of Norah Desmond's power. The next moment, however, he looked at his cousin suspiciously.

"Miss Desmond is too shrewd a woman to surrender those letters without expecting something in return," he said. "What is it?"

"What any woman in her position has a right to expect and to demand," answered Max, growing stern in spite of himself. "Her own letters."

"I told you that I had not one of them—that I never dreamed of keeping them."

"I told her that; and, if you assert the fact on your honor, she is willing to accept it," said Max, not without a grim sense of the satire involved in his words. "But"—and he leaned forward here to note the effect of what he had to say—"she is not sure, and neither am I, that you have not a letter of hers *which was not addressed to you*, in your possession."

"What the devil do you mean?" asked Arthur, angrily. He knew perfectly well what the other meant, but this question is every one's first expedient to gain time.

"I fancy that you know very well what I mean," answered Max, quietly. "I mean that I think you have in your possession a letter of Miss Desmond's addressed to her sister, which you found on my table, among various other papers, the night Thursday night that you were in my room alone."

"In your room alone!" repeated Arthur, wrathfully. "I never heard such insolence! Do you mean to insinuate that I have stolen your letter, or Miss Desmond's letter, or whosever letter it chanced to be?"

"I have already told you that it was a letter addressed to Miss Desmond's sister, and written by Miss Desmond herself," answered Max. "I insinuate nothing; I merely ask if it is not in your possession."

"And I reply emphatically that such a question is an insult, and that I decline to answer it."

"Then, in that case, I am empowered by Miss Desmond to say that she declines to surrender your letters."

"Declines to surrender my letters because I do not choose to acknowledge the possession of any stray fragment of writing which you may have lost? Is Miss Desmond mad, or are *you* mad, that you bring me such a message?"

"We are neither of us mad, I hope; but the matter stands thus: I am confident, from the circumstances of the case, that this letter must have fallen into your hands, and Miss Desmond (whose property it is) demands its return as a proof of good faith on your part. She demands, also, that you pledge your word of honor to keep your engagement with her sister unbroken, and—"

"And what else?" asked Arthur, breaking in suddenly with a derisive laugh. "Pray, what power does Miss Desmond imagine that she possesses over my actions, that she can lay down arbitrary conditions after such fashion as this?"

"She does not imagine that she possesses any power, but she claims a right to name the conditions upon which she will surrender the letters you are anxious to obtain."

"Not so anxious as you imagine, perhaps," said the other, sneeringly. "I fancy I am safe enough from any use she may be tempted to make of those letters. No woman, with the instincts of a lady—and those, at least, Norah Desmond has—ever likes to proclaim herself jilted."

"And how does a man, who ought to have the instincts of a gentleman, like to be branded with dishonor?" asked Max, shortly. A fire, not common to his eyes, gathered in them. The last shreds of his well-worn patience began to give way. "Let us make an end of this," he said, rising to his feet. "Once for all, will you accept the offer which Miss Desmond makes, or will you force upon her the alternative of going to Miss Grahame with these letters in her hand?"

"She may go to Miss Grahame or to the devil!" answered Arthur, with a defiance born of champagne and French brandy. "If I choose to make an effort to hold my own with Leslie, I do not anticipate any difficulty in doing so because a woman like Norah Desmond brings forward some relics of an old folly. Her character, wherever she is known abroad, is so notorious, that her word will pass for very little when I once make Leslie clearly understand that she is a mere Bohemian adventuress, a mere—"

"Stop!" said Max. In sudden, fiery intensity, the word was almost equivalent to a blow. "I have heard enough of this. You are not defending yourself by slandering Miss Desmond—you are only proving how right I was when I told her that it was worse than folly to surrender the letters which prove the utter falsehood of every word you have uttered, or are likely to utter, concerning her!"

"They may prove it to you," said Arthur. "No doubt you have had ample opportunity for judging. But you are right—this has gone far enough!" said he, springing suddenly to his feet, and speaking in a voice which was full of passion. "Even now, if you were not standing as a guest under my own roof—"

"I shall not be a guest under your roof much longer," interrupted the other. "I accept no obligation—least of all that of hospitality—from a man whom I have ceased to hold in any respect, who has forfeited every characteristic of a man of honor!"

"You will answer for this!" said Arthur, through his clinched teeth.

"Answer for it!—what is there to answer?" returned Max, contemptuously. "Is it not true? Have you not been tried in the balance and found wanting in every instinct of honor, every regard for truth? God knows," said he, with a sudden, passionate vehemence, "I trusted in you, believed in you, hoped in you, to the last! But after today I should be a fool indeed if I put further faith in you. Therefore I go now to tell Miss Desmond the failure of my mission, and at daylight I shall leave your house."

He moved toward the door as he spoke, but Arthur made one stride and stood before him—a flame of color in his fair cheeks, a gleam of menacing light in his violet eyes.

"You are altogether wrong if you think you can insult me like this, even in my own house, with impunity!" he said. "You shall not leave this room until you have passed your word to give me the satisfaction of a gentleman."

"I should as soon think of giving satisfaction to my own brother—which, thank God! you are not!" was the response. "I have only spoken truths which your own conscience must echo, and I have spoken them because our intimate friendship and near kinship gave me a right to do so. It is a right which I shall not claim again, however. I repeat that, after to-night, I am done with you—done with you and your affairs utterly and forever! Now stand aside and let me pass. This is child's play."

"We'll make it something else, then!" said Arthur, between his set teeth. He took a step forward as he spoke—his purpose plainly to be read in his gleaming eyes, his knitted brows, and tight-set lips but, though he was quick and lithe as a panther, the man who met him was like a rock. He extended his hand, seized the assailant by the collar, and swung him out of his path, just

as the door opened, and the face of a servant—first grave and decorous as usual, then stricken with amazement—looked in.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said, falling back a step or two as Max strode toward the door. It is likely that he feared summary ejection; at all events, he retreated crab-fashion into the hall, as the young man advanced upon him.

"What brought you here?" demanded Captain Tyndale, sharply—pausing at last in the middle of the hall—"An ignorant servant might be excused, but you know better you know that you have no business to enter a room unless you have been summoned."

"I—I beg pardon, sir," repeated the man again—he was a well-trained English servant, whom Arthur had brought with him from abroad, and therefore, as Max said, could not plead ignorance for his shortcomings "but I saw a light in the dining-room, and, not knowing that either of you gentlemen had come back, I thought I would just come and—and see what it was about."

"You might have known that your master or myself must be there," said Max, unmollified. "You ought to be aware that this kind of thing will not answer. A servant must learn to come only when he is bidden, and" (with emphasis) "to hold his tongue."

"I think I know how to hold mine, sir," said the man, respectfully.

"It will be well for you if you do!" said Captain Tyndale, significantly. Then he turned away and walked toward the hall-door, which stood open to the dreamy beauty of the magical moonlight. Before he reached it, however, a thought seemed to strike him—he wheeled round again, and addressed the servant, who was still lingering where he had been left.

"Do you know what time the earliest train passes Wexford to-morrow morning for Alton?" he asked.

"About half-past six, sir, I think," was the answer.

"Tell Anderson, then, to have something at the door for me and my luggage about half-past five. I find that I am obliged to go up to the city."

"Very well, sir."

"Half-past five, mind! I don't want to be left."

"I'll take care of that, sir."

After Max passed out, the speaker shook his head solemnly.

"There's been no end of a row!" he said, half aloud. "It's no more than I expected all the time. I never yet seen two gentlemen thicker than brothers but what I says to myself—"

"Giles!" cried an irritable voice in the rear. "Giles, don't you hear? Why the devil don't you keep your ears about you, and come when you're called?"

"I didn't know you had called before, sir," said Giles, turning round and facing his master, who was standing in the open dining-room door. Even to the servant it was plain, at a glance, how deeply he had been drinking, and it flushed through his mind that the "row" might not be so very serious after all.

"You were too busy taking Captain Tyndale's orders to listen to *me*, I suppose," said Arthur, more angrily than before. "But I want you to understand that it is I who am master in this house, and not Captain Tyndale."

"I know that, sir," said Giles.

"What was he telling you to do?—what was that order I heard him giving you?"

"He told me to tell Anderson to have something at the door for him and his luggage at half-past five to-morrow morning; he wants to leave on the half-past six o'clock train, sir."

"He does, does he?" said Arthur, changing color violently. "We'll see about that."

"I'm not to tell Anderson, then, sir?"

"D—n Anderson, and you too! Leave the house, this instant!—and the next time you come where you are not called and not wanted, you'll leave it for good!"

"Very well, sir," said Giles, sullenly. He felt strongly inclined to say, "I'll leave it now for good," but the thought of Arthur's usual kind treatment, the light service, excellent wages, and more excellent perquisites of his place, restrained this spirit of noble independence. He left the

hall by the back-door, and, once out on the moonlit sward, relieved his mind by the use of various expletives of a forcible nature.

Arthur, meanwhile, turned back into the dining-room, poured out half a glass of brandy, and drank it off. "We'll see about that!" he repeated, as he set the glass down with a ringing sound. A wild light seemed instantly to flame into his eyes. It was evident that the brandy mounted to his brain like lightning. "If he thinks that he can treat me like this, insult me to my face, and then refuse me satisfaction, I will show him that he is mistaken!" he said, nodding with a truculent, drunken air to the tall, flaring candles and the half-empty decanters. "Norah must understand that I'll have no more of this," he continued, after a minute. "I'll see her myself, and, if she insists, she can have the letter, but I'll have no more carrying of messages back and forth by a cowardly bully who takes advantage of his position to offer insults, and then refuses to stand by the consequences of them!—Going off tomorrow morning, is he?—We'll see about that!"

It was probably as a means of seeing about it that he went into the library, and, opening a drawer, took out a silver-mounted pistol—one of the small revolvers in such common and deadly use at present—and, having ascertained that it was loaded, slipped it into the breast-pocket of his coat. Thus equipped, with a fiery flush on his cheeks, and a fiery light in his eyes, he seized the first convenient hat which came to hand, stepped out into the moonlight, and, leaving the house all open, the library and dining-room all ablaze with light, behind him, took his way across the park, following the path which Max had followed fifteen or twenty minutes before.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

"We two stood there with never a third,  
But each by each, as each knew well,  
The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,  
The lights and shades made up a spell  
Till the trouble grew and stirred.

"Oh, the little more, and how much it is!  
And the little less, and what worlds away!  
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,  
Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,  
And life be a proof of this!"

WHEN Captain Tyndale reached the bridge spanning the stream which divided the Strafford lands from the Rosland grounds, he hesitated a moment, doubtful whether to turn aside to the summer-house, which was situated at some distance on his right, or to keep straight on to the villa. He was back sooner than he had anticipated—considerably in advance, indeed, of the time he had named to Norah for meeting him and it was likely, therefore, that she had not yet come to the place of rendezvous. There were some unquestionable advantages to be gained by seeing her on the lawn or in the drawing-room—the advantage, above all, of avoiding an interview which would excite much of ill-natured comment if it were suspected or discovered, and from this comment Max, who knew his world better than Norah did, was anxious to shield her; but then there was the great disadvantage of not being able to speak freely, of not being secure from interruption or distraction. Besides this, if he went to the house and she were not there, it would excite a great deal of attention in fact, be very "marked," if he left again abruptly in evident search of her. Again, he might not be able to leave abruptly. Max was an old bird, who had been caught too often in society nets, not to be wary of them. He could imagine himself held

captive while Mrs. Sandford or some other woman talked nonsense to him, and Norah waited alone in the summer-house. Lastly—

"View mortal man, none ever will you find,  
If the gods force him, that can shun his fate;"

and Captain Tyndale being emphatically a mortal man, felt very little inclination to shun an interview alone with Norah—his last, just then it occurred to him—which the gods seemed determined to force upon him.

After meditating duly upon all these considerations, he decided to go to the summer-house and wait for her. He glanced at his watch. It was a quarter-past eleven. He had told her that he would probably be there at half-past that hour. Again he hesitated. Should he go to the villa? There was still time enough, and a dozen words would be sufficient to tell her the result of his mission. But, then, it must be confessed that he felt strongly inclined for more than a dozen words. She was not in his style at all, and, after to-night, he would probably never see her again—but that was all the more reason for giving his last looks time to linger on such a beautiful face, for letting his ears drink in again the sound of a voice sweet as that of the sirens. He turned with an air of decision, put his watch back into his pocket, and entered the shrubbery to the right.

Is it worth while to say that, if he had decided differently—if he had gone to seek Norah in the presence of the large and respectable social gathering at Rosland—the after-events which followed would have been very different? Of what action of our life might not this old but ever new commonplace be predicated? Yet the consequences which follow most actions are, as a general rule, less immediate and less unpleasant than those which followed this apparently trivial decision of Max's—a decision born of the magic of a woman's fair face, as many a man's decision has been before.

When he reached the summer-house, he found, as he had expected, that Norah had not yet arrived. This fact did not trouble him very much, however; she had not said, "I will come if possible," but she had said, "I will come!" and instinct told him that what Norah Desmond promised would assuredly be performed. Lighting a cigar, therefore, he sat down on the steps to wait for her. The balmy, voluptuous night was all around him like a spell. In its white lustre every object stood out clear and distinct. The distant hills melted away in silvery mist; the woods, in their dark, shadowy beauty, stretched as far as the eye could reach. On the smooth sward around the summer-house, flecked delicately with leafy shadows, every dainty fay and sprite of the greenwood might have danced. A chorus of katydids sounded from the large oaks behind him. From the depths of the shrubbery in front rose suddenly the sweet, melodious voice of a mocking-bird. Save these sounds, every thing was so still that the voice of the stream was distinctly audible, as it flowed along its hollow, singing to itself in the silent night.

After a while he looked at his watch again. It was thirty minutes past eleven. "She will be here before long now!" he said to himself, and, as he said it, a white figure emerged from the shrubbery in the direction of the house and advanced toward him.

He threw away his cigar, and rose as she approached, conscious of a strange sensation of pleasure which he did not stop to analyze, but which was quite apart from the "business" end that he had in view.

"I am so exactly on time," she said, as she came up, "that I thought it likely I should have to wait for you."

"On the contrary, I have been waiting for you for a quarter of an hour."

"Is it possible? But that was your own fault. Punctuality does not mean being before one's time any more than after one's time, it means being on it as I am."

"I did not mean to claim the virtue of punctuality—that certainly belongs to you; I only meant I was glad any necessary share of waiting should have fallen to my lot instead of to yours. This would be an uncanny place, as the Scotch say, in which to be alone at midnight!"

"Why? because it is lonely? I should not be afraid of that. Men are not likely to come here, I suppose, unless by appointment; and, if the ghost of a Dutchman appeared, I should make the sign of the cross, and expect to see him vanish in blue smoke."

"There might be more unpleasant visitors than the ghost of a Dutchman. But will you come into the summer-house, or shall we sit here?"

"Here, by all means. One cannot have too much of such a night as this."

"It is beautiful, certainly," said Max, but he was not thinking of the night as he spoke. He was thinking rather of the woman who, fair as the night, sat down on the steps from which he had risen, and looked up at him with a smile.

"Does it not make you think of Lorenzo and Jessica?" she asked; and, before he could answer, she began to repeat:

"The moon shines bright. In such a night as  
this,

When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,  
And they did make a noise, in such a night  
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls,  
And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents,  
Where Cressid lay that night.

In such a night  
Did Thisbe fearfully o'ertrip the dew:  
And saw the lion's shadow ere himself,  
And ran dismayed away'

as I might have done, perhaps," she added, with a laugh, "if I had not been very stout of heart, when I saw you sitting here—a dark, motionless figure in the moonlight with your cigar glowing like an angry eye."

"I scarcely fancied you would have seen it in such a lustrous atmosphere as this. But if I looked like a Cyclops, you certainly looked like the incarnate spirit of the moonlight as you came across the sward."

"I am not ethereal enough to look like an incarnate spirit of any thing," said she, glancing up again, the moonlight shining on the matchless lines of her face, the transcendent fairness of her skin, the liquid softness of her eyes—Max had never thought them soft before—the beautiful curve of her white throat, as the flower-like head was thrown back. A fleecy shawl was draped around her shoulders, but its effect only heightened her loveliness. The young man caught his breath. Impassive though he was, he felt his pulses thrilling and his brain whirling a little. Not a woman in his style, not a woman whom he admired, but still a woman whose equal in abstract beauty he could scarcely hope ever to see again—a woman at whose feet a man might almost have been pardoned for falling down in absolute worship as she sat there with the silver night about her like a benediction, and all Nature wrapped in stillness. "What fools some men would make of themselves if they were in my position!" Max thought, with an agreeable sense of superior wisdom, which he immediately justified by plunging into the business that had brought them there. After all, what was Norah Desmond's beauty to him? A soldier with little or nothing besides his pay could not afford to fall in love with the penniless daughter of a Bohemian adventurer, if she were a second Helen.

"I have just come from Arthur," he said, abruptly. "I am sorry to say sorry, at least, on your account, that he refuses absolutely to accede to your demand about the letters."

"Indeed!" said she, starting, an expression like a wave of surprise sweeping over her face. "Does he deny, then, that he has the letter which I wish returned?"

"No; he professes himself insulted by the charge, and will neither deny nor acknowledge any thing concerning it."

"Do you not think that is equivalent to owning that he has the letter?"

"I do not 'think' so; I am sure of it."

"And equivalent, also, to refusing it?"

"Equivalent to that, also."

"I did not expect this in the least," said she, after a minute's pause. "I thought he would have been more than willing to buy his letters back at such a price. What is the meaning of it, Captain Tyndale? He must be anxious to obtain them, while that letter has no value to him. It tells him nothing which he did not know before, or which he could by any possibility desire to use."

"I must confess," said Max, reluctantly, "that he was not at all sober, which may have had something to do with his foolish obstinacy. But you must forgive me if I say it is a good thing, Miss Desmond. More clearly than before—if that be possible—do I realize how very unwise it would be to surrender those letters. For no reason," said he, energetically, "have you a right to throw your good name away. Now, you *will* throw it away, if you once put those letters out of your possession. Believe me, I mean what I say. Arthur Tyndale is not a man to be trusted. Even you do not know how far he has gone in dishonor—how little he would hesitate over any falsity!"

"Has he been uttering any fresh slander about me?" demanded she, with eyes that began to glow, and lips apart. "If so, don't hesitate—tell me at once what it was."

"He only insinuates slander at present," answered Max, dryly. "He will wait to do more until he has the letters safely in his hands."

"But he cannot be anxious to obtain them, since he does not even think them worth a blurred fragment like my letter to Kate."

"I have told you that he was not sober; I may add that he worked himself into a violent rage, which ended in his demanding 'satisfaction' of me, and refusing absolutely to entertain any of your proposals."

"How little I expected this!" she repeated. "I was so sure you would have been successful, that I brought the letters with me. See!"—she drew a package from her pocket and held it in the palm of one hand, looking meditatively at it—"Here they are—so many ounces of passionate devotion, love, trust, faith, etcetera! Is it any wonder I am willing to dispose of them—that is the mercantile phrase, isn't it?—o the original owner, very cheaply indeed?"

"I can imagine that they are valueless to you; but, nevertheless, you should keep them."

"What will you wager, that, when he is sober, he will be willing to give all that I ask, and more besides, to obtain them?"

"Very likely; but nothing should induce you to accept any thing which he offers. He will respect no pledge an hour longer than he cares to do so. Remember, that is my last caution to you."

She looked up with an inquisitive glance.

"What do you mean by that? Why should it be your 'last'?"

"Because I am going away to-morrow morning," he answered not unwilling, perhaps, to note the effect of such a sudden announcement on her.

The effect—as much, at least, as he saw of it—was only astonishment, mingled somewhat with regret.

"You are going away!" she repeated, after a short pause. "And to-morrow morning! How sudden! Will you think that I speak only from interested motives if I say that I am sorry? I really am."

"You are very kind!" he muttered—disappointed by her self-possession, though he had not the faintest reason for expecting any thing else.

"I think it is you who have been kind," she said, after another pause—"you who have taken so much trouble and annoyance upon yourself without any hope of reward; and now—"

"How do you know that it was without hope of reward?" he said, as she broke off abruptly—only her eyes supplying the words unsaid—"how do you know that I have not been

rewarded already? To be honored by your confidence and your presence would repay much more than I have done."

"Do you think so?" asked she, laughing—but the laugh, instead of being the little tinkle of gratified vanity which Max knew so well, had a bitter, jarring sound in it. "You surely do not know how easily such honor can be obtained—in Bohemia, Captain Tyndale."

"Why are you so unjust to yourself?" said he, angrily. "You know better than that! You know that neither in Bohemia nor out of it is such honor easily obtained from a woman as proud as you are, Miss Desmond."

"And pray," demanded she—flushing so suddenly and deeply that he saw the suffusion even in the white moonlight—"what right have you to suppose that I have given you more than I should have given any other man who crossed my path?"

"Don't be angry," said he, smiling; "and don't think me presumptuous before I deserve it. I have never for a moment imagined that it was any merit of my own which has won for me the confidence you have given me—the confidence which you certainly would not give 'any man who crossed your path'—but only the singular circumstances which have thrown us together, and made us know each other very well even in the course of one short week."

"A great deal can be done, thought, felt, and said, in a week," said she, half dreamily, looking, not at him, but at the melting line of moonlit hills far away. "But, when you speak of knowing me," she added, with another low, bitter laugh, "you are talking absolute nonsense. I have a hundred characters: you have seen only one."

"But in that one lies the key to all the rest," said he.

She shook her head, half sadly.

"I am not a book, to be read at sight," she said. "Sometimes I think that I am written in cipher, even to myself."

"You are a book, to make and to repay the study of a man's life!" said Max. He knew that he was a fool when he uttered the words; but, just then, his senses were bewitched. That fair face, with the moonlight shining on it, might have made wild havoc with any man's senses.

But Norah only smiled: she was too well used to such speeches and such tones to give them any significance beyond the amusement of the hour.

"How good of you to think so!" said she. "But my character is nothing to you," she added, with a sudden flash of impatient anger. "Why are we discussing it? I came here to speak of your cousin and Leslie. Let us talk of them."

"How do you know that your character is nothing to me?" demanded Max, in turn—ignoring her last command—and with a curious, vibrating thrill in his voice, born of folly, madness, moonlight, Heaven only knows what. "How can you tell but that—"

It is impossible for any one to tell what he might have uttered next, if, at that moment, a pistol-shot had not rung out clearly on the still night-air, making them both start and gaze at each other with amazed, interrogative eyes.

Norah was the first to break the pause which ensued.

"What can it mean?" she said "and so near at hand, too!"

"I don't understand it at all," said Max. He thought of Arthur. But, even if Arthur had left Strafford and followed him—which he did not conceive to be at all likely—at whom could he be firing? "That shot was certainly fired within the grounds," he said, rising to his feet. "If you will excuse me, Miss Desmond, I will soon see—"

"Do you mean that you are going away and leave me here?" said Norah, quietly—and her tone stopped him more effectually than a dozen screams could have done—"I should not have been afraid to be alone before, but now—"

"True," said he, quickly. "I forgot. While I went in one direction, the shooter, or shooters, might come in this. After all, perhaps it may be only one of the negroes, who is amusing himself with a pistol. It cannot be a nocturnal duel, for there was only one shot, and it does not seem that there is to be another."

"From what direction did it seem to you that the sound came?" asked she.

He pointed in the direction of the stream and the bridge. "There!" he answered, briefly.

"So I thought," she said. Then, after a short pause, she added, in a quick, nervous voice: "Do you think it could have been Mr. Tyndale?"

"Impossible. At whom, or at what, could he have been firing?"

There was silence after this for two or three minutes. They both listened attentively, but no other report followed—the katydids, the grasshoppers, the crickets, and the mocking-birds, had all the night to themselves. Then Norah laughed a little—a laugh relieved, but somewhat nervous still.

"It was queer," she said; "but it could not have been any thing serious, since no other shot has followed."

"I suppose not," said Max; but he spoke slowly—somehow, he had an instinct that it *had* been something serious, and that he would have done well to have followed his first impulse, and gone to see about it; but, then, how could he leave Norah alone? He might not have hesitated so much on this score if he had only known how little Norah felt any fear for herself, how entirely her whole assumption of it had been for *him*, in order that he might not be drawn into a trap and shot down, perhaps—she did not stop to ask herself by whom. Night breeds fantastic fears even in the bravest heart, and braver breast than that of this Bohemian girl one seldom meets.

After another minute, she spoke again:

"I believe there is only one thing more to be said: since your cousin refuses my terms, I shall keep these letters; and, since you are going away, I must decide at once whether or not to show them to Leslie. What do you advise me to do? Tell me, and perhaps I may do it."

"How encouraging!" said he, with a smile. "But, in truth, I scarcely know what to tell you—I have lost all confidence in my own judgment." He did not add that he had lost all interest in the subject under discussion. Even his Platonic devotion to Leslie had faded away like "snow-wreath in thaw." He knew that the interruption of the pistol-shot had only just come in time to save him from making a consummate fool of himself—and yet the temptation to do so remained as great as before the interruption. But it can at least be said for Max that he was a man of honor: he knew that he could not afford to marry Norah Desmond, even if she were willing to marry him; therefore he knew, also, that he had no right to utter one word of the madness which had suddenly come upon him like a flood.

"You have not even confidence enough in your own judgment to advise me whether or not to let matters take their course, or to tell the truth to Leslie without delay?" asked she, looking at him curiously.

"I cannot even tell you that," he answered, desperately. "You must judge for yourself. I am done with the whole affair. I told Arthur that to-night. My diplomatic career has been little besides a succession of blunders. It is a good thing that it is drawing to a close."

"And you are going away to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, I am going away to-morrow morning, at half-past six o'clock. This must be our good-by, therefore, and—and you must let me thank you, Miss Desmond."

"Thank me! for what?"

"For having trusted me as you have done, and for having so kindly overlooked the prejudice with which I met you first."

"I knew whom to credit with that," said she. "For the rest, you have treated me with a courtesy and respect for which I owe you thanks—I believe I have told you that before. And now," said she, turning to him with a smile which dazzled and bewildered him both at once, "when are we to meet again?"

"When?" repeated he, catching his breath shortly. "Heaven only knows. Never, perhaps!"

"You mean, then, that if you were to see me again across the opera-house, in Paris, you would not even bow to me?"

"I mean that, if I were wise, in such a case I would go my way without recalling myself to the memory of one who will probably by that time have forgotten all about me"

"It is very probable, indeed, that I shall have forgotten all about you," said she, "for I do forget people very soon; but still, you know, you could recall yourself to my memory, and we could shake hands, say 'How-d'ye-do?' and think of to-night."

"Perhaps the best thing for me to do will be to try and forget to-night," said he, slowly. Now, as ever, she puzzled him. He could not tell whether she were trifling with, tempting, or mocking, him. He only felt that this was a scene and a time to hold in remembrance while life should last. The majestic silence of midnight was upon the earth. The moon had reached mid-heaven, and was looking serenely down upon them; the shadows were small as those of noonday, while over plain and hill and river, over the lawn where the croquet hoops and mallets were lying, over the woods full of the sweet tinkle of distant waters and the soft hum of insect - life, the marvelous silver radiance rested. They were all alone—entirely alone—with only the night and the moon to be witness to whatever they might utter—the night and the moon, which have seen and heard so much of human folly as well as of human crime.

But Max was resolved that it should witness no further folly of his. He suddenly turned and held out his hand, speaking a little hoarsely. "Good-by!" he said.

"Good-by!" she echoed, almost coldly, but she laid her slender, white hand in his. It was the first time that their hands had met since the day when he had clasped hers, all wet and gleaming, in the boat. That recollection came back to both of them. Their eyes suddenly met. There was a thrill in look as well as in touch. "Remember that I kept my pledge, at least," she said, smiling faintly. "I may be fast, mercenary, Bohemian—every thing that you most dislike—but don't forget that I kept faith as far as I could!"

"I shall never forget it!" said he. And then the moon saw some of the old, old folly.

All of our impassive *chasseur's* resolution melted like wax exposed to steady flame. He lifted the hand which he held to his lips, he murmured words which wisdom would never have sanctioned. It was only the abrupt movement with which Norah drew back that brought him, in a measure, to himself.

"Stop, Captain Tyndale," she said, "and listen to me. I am sorry we could not have parted without this. I am sorry that I cannot think that one man holds me in sufficient respect to treat me as he would treat the women of his own class. Do you think I have not seen, for an hour past, that, what with the night, and the moonlight, and my pretty face, I might have fooled you to the top of your bent?" asked she, with a certain scornful indignation. "But I wanted for once to see if some one could not know me and like me, and—and not try to amuse his idle hours by flirting with me! I find, however, that this is too much to expect. I am flirting material or I am nothing. I like you well enough to prefer to be nothing to you—therefore good-night. Perhaps it is as well that you are going to-morrow."

"Norah—Miss Desmond—for Heaven's sake, listen to me!" he cried.

But, snatching her hand from him, she turned with a gesture of almost passionate pride.

"You would never have spoken to Leslie like this!" she said. "After all, you are alike—you and your cousin. You both think that I am for one use and she is for another! No doubt you are right enough, too," she added, with a sudden return to calmness. "No doubt, also, I shall grow used to my position in life after a while. I have not learned to do so as yet; but, then, I am young at least, I ought to be. Good-night again, Captain Tyndale. I hope you will have a pleasant journey and a safe arrival wherever you are going."

"You will not leave me like this!" said he, imploringly.

But, before the last words left his lips, she had drawn her shawl closer around her figure, and passed so lightly and swiftly across the moonlit sward that he saw in a moment it was hopeless to follow her.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

"There are sorrows  
Where of necessity the soul must be  
Its own support. A strong heart will rely  
On its own strength alone."

AFTER the last guest was gone, and the last good-night exchanged, Leslie went to her chamber with a lagging step. It was much more than mere weariness which weighed upon her: it was a terrible soreness of heart, an unutterable sickness of soul, which it is no more possible to grasp and embody in words than it would be possible to paint a death-agony on canvas. All that she had endured during the day seemed but a faint prelude to the anguish which had possessed her, which she had bravely borne and as bravely concealed during the long hours of the evening. Such hours it has fallen to the lot of most women to endure once or twice in life; but time dulls the memory of all things, and only those to whom such pangs are fresh can realize what Leslie endured as she went among her guests with a smiling face, talking, laughing, uttering the light nothings of society, while pain and doubt, suspicion and jealousy, were gnawing, like the traditional fox of the Spartan boy, at her heart. But no one—save, indeed, Max Tyndale—suspected any thing of this from her face or manner. Is it the author of "Guy Livingstone" who says that it is chiefly in the power to endure that good blood shows itself in these later days of ours? Whoever said it, it is true enough—especially of women like Leslie Grahame. She was thorough-bred, not only in blood, but in instinct—not so invariably as we fancy, perhaps, do the two things go together—and there was in her the stuff of which martyrs are made, as well as the high-bred reserve, the supreme pride which shrinks from displaying an inner feeling, in a manner which a lower nature literally fails to understand. Leslie could have died sooner than made a sign which would betray, even to the aunt who had been a mother to her, all that she was suffering. After the guests left, she still wore her smiling mask until she parted with the last member of the household. Then she went to her room where her maid was waiting, restrained an inclination to dismiss the latter at once—knowing that such a proceeding would excite a great deal of domestic remark—went through all the duties of the toilet as usual, and it was only when every thing was finished, and she was at last alone, that she sank into a chair and buried her face on the cold marble of the toilet-table with a low, pathetic moan.

Then the dark waters came surging over her, wave on wave. Her pain was all the more bitter for the mystery which seemed to encompass it. Who was to blame? What had happened? Why was she alone ignorant of what every one else seemed to know? Hard questions, these—questions which it was impossible to answer, though they rose again and again in her troubled mind. Of course the doubt and mystery were dwarfed by the terrible certainty—a certainty borne in upon her with a force which even the most foolish of blindly-foolish women could not have disregarded—of Arthur's alienation; but they were too closely connected with this to be banished altogether. The love which she had leaned upon as a staff which was to last through life, had broken—cruelly broken—under her hand; but, in the blank bewilderment of pain which ensued, she was still able to remember all the innuendo which had gone before, still able to ask, "What does it mean?" Round and round this treadmill of hopeless thought her brain went, until she almost felt as if she should go mad if some light were not thrown upon the subject, if some elucidation of the mystery did not come.

But it was characteristic of the woman that she never for an instant thought of seeking this light or this elucidation. Although aware that there were two people within a stone's-throw of her room who probably possessed the key which she lacked—who, at least, had spoken as if they did—she never stirred or dreamed of stirring to demand it of them. It was not in her nature to do such a thing. If the explanation came to her, she would receive it, provided always that it came openly and honorably; but to solicit it was something which never occurred to her. So she sat

motionless, her hot brow on the marble slab, her hot hands clasped in her lap, while the night wore on toward midnight, and the last sound or movement died away in the house.

She was still sitting in this fashion, and beginning to wonder if the sick pain which seemed to pervade every faculty of her body, mind, and spirit, would ever merge into the blessed unconsciousness of sleep, when a knock sounded on her door, a subdued, hesitating, insinuating tap. Instantly she raised her head, her nerves strung like tense cords, her heart beating as if it would stifle her. "It has come!" That was what instinct said to her; that was what held her for a moment absolutely speechless; that was what cost her a sharp struggle before she was able to command her voice and say, "Come in."

Then the door slowly opened, and, instead of Norah—whom she had hoped and yet dreaded to see—Mrs. Sandford appeared.

"I am so glad to find you are not in bed!" that lady said, advancing into the room, and closing the door with elaborate caution behind her. "I should have been so sorry to disturb you—and yet, I could not have made up my mind to wait until to-morrow. O my dearest!"—suddenly clasping the passive form of the girl in a gushing embrace—"I hope you have resolution to bear a terrible, terrible blow, and I hope you will forgive me for being the bearer of it. I would do any thing in the world to spare you pain; but, to deceive you—to stand by and *see* you deceived—oh, my darling Leslie, ask yourself if I should be indeed your friend if I could do *that*?"

"Will you not sit down?" said Leslie, disengaging herself, and drawing a chair forward. At that moment pride made her nerves as firm as steel. She even smiled at the self-important, anxious look with which the other was regarding her. "You are very kind to come at such an unseasonable hour," she said, quietly, "if, as I imagine, you are here on my account. But, if you will say what you have to say at once, it will be better for both of us."

"It is impossible for me to tell you what a struggle it has cost me to come!" said Mrs. Sandford, sitting down and putting her handkerchief to her eyes. "I simply had to *force* myself, and nothing but my great friendship and love for you, Leslie—"

"Yes," said Leslie, with a cadence of weary impatience in her voice. She felt as if she could not bear these false platitudes. If the woman would speak out, if she would only say what she had come to say, that was all she desired. "What terrible blow is it that you are the bearer of?" she asked, standing by the toilet-table erect and stately, the shadowy glass imaging her slender figure, her pale, lovely face, her soft, brown hair, hanging loose. Save that there was nothing wan or melancholy in her aspect, she might have stood for Ophelia.

"Oh, my dear, I scarcely know how to tell you!" said Mrs. Sandford. This was strictly true. With her story on her tongue, and the proofs of her story in her hand, a sudden, strange embarrassment came over her. For one thing, she had not counted upon being met by so much self-possession and reticence. She had pictured a passionate, weeping girl, whom she could kiss and soothe and lead as she liked.

"It does not matter in the least *how* you tell me," said Leslie—and through her usually gentle voice a jarring chord rang—"so that you do tell me. Suspense is worse than any blow. You ought to know that. Come to the point at once! Tell me whom your story—I see that you have a story—concerns besides myself."

"It concerns Miss Desmond and Mr. Tyndale!" said Mrs. Sandford, sharply. "Leslie, it is impossible! you must have seen, you must have suspected, something between them!"

"Seen!—suspected!" said Leslie—she threw her head back haughtily. "What do you take me for? How could I suspect my sister and—and the man whom I had promised to marry? Take care, Mrs. Sandford!"—no one who had not seen it would have believed what fire could gather in those soft, gray eyes—"unless you are very sure of what you are saying, this subject had better end here."

"But I *am* sure!" cried Mrs. Sandford. Her blood was up now. She had made the plunge, and the rest was easy enough. "I suspected, from the first, that Miss Desmond and Mr. Tyndale were not such new acquaintances as they professed to be—as you, poor darling! took them to

be—and now I find out that I am right," she said, with energy. "Leslie, they knew each other long ago—they had a love-affair with each other long ago in Europe. You wrote to this girl about your engagement—she came here at once to break it off, and to draw Arthur Tyndale back to herself. *This I know.* I overheard a love-scene between them on the terrace at Strafford the day we were all there, and I should have told you then, only I had no proof, and I knew they might deny every thing. Last night I saw Mr. Tyndale give Miss Desmond a note: this morning I know that she went out at daylight to meet him—Leslie, my darling girl, it goes to my heart to tell you all this; but how can I know how much further you might be deceived if I let it go on?"

"You are quite right to tell me, if it is true," said Leslie, calmly. She was determined the other should not guess what a sense of deadly faintness came over her, how things grew black before her eyes, or how she was fain to lean heavily against the toilet-table in order to support her trembling limbs. "But you must pardon me if I say that all this is merely assertion," she added, after a moment. "In a matter of such grave importance—a matter touching not only my own happiness, but the honor of those nearest and dearest to me—I should do them grievous injustice if I were convinced by any thing short of proof."

"And I have proof!" said Mrs. Sandford, exultantly. She forgot herself, and let that tone of her voice betray her real feeling—not sympathy, not indignation for Leslie's wrongs, but exultation, pure and simple, in the fact that she held proof, absolute, indisputable proof, in her hand, at last!

"What kind of proof?" asked Leslie. She had caught the tone, and it hardened her heart, and braced her nerves, which for a moment had been in danger of failing.

For answer, Mrs. Sandford drew from her pocket a letter, and laid it on the toilet-table, so that its caligraphy could be plainly observed, and, if necessary, read. "I suppose you know that writing?" she said, with the veiled falseness coming back to her voice. "I am sure the sight of it must go to your heart, my dear; for oh, what a stab it gave me when I opened the pocket-book and saw it!"

"The pocket-book—what pocket-book?" asked Leslie. She knew the writing in a moment—blurred and defaced though it was, there was no mistaking those bold, black characters—but, even in this supreme moment of doubt, temptation, and the sharp certainty of betrayal, her exquisite instinct of honor remained with the girl. Touch the letter she would not, until she knew whether or not she had a right to do so.

"Mr. Tyndale's pocket-book!" answered Mrs. Sandford, with a tone of triumph, despite all her efforts, ringing again in the words. "He lost it to-night, and Mr. Ransome found it as we were crossing the lawn. I put it into my pocket, and forgot all about it until a little while ago, when I took off my dress. Then, examining it—to find out to whom it belonged, you know—I found this letter. It seemed providential, for I was just debating whether or not I should come and tell you all that I knew without any proof but, of course, with this, I could not hesitate any longer. I don't clearly understand how it came into Arthur's possession," she continued, with a puzzled look, "for it is not addressed to him, and it tells Miss Desmond's story from her point of view; but still—if you take all that she says with a great deal of allowance—you will see how they knew each other in Europe, and how—"

"Excuse me!" said Leslie—she held up her hand with an indignant, silencing motion—"I would rather hear no more! Indeed, I absolutely decline to hear any more! Nothing will induce me to read a line of the contents of this letter!" she added, with sudden passion. "I should never have listened to you, as I have done, if I had imagined for a moment how your information was obtained. If you have no other proof than this to offer, our conversation is at an end. I will listen to no more!"

"That is just as you please, of course!" said Mrs. Sandford. Seldom in her life had she been more taken by surprise, seldom in her life had she been more angry. A flush of color came over her face, her blue eyes expanded with something besides their usual infantine artlessness. "If this is your gratitude for all that I have done for you," she cried, in a voice tremulous with

indignation, "of course, it is quite useless to say that I never thought of myself. Why should I have thought of myself? Neither Miss Desmond nor Mr. Tyndale is any thing to me! They might elope to-morrow, and *I* should not care! I only thought of you and *this* is your gratitude!"

"Pardon me, if I said more than I should have done!" answered Leslie. "I scarcely knew what I was saying. I did not mean to be ungrateful. No doubt you desire to serve me; but I would rather remain in ignorance forever, than gain knowledge by such a means as this," she added, firmly.

"I consider that absurd—worse than absurd!" cried Mrs. Sandford, angrily. "When one is deceived and betrayed, one has a right to defend one's self."

"By deceiving and betraying in turn?" asked Leslie. "I cannot agree with you. If I am deceived and betrayed, that is the fault of others; but it is my own fault if I disregard my own sense of honor and integrity."

Mrs. Sandford would have liked to call these commendable sentiments "melodramatic stuff!" but, not having the requisite courage, she shrugged her shoulders in a manner calculated to express the same thing without words. "It is just as you please, of course!" she said again, more stiffly than before. "I am sorry that I came; but I thought you ought to know all that is going on. Nobody else would speak, and circumstances put the proof into my hands."

"It is impossible for me to use it," said Leslie. She stood like a rock, with her proud, pathetic face, her wistful eyes with their look of bitter pain. "If I read that letter, I should never respect myself again!" she cried, with a vibrating thrill in her voice.

"I suppose I had better take it and put it back into the pocket-book, then," said Mrs. Sandford, with a tone of contemptuous vexation in her voice. Her grand *coup* had ended in failure, and at that moment she was so angry with Leslie that she could scarcely trust herself to speak. She rose, and, advancing to the toilet-table, laid her hand on the letter; but, to her surprise, Leslie interposed.

"If you will excuse me," she said, "I should prefer to keep this. I have the best right to do so, and it will enable me to return it to its owner."

"Oh, certainly," said Mrs. Sandford, drawing back her hand. "I have no right to it, and not the least disposition to claim one. As I said before, Miss Desmond's and Mr. Tyndale's conduct is nothing to me!"

But, as she spoke thus, the pretty widow thought cynically that, after all, Leslie had indulged in a most absurd and unnecessary pretence of pharisaical honor. It was evident at a glance that she meant to keep the letter to read; why, then, could she not have read it at once, without all this "fuss?" But, even as she asked the question, her indignant contempt changed oddly enough into something like respect. Leslie, it was evident, knew "what she was about." She meant to read the letter, but she did not mean to be detected in doing so. Mrs. Sandford felt able to appreciate the shrewdness of this manoeuvre.

"To think that I should have been fool enough to be deceived for a minute by all her high-flown nonsense!" she said, to herself, as she left the room and walked down the corridor to her own chamber. "I ought to have known better. But she is shrewder than I gave her credit for being—oh, much shrewder! What a point she will make now of not having read it, when she returns it, and all the time she will know every word in it as well or better than I do! I might have pretended the same thing if I had chosen!" thought the fair widow, virtuously. "But, after all, it is safer to tell the truth—there's some comfort in that."

Left alone for the second time, Leslie stood for several minutes quite motionless, looking at the letter as it lay before her on the marble where Mrs. Sandford had first laid it. During those minutes she wrestled with and overcame as sharp a temptation as falls to the lot of most of us during this mortal life. In that letter was *the truth*—the truth unglossed by deceiving words, or looks, or tones—the truth as it was, and not as it might perhaps be told to her. It had been brought and laid before her by no act of her own; if she put it from her, could she ever be quite sure that the mystery under which she writhed was made plain as this would make it plain?

After a while she turned abruptly away, and walked across the room to an open window which overlooked the lawn, on which moonlight and shadow were blended, the shrubbery, the woods, the distant fields and hills, all the serene, beautiful, silver-flooded prospect, with the marvelous sky arching overhead, and the murmur of the river over its rapids far away making a weird, mystical music on the summer night. Here she stood, asking herself, vainly and torturingly, what she should do. They had known each other, loved each other, long ago! That was the refrain of all her thoughts, the sharpest sting of all her pain. They had deceived her from the first! Although she repeated this again and again, she could not realize it—she could not force her comprehension to grasp it as an intelligent fact. She found herself going back with vague wonder over Norah's arrival, Norah's meeting with Arthur, Arthur's pretended shrinking from her, Norah's pretended acquaintance with Max. "And they knew each other then," she would think. "All the time they were deceiving me, and smiling to themselves, perhaps. It was all false! false! false!"

Yes, all false—every thing false! The lover's love, the sister's affection—all false! She had never really possessed either the one or the other. For some inscrutable reason, they had chosen to make a tool and dupe of her, but she had been no more to either of them than that. She thought of all her trust in Arthur, of all her plans respecting the change she would make in Norah's life. Somehow, these things came back to her as she stood there in the moonlight alone with her great desolation, her inexpressible pain.

And it was while she still stood, gazing blankly, dumbly out on the jewel-like beauty, which she did not see, that her attention was attracted—how, she scarcely knew—by a white-clad figure which emerged from the shrubbery, and, crossing the lawn, came slowly, as if careless of observation, toward the house.

That it was Norah she knew in a moment. There was no mistaking the lines of the figure, or the stately, unconscious majesty of the gait. Her head was bent a little, in an attitude not usual with her; but the free, elastic step was unchanged. Varying the monotony of its dull pain, a throb of bitter anguish seemed to seize and rend Leslie's heart. It was true, then, all that Mrs. Sandford had said! There were assignations, meetings—this, no doubt, had been one of them. Oh, the misery, the bitterness of feeling, of knowing, of *seeing*, how she was betrayed! A great passion of outraged love and jealousy swept over the girl like a flood. She suddenly smote her hands together with an unuttered prayer. "O my God, my God, teach me how to bear it!" was her inward cry—a cry which He to whom she spoke scarcely left unanswered.

Meanwhile, she heard Norah enter the veranda, open one of the Venetian blinds of the sitting-room—the windows were rarely closed at night—and so pass, without difficulty, into the house. It is likely that she took off her shoes before ascending the staircase, for, after this, Leslie heard no further sound.

But, in truth, she did not listen for it. Her mind was full of something else. A resolution came to her like a flash of inspiration. She would go to Norah! That was the, best thing to do. Unconsciously to herself or, at least, unacknowledged by herself Leslie felt that there was no hope of hearing truth from Arthur Tyndale. But Norah—Norah, with her defiance and recklessness, might tell it, perhaps, when confronted with the plain proofs of all that had been revealed by chance or accident.

Leslie did not give her resolution time to change. She was in one of those moods when even the most impassive feel that they must act or die. She turned from the window, crossed the floor, took the letter from the table, where it still lay, and, opening the door noiselessly, passed, in her bare, unslippered feet, down the corridor to Norah's room, under the door of which a bright stream of light shone.

In this room Norah had not been more than five minutes, and she was still lying, where she had thrown herself in utter exhaustion, across the foot of the bed, when Leslie's sudden knock startled her. Immediately her alert vitality asserted itself. She sprang to her feet, unable to conjecture what such a sound, at such an hour, could possibly mean—and, instead of saying

"Come in," walked quickly to the door and opened it. Her amazement when she faced Leslie—Leslie, in her night-dress, and pale as a statue—could scarcely have been exceeded.

"Leslie! she exclaimed. "What is the matter?" What has happened? Come in!"

"Nothing is the matter—at least, I mean nothing has happened," answered Leslie, coming in. "I want to see you—that is all. I am sorry to have startled you."

"Oh, nothing startles me very much," answered Norah, who had regained all her self-possession. "My nerves are good—Kate often says that she thinks I have none. Pray, sit down—you look pale. Here is a comfortable chair."

Leslie sat down—indeed, she was trembling from head to foot, and more than ready to do so. The reaction from her tense strain of nervous excitement began to make itself felt. But, as yet, the strong power of will bore her up. Her voice was as steady and quiet as usual when she looked at Norah and spoke again.

"I ought to beg pardon for disturbing you at such an hour. I should not have done so if I had not seen you cross the lawn a few minutes ago, and therefore I knew you were still up."

"Yes, I crossed the lawn a few minutes ago," said Norah, quietly but there was a slight strain of defiance in her voice. Had Leslie come to lecture her on propriety? This was the idea which at once occurred to her.

But Leslie was thinking of something besides propriety. At another time she would certainly have been shocked at the idea of a young lady wandering, either alone or attended, about the grounds, at midnight, when all the rest of the household were safely and decorously in bed—but now she had no time to spare for being shocked. She accepted the fact that Norah had been to meet Arthur, and passed on at once to the other, the more important matter bearing relation to this fact.

"Since I saw you last," she said, "a letter has been put into my hands which belongs to you, or, at least, was written by you, and I have thought it best to bring it to you myself."

As she spoke, she laid the letter down on a table which was near at hand the same table on which stood the desk that had so tempted and so baffled Mrs. Sandford. The moment that her hand was lifted from it, Norah recognized it. A glow of color flashed into her face. She glanced from the letter to Leslie, and from Leslie back to the letter. To imagine where it had come from certainly puzzled her.

"Yes, this is mine," she said, taking it up and glancing at the blurred pages. "It is a letter to Kate, which I wrote several days ago, and lost."

"Lost!" repeated Leslie, involuntarily. Hope assuredly springs eternal in the human breast. At that moment her heart gave a leap; she was almost ready to believe that the whole thing had been a great and terrible misconception. But Norah's glance, and Norah's tone, the next moment, undeceived her.

"I suppose, of course, you have read it?" she said, glancing from the letter to the pale face before her with a keenness and coolness which seemed to fall like ice on Leslie's heart.

"No," the latter answered, not indignantly, but so quietly that the word sounded almost indifferent. "It was not mine; I had no right to read it."

"And may I ask how it came into your possession?"

"You have a right to do so, I suppose. Mrs. Sandford brought it to me; she found it in a pocket-book of Ar—Mr. Tyndale's, which he dropped on the lawn."

"Indeed!" said Norah.

Expressive as this monosyllable can be made, it has seldom been more expressive than as it fell from her lips. It meant many things which Leslie did not understand: for one thing, that Max and herself had been right in believing that Arthur had the letter; and, for another, that it was no wonder he had declined to deliver what had passed out of his possession. She did not know that he had firmly believed himself possessed of the letter at the very time when he refused to acknowledge any thing about it to Max, and that his conduct could only be accounted for on the grounds of general depravity and drunken obstinacy.

"This is not the first time that Mrs. Sandford has interfered in a matter which does not concern her in the least," Miss Desmond said, after a little while, very coldly—even at this supreme moment of preoccupation—Leslie could not help being struck by the utter absence of any thing like "detected guilt" in her manner or appearance—"I need hardly ask whether or not she has favored you with an account of the various items of information with regard to Mr. Tyndale and myself which she has gleaned by eavesdropping and other honorable means?"

"She made some statements which certainly seemed to me very strange," said Leslie. She could scarcely articulate; her lips seemed parched, her tongue was heavy as lead. It was true, then, all true; and this matchless assurance was only the careless insolence of one to whom detection was of no importance. "For one thing," she said, gathering courage, "she told me that Mr. Tyndale and yourself had known each other long ago abroad."

"She is quite right," said Norah. She was leaning her elbow on the table as she spoke, and her smooth chin in the pink palm of her hand, while her full chestnut eyes met Leslie's own. "Mr. Tyndale and I knew each other very well when he was abroad two years ago."

"And yet you told me," cried Leslie, with passionate indignation—but here her voice choked and broke down.

After all, some things are too great for speech. Her agony of ruined love and shattered trust was one of them.

"I told you—or I allowed you to imagine—what was not true," said Norah, in her clear voice. "Yes, I acknowledge that. But it was, or I thought it was, a necessity of my position. The great mistake which I made was in ever having come here. You were living in a fool's paradise, it is true—a paradise built on lies and deception but, if I had only stayed away, you might have continued to live in it with tolerable comfort to the end."

"What do you mean?" asked Leslie, with a gasp.

By this time her mind felt as if it was literally reeling under the continually varying and multiplying impressions which were thrust upon it. She was only aware now of a strange consciousness that Norah was mistress of the situation; that Norah held the key of all this mystery which so puzzled and tormented her. There was something of supreme gentleness and pity in those brilliant eyes, and Norah's tone was very different from that of one arraigned for her own misdeeds.

"Shall I tell you what I mean?" said she, gravely. "Are you strong enough to bear the truth the whole truth? If you are, you shall hear it! I said that from the first. If you wished to live on lies, I was willing to let you do so. But, if you want the truth—"

"I do want the truth!" interrupted Leslie, passionately. "What else should I want? for what else am I here? The truth, however bitter and terrible it may be!" she cried, clasping her hands. "I have endured the sting, the misery, the agony of deception, until I am ready—oh, more than ready—to hear the truth, whatever it may be!"

"Then you shall hear it," said Norah, almost solemnly. She extended her hands, and, with one of the quick, impetuous motions which characterized her, opened and spread out the letter which lay between them. "If you will read this," she said, "it will tell you something; the rest I can supply, and these"—drawing again from her pocket the letters she had shown to Max—"these shall be my proofs of all I utter. Courage, my poor Leslie! The pang is sharp, but, believe me, there are women who have lived through worse—ay, and learned to scorn as deeply as they ever loved!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

“Tis a stern and startling thing to think  
How often mortality stands on the brink

Of its grave without any misgiving:  
And yet in this slippery world of strife,  
In the stir of human bustle so rife,  
There are daily sounds to tell us that Life  
Is dying, and Death is living!"

FROM midnight, of a midsummer night, to the time when the first rosy flush of day begins to break in the east, is not very long, as most of us have, at one time or another of our lives, practically discovered. Max Tyndale discovered as much for himself after he parted with Norah, and, returning to Strafford, began to prepare for his intended journey. With most men that special terror of the feminine soul, "packing," is a process chiefly remarkable for simplicity and brevity; but Max had been established at Strafford long enough to find a good deal on his hands when it became necessary to prepare for a final departure in this abrupt fashion. Fortunately, he had a natural neatness and love of order added to his military training, so that the gathering together and disposing of many odds and ends was not so serious a matter to him as it would have been to the majority of men. In an hour or two his labors were finished. Then he sat down and wrote a few lines to Arthur, thanking him for his hospitality, and regretting that they had parted so angrily—lines touched somewhat by the memory of old kindness, though Max's heart was still hard against his cousin. After this, he threw himself on the bed, and, having a good conscience, and a not particularly damaged heart, was soon sleeping soundly, while the air freshened, the moon sank toward the west, and the east began to glow.

Of course, he dreamed of Norah Desmond—what man could have failed to do so, with the scene of the summer-house fresh in his recollection?—but his dreams were not by any means as agreeable as the reality. He saw her again standing before him in the moonlight, beautiful and proud, with her hand extended in farewell; but, when he was in the act of taking it, the shot which had startled them sounded again, and she sank dead at his feet. Oddly enough, he was distinctly conscious that it was a nightmare; but he could not waken himself sufficiently to shake it off, and the dream went on. She was taken and borne to the house—he saw the fair face, with the death-agony stamped upon it, in the coffin—nay, he even heard them nailing down the lid. Did they know that they were nailing down his heart with it? He knew it now, too late. He tried to move and cry out. Suddenly he sprang to his feet, wide awake, conscious that it was broad daylight, and that Giles was knocking at his door.

"Come in—why the deuce don't you come in?" he cried, snappishly—even the best-natured people are sometimes snappish when waked abruptly at five o'clock in the morning.

"Door's locked, sir!" responded Giles, struggling with the handle on the other side.

"True enough—I forgot that," said Captain Tyndale. He glanced at his watch: it was just five o'clock. Then he crossed the floor and unlocked the door which he had absently fastened behind him the night before.

"What is the matter?" he demanded. "What are you making such a confounded row about? I told you I wanted to get off at *half-past five*, and it is only five now."

"I know that, sir," said Giles. "I didn't come on that account, sir. I come to ask if you know where Mr. Tyndale is?"

"Where he is! In bed, I suppose," answered Max, opening his eyes. "Where else should he be?"

"But he isn't there, sir," said the servant, looking puzzled. "He went out a little after you did, last night, sir, and I don't think he could have come back. At least he isn't in his room, and I've been all over the house, and he isn't anywhere."

"Isn't anywhere?" repeated Max. He looked, as he felt, considerably astonished. A recollection of the shot of the night before came back to him; and, although he could see no reason for connecting it with Arthur, instinct sometimes connects things in spite of reason. "He may have gone over to Rosland, and accepted an invitation to spend the night," he said, after a

short pause—though he felt how extremely improbable such a thing was. "Did he leave the house on foot, and how long after I did?"

"Yes, sir, he left it on foot," said Giles, looking a little suspicious, and as if he fancied that this information was not exactly necessary. "I saw him come out of the library- window, and cut across the park—in your very tracks, sir—about ten minutes, or maybe a quarter of an hour, after you left the house."

"And you are sure he did not come back?"

"I'm quite sure of that, sir. His bed hasn't been slept in, nor his room set foot in, last night."

"What can have become of him?" said Captain Tyndale, musingly. Having mentally pooh-poohed his first vague idea about the shot, he felt more curiosity than alarm concerning this mysterious disappearance. He knew what Arthur's condition had been the night before, and that he was ready for any thing, however desperate or absurd. The question was, what desperate or absurd thing had he done? Max's own impression was that he had gone away, as he had threatened to do, the day before; but, of course, he said nothing of this to the servant standing by silent, watchful, and expectant.

"Your master is able to take care of himself," he said. "No doubt he'll turn up all right after a while. By-the-by, I suppose you don't know whether any train passes Wexford about midnight, or a little later, do you?"

"Anderson's just been telling me that the schedule changed yesterday," answered Giles. "He was over at Wexford and heard it; but he don't know exactly about the hours. He heard the railroad people saying that the ten-o'clock train wouldn't be along till after midnight; but he don't know any thing about the half-past six—"

"Tell him to be at the door by a quarter to six, at all events, and we'll drive over and see about it," said Max, curtly—having no fancy for a longer stay at Strafford under any circumstances. "See that there's a cup of coffee in the dining - room for me when I come down," he added; "and what are you waiting for? That is all."

"Hadn't I better send a messenger over to ask whether Mr. Tyndale's at Mr. Middleton's, sir?"

"If you want Mr. Tyndale to break your head, you had certainly better do so. He is not a baby, and I don't think he would exactly relish being treated as if he were."

With this reply Giles took his departure, long-faced and serious. It may be said for him that he was anxious as well as puzzled. It was impossible for any one to be closely associated with Arthur Tyndale without becoming attached to him. Seen generally and superficially, he was generous, amiable, frank of manner, and open of hand—a debonair young prince with whom the world went well, and who was willing to throw a little of his sunshine on the lives of those around him. This when the world *did* go well with him. What he was when it went ill these pages, which record an exceptional and not a usual phase of his character, may tell.

Meanwhile, half an hour went on, and no sign of him appeared. A general impression that something was wrong had, by this time, diffused itself throughout the Strafford house-hold. Under the stress of these circumstances Giles's tongue was loosed, and he gave forth hints respecting what he might say concerning a serious difficulty between the two cousins the night before. These hints, coupled with Arthur's disappearance and Max's proposed departure, were enough to set the tongues of half a dozen servants at work. The cook shook her turbaned head over the cup of coffee she was making for Captain Tyndale; Anderson shook his head over the horses he was harnessing in the stable; the housemaid stood with a broom in her hand talking to Giles on the front portico, and both of them shook their heads at intervals. "I wouldn't a' asked Cap'n Tyndale no odds—I'd a'sent to Rosland anyhow," Mary Ann was saying, indignantly, when, greatly to her dismay, Captain Tyndale himself stepped out of the open hall-door upon them.

"I am going for a short turn in the park," he said. "Have the coffee ready, and bring my luggage down—I shall not be gone ten minutes."

"Very well, sir," said Giles. He turned into the house at once, like the well-trained servant he was, but Mary Ann stood her ground, and, under pretense of sweeping off the portico-steps, watched Captain Tyndale as he descended the terrace, and struck across the dewy grass, and cool, long shadows, straight in the direction of Rosland.

In truth, Max was conscious of a queer, uneasy sensation which he could not set at rest—a persistent recollection and connection of Arthur's excited face and the pistol-shot of the night before, which he found it impossible to dismiss. He called himself a nervous fool to attach any serious significance to his cousin's absence; but, all the same, he felt that he could not turn his back on Strafford without having satisfied himself by personal observation that nothing tragical had occurred. He certainly thought Arthur's absence singular, though he had not admitted as much to Giles. It was folly to suppose that he had gone to Rosland, and the idea that he—a sybarite of sybarites—had *walked* to Wexford in order to take the train, was simply ludicrous. What, then, had become of him?—where had he spent the night? Max was aware that the vagaries of a drunken man are often beyond the astutest range of sober intelligence, but he wanted to be sure that no harm had come to the young man, and, as a means of ascertaining this, instinct, rather than reason, turned his steps in the direction of the bridge, on which or near which the pistol must have been fired the night before.

If the night had been beautiful, the day was peerless; but, as he walked along, he scarcely heeded its glory or freshness. The shadows stretched serenely beautiful over the sparkling grass; the air was like crystal in its lucid clearness; the distant violet hills stood out with exquisite distinctness against the horizon-line; in the leafy depths of the woods an infinite number of birds were singing, twittering, chirping, ushering in the summer day with a chorus of melody. Every thing was jubilantly joyous—jubilantly full of life. Half unconsciously Max felt this; half unconsciously it jarred on his mood. He was more nervously, indefinitely uneasy than he cared to acknowledge even to himself. One of those presentiments at which we laugh (when they are not fulfilled), warned him that "some- thing had happened," and this feeling increased with every minute.

It increased as he left the park behind, passed through a belt of outlying forest, and came to a bend of the path which led across some fields. As he emerged out of the green region of shadow into the full glow of sunlight—already warm, even at this early hour—he caught sight of a dark figure at some distance advancing at a rapid pace toward him.

For a second the thought occurred to him that it might be Arthur. The next instant he saw that, instead of being Arthur, or anybody like Arthur, it was a negro, without a hat, running at full speed—a negro who, when he saw him, threw up his arms and shouted something unintelligible.

The young man stopped short, stopped as if he had been shot, and stood motionless, rooted to the ground. At that moment an instinctive certainty of what had happened came to him as clearly as if it had been uttered in plainest language in his ear. A constricting hand seemed to seize his heart and hold it still for a minute—a long, horrible minute in which the bright, beautiful, golden prospect lay spread out before him unchanged, and that dark figure speeding along seemed to advance at a snail's pace.

When the boy—a field-hand, whom he chanced to know by sight and name—reached him, he was panting so that he could scarcely articulate. But, if ever terror and horror were imprinted on a human countenance, they were imprinted on his. No need to ask what presence he had seen. There is but one before which humanity quails in such wild consternation. His eyes were distended so that they looked as if they might start from his head, his lower lip was hanging like that of an idiot, and quivered convulsively. He stammered forth his news so that Max only caught two words—"Mass Arthur" and "dead."

Those two words were enough. They told him all that he had blindly, instinctively felt assured that he should hear, and, face to face with the certainty, his nerves seemed to quiver for a moment, and then grow firm again. He had not afterward the faintest recollection of what he said

or did; but the boy, who was literally chattering like an idiot, often related, to wondering audiences, how coolly Captain Tyndale looked at him and spoke.

"Take time and tell me plainly what is the matter," he said. "Where is Mr. Tyndale, and how do you know that he is—"

He stopped—even his self-possession could not enable him to utter that final word.

"He's down at the creek!" was the unexpected answer, given in a horror-stricken whisper. "I was a-comin' across, sir, an' I seen a man lyin' there, so I went down, an'—an'—an' it was Mass Arthur!" said the boy; and, having been brought up on the Tyndale estate, he ended by bursting into tears.

"At the creek!" repeated Max. He asked no further questions. That was all he wanted to know—*where*. He started at once at a pace equal to a run, crossed the fields, entered another belt of woods, and soon reached the stream, the small creek which bounded the Rosland grounds, and has been several times mentioned in the course of this story.

Approaching from the side next Strafford, he could see nothing until he gained the very edge of the bank, which, just at the bridge, was some ten or twelve feet above the present level of the water. As he drew near, his pace involuntarily slackened a little; he gave one quick, heaving breath; for an instant he felt as if it were literally impossible to advance farther. But he shook off this weakness and went on, until, standing at the entrance of the bridge, he laid his hand on the railing and looked over.

Instinct, rather than any conscious act of the reasoning faculties, had guided his steps within the railing of the bridge; and it was fortunate for him that it had been so, since, prepared though he was for the sight that awaited him, the first glance upon it almost unmanned him. A sudden trembling seized his frame; his sight grew so dim that, after that first look, he gazed down on a thick white mist only. The iron nerves that had been unshaken when bullets were raining like hail, and men falling like leaves, around him, quivered now with a sick faintness he had never known on the bloodiest battle-field. *That* was in the high carnival of death and carnage, however; what else could have been looked for then? But *now*, amid all this wealth of sylvan beauty and joy, for Arthur—of all human beings, Arthur—to be lying dead, stricken out of life in the glory of his youth, his beauty, his strength, and health, seemed something far too terrible and hideous for belief!

Yet it was so! The step of the panting negro, as he reached Max's side, roused the latter to something of his usual self-possession. He pressed his hand over his eyes for a minute to clear away their dimness, then he looked down again, and saw a motionless form, a white, rigid face, on which the golden, sunbeams fell quiveringly through the green leaves softly rustling overhead.

He stood with his eyes fastened upon the dead man for what seemed a long time to the spectator beside him; but there was something in the expression of his face which precluded the possibility of the negro's venturing to disturb him. At last he turned and spoke quietly, almost gently:

"Go over to Rosland, Lewis, as fast as you can, and tell Robert that you want to see Mr. Middleton—say that you have a message on business for him. Take care, however, and don't mention any thing about this or it may get to the ears of the ladies of the family, and, you know—"

"Yes, sir," said Lewis—his eyes distending again with a gleam of intelligence as Captain Tyndale stopped suddenly, with a sort of gasp in his voice, "I'll not say a word, sir."

"Speak to Mr. Middleton alone, and ask him to come over to Strafford immediately—say that I want to see him on very particular business, or I should not send for him at such an hour. Come back with him, and, as soon as you are out of hearing of the house, tell him what is the matter."

"Yes, sir."

Left alone, Max stood still for some time longer, trying to realize the awful truth that was there before his eyes. Try as he would, however, it was something which he found it impossible

to do. Connect that silent figure with Arthur he could not: and it was only by an effort he roused himself at last, and, slowly leaving the bridge, walked along the bank of the creek for some twenty or thirty yards toward a spot where the ground sloped gradually downward until the greensward was but a few inches above the bed of the stream, which, shrunken now by the summer drought to less than half the width and volume of its winter current, rippled clear and shallow along the middle or deepest part of its channel, leaving a dry, sandy margin on each side. At another time, or under other circumstances, Captain Tyndale might not have been so deliberate in his movements, might not have walked until he could make an easy step from the grassy bank to the creek-bottom. But why should he be in haste now? One glance had told him that all earthly effort would be vain—that Death had set his inexorable seal on the victim he had chosen! So he walked lingeringly along the bank, slowly stepped from the soft grass to the barren sand, and, turning, went back toward the bridge, almost immediately beneath which the body of Arthur was lying.

For the third time Max paused, when he stood beside the body—for the third time a sense of suffocating emotion seized him as he looked on the dead presence that in life had been so familiar to his eye—as he began at last to realize the strange, incomprehensible truth that *Arthur was dead*. How poor, and petty, and unworthy of remembrance, seemed now the clouds that had come between them of late!—how entirely his thoughts went back to the better days of that cordial, almost brother-like intercourse and affection which had existed between them for years. A great pain was at his heart—a great dimness (not of tears, for his eyes were hot and dry) was over his vision. He bent over and took one of the cold hands in his own. The touch acted like an arousing shock to him. He shuddered; he let the hand gently fall from his hold; he felt that he must control himself.

"This won't do!" he muttered, as he pushed the hair back from his forehead, throwing off his hat unheedingly in the act. And at that moment an exclamation from a human voice attracted his attention. He looked up, and saw the pale, horror-stricken face of Mr. Middleton, leaning over the bridge above.

"Good God! Tyndale, what is the meaning of this?"

"God only knows!" Max answered, with more literal meaning than is often put into those trite words. Truly, and indeed in every sense, God and God alone knew what was the meaning of the scene which the midnight had witnessed here. But that which was merely an exclamation, suggested to him suddenly what he had not thought of before—the question of *how Arthur had died*.

"Come down here," he said to Mr. Middleton; and the latter, looking a little bewildered and doubtful as to how he could get down, Max briefly directed him the way he had come himself. Partly the appearance of Mr. Middleton on the scene, and partly the train of thought which his involuntary cry had awakened, at once restored him to his characteristic composure of mind and manner. There was something to be done and the soldier was ready to do it.

When Mr. Middleton came to his side, they stooped down beside the body and proceeded to examine it as well as it was possible to do without infringing the law which forbids the touching the body of one found dead until it has been inspected by a jury of inquest.

Almost as graceful in death as he had been in life, Arthur lay in what looked an easy attitude, half on his side, his shoulder supported against a large, flat stone, his head falling back so that the face was fully exposed to view. His right hand—the one Max had grasped a few minutes before—rested carelessly beside him on the sand, palm downward, with loosely-curving fingers, like that of one sleeping; the left arm was bent, and half doubled under the reclining form. The expression of the face—or, more properly speaking, its want of expression—was that of deep, dreamless slumber. Not the slightest shade or contraction marred the beauty of the white forehead and pale-tinted but clearly-penciled brows; there was no hollowness under the eyes, where the long lashes swept the cheek, veiling from sight that which "thought shrinks from;" the straight,

chiseled nose had no sharpness about its lines, and the well-cut lips were closed naturally under the silky waves of the blond mustache.

At first they could see no signs of violence, except that the dress was slightly disarranged about the chest and throat, but a moment's scrutiny showed signs of blood on the left side of the head. Max gently put aside the waves of fair hair, and then they perceived a deep, gaping wound high up on the left temple—the death-wound, as they recognized at a glance. When he saw this, the young man thought again of the shot he had heard the night before, but the shape and general character of the ragged incision forbade even a momentary suspicion that it could have been caused by a pistol-ball. It looked rather as if made by some rough, three-cornered instrument, and convinced the two men at once that the death had not been caused by accident, but was the work of deliberate design—in plain words, a murder. As the wound looked as if it must have bled profusely, they directed their attention to the ground to see if they could find further traces, and were soon startled by a new discovery. A few paces from where the body lay was a spot which had evidently been a pool of blood. Had been a pool of blood—it having trickled in a small stream down to the water, no doubt, filtering gradually through the damp sand, also, as it went, leaving only a red stain, which, however, could not be mistaken. But it was not this sanguinary sign which struck them most. Just beside it was a small, sharp stone, the shape of which seemed to both of them identical with that of the wound. On examination, they found that it was merely the exposed point of a larger stone embedded immovably in the sand—a point a good deal like an Indian arrow-head, and not much larger. In fact, it did not protrude more than an inch above the ground; but it was flint—hard as steel and sharp as glass. While they regarded it with momently increasing conviction as to its instrumentality in the death of Arthur, their uncertainty was set at rest by another discovery. Exactly on a line with the stone for about the length of a man's body there was a faint, but perfectly perceptible indentation on the sand. They looked at it for an instant, and then Mr. Middleton spoke.

"It is plain enough, so far as the mere circumstance of his death is concerned," he said, in that hushed tone to which the voice involuntarily attunes itself in the presence of the great destroyer. "He must have been waylaid and attacked as he went home from my house last night. There was a struggle, evidently"—he pointed to the loosened cravat and other appearances about the upper part of the dress, which could only have resulted from a personal conflict—"and he has been hurled violently down, his head striking against that stone. But I don't understand why he should be *here*—how he got here—"

He paused, looking vaguely round; and, as by a common impulse, he and Captain Tyndale rose to their feet, and began to bestow the same scrutiny on the locale around which they had just given to the body itself.

It would have been hard to find a lovelier spot than this, which was to be evermore a picture, in the memory of both of them, as a scene of horror, a background of mocking beauty to the ghastly central object before them. The bridge, a rustic, picturesque structure of wood, had been thrown over the creek at the point where the stream was narrowest and the banks highest; and almost immediately beneath its span they now stood. The banks rose, perpendicular as the walls of a chamber, to at least ten feet above them on each side, for some distance both above and below the bridge; and, as the stream made a sudden horseshoe bend just here, they were literally shut in—to the sight—between walls of most varied and luxuriant verdure—shrubs, moss, clinging vines, and even trees that bent their limbs over from above, or shot up their stems from the rich, loamy deposit just at the verge of the water. The blue sky, with a few fleecy clouds floating like pearly mists in its liquid depths, was overhead; the sunshine flickered down through the spreading boughs that fringed the bank on its eastern side, throwing here a gleam, there a broad sheet, of brightest gold over the clear, shallow water that flowed noisily by, and upon the dry creek-bed on which was stretched the slender, graceful figure of the dead man.

The first thing which at the same moment attracted the attention of the two gentlemen was the crushed and broken appearance of the shrubs on the bank, at one point a few paces lower

down the stream than the spot where the body lay. Several bushes had been uprooted, and now hung to their native earth by the fibres of their roots alone, while a larger one—a small tree, in fact, it was—had only suffered in the breaking of some of its branches. There were signs, too, on near investigation, of a man's feet having been dug into the soil at intervals, in a slanting direction, along the sheer, perpendicular face of the bank—making it plain that somebody had clambered down by clinging to the thick, tough growth with which it was clothed.

"Could it have been Arthur himself?" was the thought which occurred to both, and which was expressed in the glance they exchanged.

Again, as with one thought, they turned to ascertain this by examining his boots, which would necessarily retain traces of the moist earth, if it had been he. A glance satisfied them that it was not. Both his boots and trousers were immaculate of earth-stain or speck of any kind, as when he had entered Mrs. Middleton's drawing-room the evening before.

"Strange!" said Mr. Middleton. "There was a struggle, unquestionably."

"Unquestionably," assented Max; "and it is equally unquestionable that somebody has scrambled down the bank here, and that it was not himself."

"Yes. What is most unaccountable to me, though, is how he got here, what he was doing down here, if the murderer came down after him. And, then, that mark there is certainly the print of his body, to say nothing of the wound: yet he lies in a position which shows he has been moved since he fell." Then, with a fresh burst of horror: "Great Heavens! to think of it! Arthur Tyndale murdered! One of the last men in the world that I should have expected to see meet such a fate! And here, right at his own door, almost in sight of my house! Good Heavens! I can scarcely believe the evidence of my own senses! What could have been the object of such a murder? Can you imagine? Oh!"—as a sudden thought struck him—it may have been a robbery as well as a murder. No!" (after ascertaining that neither watch nor purse was missing). "There seems no clew to the mystery. Well"—raising himself with a short but deep and audible sigh "well, we must see about—"

"Stop!" said Max. "We will examine the ground above there. Stay here, Lewis," he added, turning to the boy, who had followed Mr. Middleton closely, and now stood near in open-mouthed wonder, "while we go up on the bridge."

He turned and led the way rapidly down the bed of the stream, until he came to a point where he had no difficulty in mounting the bank by the aid of the roots and trunk of a small, gnarled beech-tree; but Mr. Middleton, who was neither so active in movement nor so long of leg as himself, kept on to the place they had both passed over in coming, a few minutes before, and consequently he was considerably behind Max when the latter, after mounting the acclivity, stopped at the entrance of the bridge to wait for him. While he came puffing and blowing up the steep ascent, Max walked upon the bridge, and looked closely at the floor, especially at that part just above the spot where the body lay. As he looked, he shook his head. There were no signs of a struggle having taken place, and, if such a thing had been, the evidences must have appeared, since a thick coating of dust covered the boards, and any unusual movement upon it would have left unmistakable traces. The young man turned, and, passing outside the railing, began to direct his scrutiny to the greensward which stretched along the edge of the bank. He had scarcely turned the corner, so to speak, of the railing—it should be remarked that this railing, as a matter of precaution on account of the height of the bank, was run out for a considerable distance from the edge of the stream upon the land—when a sudden exclamation from him quickened the pace of Mr. Middleton, who was by this time but a few yards off. Hastening forward, that gentleman echoed the exclamation with emphasis, as he gazed down upon the crushed and trampled turf to which Max's hand pointed. Here the struggle had been, it was plain, a hand-to-hand struggle, for the grass, which was high and luxuriant, bore the print of trampling feet that had moved in a very small space, and obviously irregular manner, along the very edge of the bank, from which a fragment of turf had been broken in one place. Except on this spot, there were no marks of footsteps in any direction.

"So!—there is no question but that he was waylaid, as I have said," observed Mr. Middleton—"and the body must have been thrown from here, instead of off the bridge, as we supposed." He went close to the margin of the bank, looked cautiously over, and was about to speak, when another exclamation—this time it was almost a cry—from his companion, startled him so that he nearly lost his balance, and was for an instant in danger of going head-foremost the way he had just expressed his belief that Arthur Tyndale had gone. Recovering his equilibrium, he looked round to see what had excited Max so greatly—looked just in time to see the latter start forward, stoop, and seize some object that lay half concealed beneath the sweeping foliage of a small shrub near by. A gleam of sunshine chanced to fall just upon the place, and lighted the plate of burnished metal which had caught Max's eye by its glitter.

"What is it?" said Mr. Middleton, eagerly.

"A pistol, you see," was the reply; and the young man held it up to view. "His own pistol, as I perceived in an instant here is his name." He pointed to the silver plate on which the name was engraven, and then went on in a tone of deep agitation: "Great God! if I had but gone when I started to go, last night—when I heard that shot—I might perhaps have prevented this! But—"

He stopped short—remembering why he had not gone, and, even at that moment, conscious that he must be careful what he said lest he should compromise Norah.

"Heard a shot!" repeated Mr. Middleton. "Is it possible you heard a shot last night? When?"

"Some time between eleven and twelve o'clock. I was in your grounds—"

"Good Heavens!" broke in Mr. Middleton, to whose mind, by some association with the word "grounds," the recollection of Leslie at this instant occurred for the first time since he had come upon the scene of the tragedy—"Good Heavens, Tyndale! I had forgotten Leslie! Poor child!"—a sudden moisture came into his eyes, and his voice sounded husky. "I must return home immediately"—he went on, hurriedly—"God forbid that such news should reach her from the tattle of servants, or without preparation! Meanwhile, the body cannot be moved until the jury has seen it."

"Of course not," said Max. "But I will send Lewis to Strafford to have every thing prepared, so that it can be moved as soon as possible. And about the jury—"

"I'll dispatch a messenger to the coroner at once and, as soon as I have told my wife, I will join you again. You remain here, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Max.

"Fortunately," said Mr. Middleton, "this is a very cool, shady place—and I hope we may get the inquest over in the course of the morning. Now, I'll go."

He held out his hand; the two exchanged that nervous grasp which is often more expressive of strong feeling than many words could be; and then he turned and strode with the vigor of a young man across the bridge toward Rosland while the other once more descended to where he had left the servant, as a watcher beside the dead.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

"Love and be loved! yet know love's holiest  
    deeps  
Few sound while living! when the loved one  
    sleeps  
That last, strange sleep, beneath the mournful  
    sod,  
Then Memory wakes, like some remorseful god,  
And all the golden past we scarce did prize,

Subtly revives, with light of tender eyes."

As Mr. Middleton took his way to Rosland, it would be difficult to describe the tumult in which his mind was plunged. The first impression of the shock having, in a measure, subsided, he was able to face it more clearly, able to understand all that it involved, and all that must flow from it—especially with regard to Leslie. How was it possible to tell her that the lover from whom she had parted a few hours before in the flush of youth and health, was now lying dead—fouly murdered? How would she bear such an overwhelming blow? It was natural, perhaps, that this consideration should have weighed with him even more than pity for the unfortunate young man who had been hurled so abruptly out of a life which every gift of Fortune conspired to render one of exceptional brightness. The mystery overhanging his fate made it doubly tragical; but then that fate was accomplished, the worst was over and done, while Leslie who could foresee what effect such a shock might have upon her future life? This was what Mr. Middleton thought, as he walked forward, his steps unconsciously growing slower as he approached the house, his heart quaking as the veriest coward's who ever served in military ranks might have quaked when the order to charge a battery was given. A battery! Mildest of civilians though he was, Mr. Middleton would have faced ten batteries just then, in preference to bearing the news which he carried within the walls of Rosland. As he crossed the lawn, he glanced round at the scattered mallets and croquet-hoops. "Great Heavens! he was here last night!" he said to himself. Here last night, and now where?

When he entered the hall, the first person whom he met, much to his surprise, was his wife. Disturbed by the message which had come for him, and vaguely uneasy concerning what it might portend, Mrs. Middleton had risen, early though it was, and weary as she might well have been from the dissipation of the night before. "Something is the matter!" she thought; and, since she was not one of the women who are ready to think this on all occasions, her instinct may have counted for something. It is at least certain that she did not disturb any one else with her apprehensions and forebodings. The whole house was wrapped in its early morning stillness as she sat in the hall, fresh and cool, and pleasant to look upon as ever, trying to divert her mind with a newspaper which she had taken up, but in reality seeing not one of the sentences on which her eyes rested, when her husband, with a face so pale that it scarcely bore any resemblance to his own, walked in upon her.

This face in itself would have been enough to frighten any nervous woman into a scream, but Mrs. Middleton, fortunately for the peace of the household, rarely screamed. As she glanced up, holding her gold -rimmed eye-glass still before her eyes, she uttered a faint cry of surprised alarm, but that was all. The eye-glass fell with a click—she rose to her feet:

"George!" she said "George! for Heaven's sake, what is the matter?"

Then George, seeing that his face had betrayed him, and, being a sufficiently sensible man to know that bad news is only made worse by any attempt to "break it," took her trembling hands into his own, and answered plainly:

"Something so terrible, Mildred, that God only knows how that poor child up-stairs is to bear it. Arthur Tyndale is dead!"

"Arthur Tyndale dead!" she repeated, with a gasp—her eyes opening wide and startled, her face turning so white that he passed his arm quickly around her. "George, do you know what you are saying? How—how can Arthur Tyndale be dead?"

"He has been murdered, I fear," said Mr. Middleton, reluctantly. "He was found dead down in the creek-bottom by his cousin, who sent for me. There are plain signs of violence, and—courage, Mildred! I thought it best to tell you the truth at once—you, who are not like other women—but try to bear up for poor Leslie's sake!"

The adjuration was necessary, for she had buried her face on his shoulder, shuddering and almost convulsed. Dead!—murdered! It would have been awful enough if he had been the most ordinary of the guests who had been with her the evening before; but the man who for months had

been as intimate in her house as if he had been a son of it, the man whom Leslie was to marry—those who have never passed through such a shock can ill conceive the overmastering horror of it. At the sound of Leslie's name, however, she burst suddenly into passionate tears.

"O my poor Leslie! O my poor darling!" she cried. "O George, George, how will she bear it!"

"It is you who must help her to bear it," said Mr. Middleton, leading her into the sitting-room and closing the door. The hall was too open and public a place for such a scene as this—for such a story as he had to tell.

As be told all that be knew, and all that Max and himself had together conjectured, it was not strange that her sense of the awful nature of the tragedy deepened many fold. It seemed something too appalling for grief, according to the ordinary meaning of that term; it was something which dwarfed all the conventional words in which we speak, all the conventional thoughts we think. Sometimes we are tempted to wonder if our power of feeling is as limited as our power of expression. It almost seems so: at least it is certain that a great shock tends as inevitably to deaden the sensations and throw the mind into chaos, as to bewilder the tongue and deprive us of words. Into something of chaos Mrs. Middleton's mind was thrown now, only dominating all other thoughts was the thought of Leslie, and the necessity—the inexorable, cruel necessity—of telling her the terrible news. From this necessity she shrank, as the weakest woman alive might have done.

"I cannot tell her!" she cried. "O George, I cannot! It will kill her!"

"The people whom such things kill are weaker people, mentally and physically, than Leslie," answered Mr. Middleton, who had by this time regained something of his usual manner. "It will be a blow which may leave its mark on her till she dies, but I do not think it will kill her. God knows I would do any thing on earth to spare her," he said, walking hurriedly to and fro; "but there is nothing to be done. She must bear it; and what we are obliged to endure, Mildred, we can endure. You know that."

"But this is so fearful, so sudden! And, then, the doubt—the horrible doubt—George, what am I to tell her?"

"The truth. Any thing else, in such a case, is gratuitous cruelty, not kindness."

"I cannot!" said she, shuddering. "It is too much to ask of me. Oh, to think that she is unconscious now! My poor darling! God help her!"

While the woman who had been a mother to her was thus weeping and unnerved below, Leslie, dry-eyed and full of misery—misery which she was too proud to vent in sigh or sob—had risen, long before her usual hour, from a sleepless couch. It chanced that, in her healthy, happy youth, she had never endured such a thing before as a sleepless night—a night in which the mind persistently refused to allow the body to rest—and the sensations which accompany such a vigil were all new to her. She had hitherto entered so little upon the heritage of grief and pain, common to all the children of earth, that she had never before risen with weary lassitude pervading every limb, with a sick heart and an aching head, with a mouth parched as if from fever, with eyes that burned, and lids that felt tense and strained as they stretched across them. "Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow? Was ever desolation like unto mine?" had been the cry of her soul during all the long hours of that weary night. Weep? She would have scorned herself if she had felt one tear rise to her eyes. What had she to weep for? For having poured out her love and trust like water on barren ground? for having given every thing, and received nothing? for having been deceived from first to last? These were not things for which to weep. "If he had died," she said to herself more than once, with a low moan, "it would have been so different!" Such a thought comes often hand-in-hand with the keen sting of betrayal, and it was not singular, therefore, that it should have come to Leslie; but if she could have known on what the moon was looking down at that very moment!

No instinct came to warn her, however, as she lay gazing out on the summer night, or the fresh glory of the summer dawn, measuring the full height and depth and length and breadth of

her desolation, as the hours went by. She was not melodramatic or passionate in her grief; she did not think that life was, in any sense, over for her. On the contrary, she knew better; she knew that she must rise with the morning to face the necessities of her position, to bear her burden bravely, to let no one even suspect how deep the sting had pierced. A few women—only a few—are capable of doing this; and Leslie was one of them. There was none of the stuff of a lovesick maiden in her. She could have died sooner than said to the world, in word, look, or tone, "I have been disappointed and betrayed!" If she had been tried by the ordeal which she anticipated, there is no question but that her courage would have matched her endurance, no question but that victory would have come to her in the end, as it always comes to the brave of heart, and the strong of purpose.

But over this fiery ordeal she had not to pass. As she stood before her mirror, languidly combing out her soft, brown hair, and trying to think when and how she had better tell Arthur that all was known to her, a low, hesitating knock sounded on her door—a knock which seemed to echo the palpitations of the heart behind it. She started, and turned round. Perhaps it was her overwrought frame of mind which filled her instantly with an instinct of ill. At least, it is certain that she felt it. Was it Mrs. Sandford again? she wondered.

"Come in," she said, coldly; and, when the door opened, it was not Mrs. Sandford, but Mrs. Middleton, who stood on the threshold.

Mrs. Middleton, with the news she had come to tell as clearly printed on her face as it had been on her husband's when he entered the hall! One glance at that face Leslie gave; then she clutched the back of the nearest chair for a support—the room reeled around, her limbs trembled under her, her tongue seemed paralyzed. She could not speak; she could only wonder what had happened—what could possibly have occurred to make her aunt look like that.

As for Mrs. Middleton, she felt as if all power of language deserted her—all knowledge or judgment how to act. What to do, what to say, in presence of that white, imploring yet unconscious face, she did not know. For an awful minute she stood silent. Then she did the best as well as the simplest thing; she came forward, and took the girl in her arms.

"Leslie! Leslie! O my poor darling!" she cried, and then fell to weeping so sorely that Leslie felt at once that only one calamity, out of all the calamities of earth, could have befallen her.

"What is it, auntie?" she asked, quiveringly, regaining her voice at length. "Is it about Arthur? Has any thing happened to him? Whatever it is, tell me at once! I can bear any thing better than this."

But the story was too terrible to be told at once—Mrs. Middleton retained that much judgment, at least and it was only by degrees that the horror-stricken girl heard her lover's fate. Only by degrees she learned that there was no need now to think of him bitterly, no need now to consider how to give him back his pledge with sufficient scorn! The passions of earth and the things of time were all over for him to whom the great sanctification of death had come.

And so it was that the love which life had taken from Leslie, death gave to her. In that bitter hour, pride sank down and died utterly; she did not ask any longer whether he had ever really loved her; she did not remember the sting or the indignity of his deception. The last few troubled days of doubt, the last terrible night of certainty, passed from her recollection as entirely as if they had never been. The majesty of her own love rose and asserted itself. She might have crushed and stifled it, while life and all life's possibilities of happiness were his; but now—in that great agony of remorseful love, of tenderness washing out all stain which death awakens—it came back like a flood upon her soul. The golden hero of her youth, the prince whose kiss had first waked her heart from its maiden trance, was hers again. No power of earth could take him from her now. Worthy or unworthy? Who could ask such a question? When we enter Death's

mighty treasure-house,\* it is with bared head and reverent breath. The touch, which is like a sacrament, has been pressed upon our gold, and we do not stop to cavil or to ask how much alloy it may contain.

Diverse as the faces and the natures of men, are the ways in which grief displays itself. Who has not seen the volatile temperament stunned into strange quietness, or the quiet temperament rise into the madness of passionate excitement? Rarely do people "take things" as we expect them to do. Leslie did not take this great shock as her aunt had feared that she might. When she mastered the truth at last, she slipped out of the arms which encircled her, and, with one cry of agony beyond expression, sank upon her knees. "Dead!" she repeated, again and again and then she would break into low, shivering moans. That was all. Passion, despair, insensibility—none of these things came. Perhaps, though her aunt knew it not, she had already gone through too much for any violent excess of emotion. In a measure, at least, she was stunned. Her agony of the night had been so intense that she might well have uttered Thekla's words when the bearer of evil tidings entered:

"The worst is said already: I can hear  
Nothing of deeper anguish!"

Meanwhile, the news spread through the household with the subtile rapidity of an electric flash. That something of an unusual nature had occurred, all the servants were very well able to surmise when Mr. Middleton was summoned away by an agitated and mysterious messenger; when Mrs. Middleton rose at an hour unprecedented in the experience of those who had served her for years; when one servant reported that he had met his master on the lawn with a face "like death," and another that she had seen her mistress going up-stairs "crying as if she would break her heart." But, with all this, they were unprepared for the announcement which the servant whom Mr. Middleton summoned to take his message to the coroner made when he came forth. "Good Lord, Maria, Mr. Tyndale's been murdered!" he said, with a dismayed and yet an important face, to Leslie's maid, whom he met first. "Master says he's been found a-lyin' dead down in the creek!"

Then it was that, like lightning, the news diffused itself through the house. Mrs. Sandford's maid flew with the intelligence to her mistress. Maria, aware that Mrs. Middleton was with Leslie, bethought herself of Miss Desmond, and of the immediate necessity of enlightening that young lady. Thus it came to pass that, five minutes later, Norah was waked from her morning sleep by an excited figure at her bedside—a figure wringing its hands wildly, and announcing, without preface or preparation, that Arthur Tyndale had been murdered.

"What!" she cried, springing up in bed—wide awake in an instant, startled, incredulous, doubting her own ears. "What is it you say? Who has been murdered?"

"Mr. Arthur Tyndale, miss!" answered Maria, with something between a sob and a groan in her throat. She was as near hysterics as it was possible for a young person of the raving-distracted kind to be; but, for all that, it cannot be denied that a certain satisfaction pervaded her breast at this moment. Who could have been insensible to the gratification of being the first to announce such an unexampled item of intelligence?

"Arthur Tyndale!" repeated Norah. For a minute she could do nothing but stare at the speaker with distended eyes—amazement, horror, and incredulity, precluding all power of further speech. Then she suddenly sprang to her feet, extended her hands, and, taking the maid by the shoulder, gave her a quick shake.

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\* "Death is the great treasure-house of love."—LORD LYTTON.

"Have you lost your senses, that you come to me with such an absurd story as this?" she cried, sharply. "You know it cannot be true!"

The tone and the shake together were remarkably efficacious in dispelling most of the alarming symptoms of hysterics.

"It is as true as can be!" said Maria, retreating a step. "I—I thought you'd like to know, miss. Master told Jim himself and Jim told me. Mr. Tyndale's been found murdered down at the creek."

"Murdered! do you mean that he is *dead*?" cried Norah.

It was a very stupid question; but people ask stupid questions at such times as these. The most brilliant of us are not generally brilliant in the face of an overwhelming shock, and to Norah, no more than to the rest of the household, was the immediate realization of such an appalling fact possible.

"La, yes, to be sure, miss," answered Maria, opening her eyes very wide indeed. "At least, that's what Jim said—*murdered!* Of course, when a gentleman's murdered, he's dead, miss."

"Murdered! My God! Can it be possible?" said Norah. She put her hands to her head for a moment. Her brain seemed reeling. It would be hard to enumerate all that flashed upon her at that instant. Arthur, Max, Leslie, the events of yesterday and of last night—much which she could not connect—came to her, as the events of his past life are said to come to a dying man. She was silent scarcely a minute, but Maria thought she had never seen a face so changed as hers was when she looked up. "Does Mr. Middleton know or suspect who committed the murder?" she asked—a sharp, hard, metallic ring in her usually rich voice.

"Not as I know of, miss," answered Maria, reluctantly. It was hard to be forced to confess ignorance on such an important point as this.

"And Leslie—do you know whether she has heard it?"

"Mistis' is in her room with her now," said the girl, with bated breath. Even she felt what those words implied.

"What!" cried Norah, "is it so certain as that? Great Heaven, girl! do you mean to tell me that there is *no doubt*?"

"I don't think there's any doubt, miss," answered Maria—awed and almost frightened by the passionate vehemence of the appeal—"master's sent Jim for the kurroner."

"The kurroner, miss—the man that always comes and sits on people when they're found dead."

"And, since he has been sent for, you think it is certain that Mr. Tyndale is dead?"

"I'm sure of that, anyhow," was the answer, delivered with perfect faith, "for master told Jim."

"My God! what does it mean?" said Norah, under her breath. Then she looked up, imperious and haughty as ever. "You can go!" she said adding, impatiently, as the girl stood still, scarcely understanding her, "don't you hear? Your news is told—you can go!"

After the indignant Maria had retired, the first thing Norah did was to walk across the room. It was a purely involuntary movement, born of that impulse to *act* which was inherent in her temperament. Any thing to her was better, was more possible, than passive endurance. Any bodily effort was preferable to sitting still to be rent by thoughts like vultures. "Who can think of *bearing*, while there is any thing to do?" she often said. And, even when there was nothing to do as in the present case the instinct and longing of her nature was so much for action, that she rushed into movement and speech as other women rush into hysterics and tears. Thrilled to the core, as she was, by the terrible news she had heard, the energy of her character asserted itself. "What can I do?" was her first thought. As yet her mind refused to credit the fact which had been forced upon it. The idea that Arthur could be dead—Arthur, concerning whom she had sat, till long past midnight, talking to Leslie—seemed utterly impossible, too wildly improbable to be true!

But, even as she thought this, a sudden recollection of the shot which she had heard the night before came back to her, as it had come back to Max. That was grim evidence which could not be set aside. She stopped short, her head thrown back, her hands interlaced, her whole attitude suggestive of one drawn up short by the curb of some unexpected thought. What did it mean? That was what she asked herself with quickening breath. If the report which she heard—she, the woman who loved him once—had been Arthur's death-shot, from what hand had it come? What midnight assassin could possibly have lain in wait for him? And he—had not Max said that he had left him at Strafford? What, then, was he doing in, or near, the Rosland grounds? Questions, these, which she was unable to answer; but they seemed to fire her with renewed energy, even while she felt an unutterable faint sickness in every fibre. It was characteristic of the woman that she turned suddenly, and began to dress with impetuous haste. "I must see Mr. Middleton!" she said to herself. "I must know all that has happened!"

But, with all her haste, she found, when she went down, that Mr. Middleton had gone back, as he had promised, to join Captain Tyndale. Mrs. Middleton was still with Leslie, and, of course, there was no one else to whom she could apply. "Where is Mr. Carl Middleton?" she asked, before she remembered that he had left the night before, and Robert stared a little as he answered to that effect.

There was nothing to be done, therefore, but to pace the hall to and fro, and try to realize that which must certainly be true, since a pall seemed to overhang the house, since the very servants came and went aimlessly with terror-stricken, curious faces, and the whole household machinery was plainly in that interesting *bouleversement* which a domestic calamity always causes. Not many minutes had she been here, however—minutes measured off as methodically by the old-fashioned English clock as if time had not ceased forever for one soul—when a figure becomingly arrayed in a blue dressing-gown, a figure which had not allowed its feelings to run away with it to the extent of forgetting its chignon, swept down the staircase and rushed to her.

"Good Heavens, Miss Desmond!" cried Mrs. Sandford, with more alarming signs of hysterics than even Maria had displayed. "Is it true, this awful, *awful* news?"

"I am afraid it is true that Mr. Tyndale is dead," Norah answered—and, feeling the curiosity of the blue eyes bent on her, pride steadied her voice and hardened her face into an indifference as great as if she had spoken of some chance acquaintance of the day before—"whether or not he has been murdered, I do not know."

"But how *can* he be dead?" cried Mrs. Sandford, "and oh, *who* could have murdered him? I thought *I* should faint when Ellen rushed upon me with the news! I told her it *could not* be true! I can't believe it! Why, he was here last night! Miss Desmond" (with an assurance of tone and manner which Norah felt to be absolutely insolent), "I am confident that *you* know whether or not it is so!"

"I know nothing about it!" Norah answered. She had neither time nor inclination to waste words on this woman. She turned from her with impatient disdain, and began her sentinel walk again. What had happened? What was going on at Strafford? What had been the meaning of that shot? These were the thoughts which filled her mind. Mrs. Sandford's talk, full of nervousness, malice, and distracted curiosity, flowed by her unheeded, with all its italics and exclamation-points. *Tæe-àt æe* in this fashion, Mrs. Middleton found them when she came downstairs.

On her Mrs. Sandford flung herself with a wealth of condolence. "Oh, my dear, dear Mrs. Middleton," she cried, "what a terrible blow to all of us! Oh, how does our poor darling Leslie bear it? And oh, is it true—quite true—that Mr. Tyndale is dead?"

"It is quite true," answered Mrs. Middleton, whose pale face and tear-stained cheeks made her look ten years older than she had done the day before. She sat down with an air of utter exhaustion in the nearest chair. "Leslie bears it better than I could have expected," she said; "but it is a fearful blow to her—fearful! My heart bleeds for her; and yet, there is nothing which any one can do. That is the hard part of it."

"Oh, it is terrible!" cried Mrs. Sandford again, her eyes expanded, her whole face full of the liveliest interest and curiosity. "Oh, dear Mrs. Middleton, pray do tell me something about it. I have heard nothing—absolutely nothing—but I cannot believe that Mr. Tyndale is really dead!"

"Unfortunately, it is impossible to disbelieve it, unless we close our ears to the truth," said Mrs. Middleton. "Mr. Tyndale is certainly dead—my husband had seen him when he came back to tell me."

"And is it true that he was *murdered?*" asked Mrs. Sandford, in an awe-struck whisper.

The elder lady bent her head; for a minute she could not speak. Then, in a voice full of tears, she said: "Yes. That is what makes it so hard so horrible! He has been murdered. Mr. Middleton thinks there is no doubt of it."

"How?" asked Norah, speaking for the first time. She had paused in her walk, and stood leaning against the foot of the stair-case, her arm around a small bronze statuette that made a finish to the end of the balustrade. As Mrs. Middleton glanced toward her, she thought, with a sense of repulsion, that the girl looked cold and utterly heartless; even Mrs. Sandford's effusion had more "sympathy" in it than this unmoved calm.

"Mr. Middleton could not tell exactly how he had been killed," she answered. "He seemed to feel uncertain, and I did not press him for any details. The fact itself was enough for me, and I am sure for Leslie."

"Was he shot?" asked Norah. She fully understood the significance of that last sentence, but she chose to satisfy one of the many doubts which were harassing her mind.

"No," answered Mrs. Middleton. "My husband said they found a pistol, but it was Mr. Tyndale's own and he was not shot."

"If he had a pistol, why on earth didn't he shoot the murderer?" cried Mrs. Sandford, with the air of one who propounds a perfectly new question, or makes a perfectly new suggestion. "I can't conceive how he could have failed to do *that!*"

"The fact puzzled George and Captain Tyndale very much," said Mrs. Middleton. "Altogether it is a most mysterious as well as a most terrible thing! My poor Leslie!" Then she turned to Miss Desmond again. "Leslie told me to ask if you would come to her for a little while," she said, with something even more cold and stately than usual in her manner; and it must be confessed that, to Miss Desmond, she always displayed a considerable amount of both coldness and stateliness. "Will you go?"

"Assuredly," said Norah. She was surprised, but she did not show it in tone or manner. Mrs. Sandford, on her part, could not restrain a glance of the blankest astonishment. For Leslie to send for her sister after all that she (Mrs. Sandford) had told her the night before, was inexplicable. "Shall I go at once?" Norah added, turning and placing one foot on the lower step of the staircase.

"At once, if you will be so kind," Mrs. Middleton answered. "Excuse me that I do not accompany you, but I think Leslie wishes to see you alone."

### CHAPTER XXX.

"This anguish will be wearied down, I know;  
What pang is permanent with man? From the  
highest  
As from the vilest thing of every day,  
He learns to wean himself: for the strong hours  
Conquer him. Yet I feel what I have lost  
In him. The bloom is vanished from my life."

LESLIE was alone when Norah entered her room. She was lying quietly on the bed where Mrs. Middleton had insisted upon placing her, and the blinds were closed for what mocks and jars upon grief like sunshine? But, as her sister approached, she raised herself, and, looking strangely white and eerie in the green half-light, motioned her to come close.

This Norah did. She uttered no words—what could she say?—but she came, and, kneeling down by the slender, erect figure, put her arms around it for the first time since they had known each other. There was something magnetic—something strangely, if silently, full of sympathy—in her touch. It seemed to express more of tenderness and pity than many words could have done. It was at once strong and full of infinite gentleness—like her face, Leslie thought, as she turned toward it. Perhaps it was the wistful look of that face—the wistful compassion of its eyes—which suddenly unlocked the great fountain of tears that had hitherto been sealed in the girl's heart. It is certain that her head sank down on the shoulder which was at once that of a sister and a rival, and, with one mighty sob, the great passion of grief burst forth.

Not that flow of relieving tears over which sympathizing friends nod their heads and say, "Poor thing! it will do her good!" but a storm of the soul like unto that which, in the natural world, uproots forests and lashes seas into fury, leaving desolation and ruin in its track. It was a storm which frightened even Norah by the intensity and *abandon* of its passion. Never before had she seen a human heart laid bare in such keen agony, such supreme desolation. It may be said, also, that her amazement was almost as great as her concern. Were these tears which flowed in torrents, these sobs which seemed as if they might rend the very breast asunder, for the man who had not only deceived, but who had been willing to forsake, this woman who trusted him? It was something which the sterner nature could with difficulty comprehend—something which touched and almost awed the girl who, though she could be true as steel to truth, was also hard as iron to falsehood or deception. Nature had given her certain grand traits—this Norah Desmond—little as she may have seemed to show them thus far, but among these traits was nothing half so majestic as the great, generous, unselfish love which Leslie flung like a royal mantle over the corpse of her dead love.

She felt this herself, and said as much, when Leslie at last regained something of composure—if composure that could be called which was little more than utter exhaustion—and, lifting her heavy lids, said, faintly:

"No doubt, you think this strange; but I—I have forgotten every thing, except that I love him, and he is dead."

"Strange!" repeated Norah, and out of her own proud eyes a quick, hot shower fell. Then the girl showed what tender impulses came to her sometimes; she bent her head, and kissed the tear-drenched hand which had dropped from Leslie's eyes. "If this is human love, what must that which is divine be?" she said.

"Something greater—oh, surely, far greater—than we can guess!" said Leslie, throwing back her head in order to catch the white gleam of an ivory crucifix hanging against the tinted wall above her bed. "But you loved him too, Norah," she said, turning with sudden passion to her sister. "Do you mean to tell me that your love is dead—that love can ever die?"

"Not love like yours, perhaps," said Norah, gently, "but mine—well, mine may not have been love. God knows. At all events, it died long ago—so long ago that I have no tears, save those of pity, to weep for Arthur Tyndale now."

"I thought mine had died last night," said Leslie; "I thought nothing but pain was left; but, you see, I was mistaken. And now it does not matter. Whatever he may have been, I love him—that is enough. And he is all mine now—mine to remember, mine to love, mine to weep over! If he had lived, I should never have seen his face more than once again; but, since he is dead, he is *mine!*"

"And anger, resentment all that you felt last night—are they dead, too?" asked Norah.  
"Forgive me if I speak of what I should not; but you set me the example."

"I sent for you to speak of it," said Leslie. "I wanted to tell you how I have changed. Last night seems like a hideous dream; I want to put it away like a dream; I want to think of him only as I knew him before you came. I think he loved me before you came," she said, wistfully.

"He loved you all the time!" cried Norah, passionately. "Leslie, as God hears me, I speak the truth in saying that. He never loved me—no, not even in Germany—I know that now. I never suited him. You did. He felt this, and knew it, even when he let madness carry him away."

"Do not let us talk of it," said Leslie. "I did not want to do that. I only wanted to tell you that anger and pride are dead within me, and that I love him—I shall always love him! It is as well, perhaps, that I heard the truth; but I am glad that I did not hear it earlier; I am very glad that no cloud of bitterness ever came between us. There is something of comfort in that."

"Is there?" said Norah.

She looked at the speaker, wonderingly. Was it true, after all, that

"... love is not love  
That alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove."

"Regret for that which is past is worse than useless," she said, in a low voice; "but I am sorry, very sorry, that I told you any thing last night."

"Sorry!" repeated Leslie. "Why are you sorry? Would it have been better to let me eat out my heart with doubt, suspicion, and jealousy—all those passions which come to us even while we scorn them? Would it have been better to let me think that you were what you were not? There is nothing to regret. You spoke the truth in your own defense, and, as regards yourself, I remember it, but, as regards *him* ah, it is less than nothing to me now! He is dead, and I love him. All is said in that."

All was said, indeed—all of tenderness, of faithfulness, of love supremely beyond the bounds of passion or of self. Yet, at that moment, something like rebellion rose up in Norah's heart. She thought of the man who had so little deserved this, the silken egotist and epicurean, the careless trifler with all that men of honor hold most sacred; and then she thought with a curious pang of the other, the man of whose devotion Leslie guessed so little, the man who had served her so faithfully, the man who would have been so true if Fate had only granted to him the great gift of this loving heart. "Is it always so?" she said to herself, with a quick shiver of passionate indignation; and, as she asked the question which many a sick heart has asked before Leslie turned and spoke, with a sudden tense sound in her voice, a sudden tense eagerness in her face.

"Norah," said she, quickly, and, as she uttered the name, she grasped Norah's slender hands until the latter could have cried out with pain "Norah, promise me that you will not misunderstand, that you will not think I mean any thing more than I say, when I—I ask you a question."

"Ask what you please," answered Norah, "and I promise to answer truly, and to misunderstand nothing."

"You will forgive me, I am sure," said Leslie, her eyes seeming to quiver and glow with great dilated pupils in her white face. "Norah, you will not misunderstand, you will not think.—It is this, then: you cannot have forgotten that, when I went to your room last night, you had just come in; ten minutes before, I had stood at my window and seen you cross the lawn—Norah, had you not parted from Arthur then?"

"Leslie!"—despite the promise which she had given the moment before, Norah wrenched her hands out of those which held them, and drew back, outraged, indignant, aghast—"After all that I told you last night," she cried, her clear voice thrilling on the hushed atmosphere, "can you ask me such a question as that? Do you think that I would have given another interview to Arthur Tyndale, and an interview at such an hour and such a time? If you can think that of me, you must believe me to be utterly false!"

"I do not think that you are false," said Leslie, simply. "I only thought that, if you had seen him, you might know something—you might be able to throw some light on this horrible mystery. He was so unlike himself last night—he avoided me so strangely—that the awful thought of suicide has not left my mind for an instant since Aunt Mildred first came to me. You know"—her voice sank here, she shuddered in every fibre—"that means the death of the soul as well as of the body—Norah, I shall go mad if I am forced to think that!"

"There is no reason why you should think it for a moment," said Norah. "From what Mrs. Middleton told me a while ago, there is no question but that he was murdered—there is not one single indication of suicide. But when you talk of my knowing any thing, of my being able to throw any light, you do not know what you say," she went on, with something like a gasp in her voice. At that moment, a sense of her position came to her like a flash of light. If Leslie opened her lips to others, if it were known that she had been in the neighborhood of the bridge at midnight, what might not be the result? "I did not see Arthur Tyndale last night," she said, "after I left the dinner-table."

"Yet you were in the grounds," said Leslie, feverishly. "Norah, if you know any thing, for God's sake do not keep it from me!"

"Why should you think that I know any thing?" asked Norah, more and more disquieted. "Leslie, for Heaven's sake, be more reasonable! It is true that I was later in returning to the house last night than I ought to have been, but I saw nothing, I heard nothing of Arthur Tyndale. Do you not believe me? Shall I take that crucifix and swear to my ignorance on it?"

"No," answered Leslie. "I do believe you. But was there no one?—Did you see no trace of any one who might—"

Norah's lifted hand stayed the words on her lip. The girl's face had grown white as marble. It was like marble, also, in the rigidity which came to the beautiful features. For a moment, her heart seemed to stand still. Had she seen any one who might—she could not finish the sentence even to herself.

"I saw no one," she said, after a minute—her voice was hoarse, her lips seemed stiff—"no one whom it would be possible to connect with such a crime. The only person whom I saw was one who would have given his life to save Arthur Tyndale; but no one who—O Leslie, do you not comprehend? Do you not see that, if you speak of this, you may plant the seed of an evil to end God only knows where! On my faith and honor, I know nothing, I saw nothing, I heard nothing of Mr. Tyndale's death—for it seems that a shot which I heard had no connection with it. I went there simply and solely to serve *you*. Leslie, will you repay me by throwing you know not what of suspicion on me or on some one as innocent as I am?"

"Throw suspicion on *you*!" repeated Leslie, stricken aghast. "Norah, are you mad? How can you misunderstand me so utterly—so horribly? How can you think I meant to ask—to imply—"

"I do not think you meant to imply any thing," said Norah, who was trembling in every limb; "but, Leslie, promise me that you will give no hint of this. It would be too terrible if any one were—promise me you will say nothing! Remember," cried she, clutching eagerly at a plea which at another time she would never have made, "that my good name is in your hands; and, oh, promise—promise me!"

Her eagerness might have defeated its own end, and wakened the suspicion of a suspicious nature; but, farthest in the world from a suspicious nature was Leslie Grahame. The charity which "thinketh no evil" was hers in superlative degree. Suspect! Suspect the sister whose arms were round her, whose limpid eyes met her own—there was nothing which she could not sooner have done. She answered, therefore, out of the fullness of her heart:

"I can promise—I do promise, if you wish it, but I never thought of speaking to any one else. I sent for you in order that I might ask you, and you alone. I was tormented by the thought that you might know something which would tell me a little how he died. Norah" she threw herself on her sister's shoulder, the agony of tears and sobs broke forth afresh "it is this which is

so unutterably terrible! It is never to know how he died, never to have another glance, word, or tone, even in farewell! If I had only known last night—ah, if I had only known! To have one last good-by to remember, would be better than this awful silence and strangeness. Oh!"—with a long, shuddering gasp—"why had I not instinct enough to take that last good-by!"

And Norah was not able to say, "It is better so!" though she knew that for such a blow to cut sharp and clean, is far better than a prolonged agony of foreboding suspense. People talk, of "preparation," but in reality there is no such thing. If a surgeon were going to amputate your limb, would you like him to hack at it for an hour, in order to prepare you for the final operation?

"It will not kill me," Leslie said, after a while, piteously. "Grief is not merciful enough to kill. No doubt I shall live through the agony as others have done before. But oh, the bitterness, the anguish of thinking that I did not even say, 'Good-night'!"

### CHAPTER XXXI.

"To-morrow is a day too far  
To trust, whate'er the day be.  
We know, a little, what we are;  
But who knows what he may be?"

'Tis God made man, no doubt, not Chance:  
He made us great and small;  
But, being made, 'tis Circumstance  
That finishes us all."

SUCH an event as the death of Mr. Tyndale, of Strafford, could not do other than make an immediate and very great sensation in his native county. That it became known very soon, and very widely, will not surprise those who have seen how quickly news passes from lip to lip, and plantation to plantation, in country districts. Mr. Middleton's excited messenger, galloping full-speed to Wexford for the coroner, took care to communicate his intelligence to every man, woman, and child, whom he met; and from Wexford itself the news soon spread in a hundred different channels. In less than an hour after Mr. Middleton and Max parted on the bridge, the nearest neighbors of the dead man made their appearance on the scene; and, after that, friends, acquaintances, relations, and connections, poured in by the score. The coroner, coming over at once—for, when a man of wealth and position has been murdered at his own threshold, officials are not likely to delay, as they are sometimes known to do in cases of inferior humanity—the coroner, I say, coming over at once, had no difficulty in obtaining his jury, and the inquest took place immediately.

No new facts were elicited. The marks of the struggle on the sward at the side of the bridge, the footprints at the extreme edge of the bank, the broken sod showing so distinctly the very spot from which Arthur had apparently been cast over into the chasm, the slight print of the body on the damp sand where he fell, the evident correspondence of the wound with the shape of the stone around which were the traces of blood—all was so obvious at one glance that the most stupid of the jurors found no difficulty in perceiving and understanding, and no excuse for difference of opinion. Even the physician, attending professionally—a pompous man, who was in the habit of indulging, on such occasions, in long disquisitions, interlarded with many high-sounding technical terms, upon the various probabilities and possibilities as to the cause of death—was for once reduced to the necessity of expressing a plain fact in plain words.

As soon as the inspection of the locale had been made the body was removed to Strafford, the jury accompanying, more for the convenience of holding their deliberation in comfortable

quarters than from any necessity for further examination of the remains. Before twelve o'clock they had brought in their verdict to the effect that "the deceased Arthur | Tyndale came to his death from fracture of the skull, caused by having been violently thrown against the sharp point of a stone by some person or persons unknown."

Beyond this verdict, neither the jury itself, nor the large number of attendant friends, was able to advance even a conjecture. Who the assailant and murderer had been, no one was able to imagine. There were none of the usual surmises and opinions afloat. Men seemed for once silenced by the mystery enveloping the whole affair. That they talked a great deal, no one who has ever seen such an assemblage on such an occasion will be able to doubt; but out of all their talk no single suggestion of any importance came—no single opinion worth a moment's attention was elicited. From his position in the house, Max had to bear the brunt of much of this talk, and to endure, as best he could, a great deal of very useless and aimless questioning. In dealing with these questions, he was more curt than was either exactly courteous or exactly prudent. In fact, he was not only wretched—full of a grief which can scarcely be exaggerated—but he was horribly at a loss what to do or say. If he acknowledged his presence in the Rosland grounds the night before, how could he account for this presence without bringing Norah's name into a notoriety which would be fatal to it—a notoriety from which every instinct of the gentleman shrank?—and, if he did *not* acknowledge it, his silence would certainly bear a very singular and suspicious seeming, in case the fact was discovered. It was a position which might have sorely puzzled any man. Yet it did not puzzle Max in the sense of leaving him in doubt what to do. There was no hesitation about that. He must shield Norah at any cost. But the burden of concealment sat uneasily on him, and he chafed under it. Every time that the pistol was mentioned, he felt an almost irresistible impulse to say, "I heard that shot;" and it required an effort to restrain the words. He did not forget that he had uttered them to Mr. Middleton on an impulse which he afterward regretted; but he was relieved to observe that Mr. Middleton, who had paid little attention at the time, had apparently suffered the fact to escape entirely from his memory.

One fact had, also, entirely escaped Max's memory, or, to speak more correctly, had not yet occurred to it. This was the fact that, in case of Arthur's dying intestate—which there was every reasonable probability to suppose that he had done he (Max) succeeded to the Tyndale estate as heir-at-law. If he did not think of it, however, there were plenty of others who did. Next to the mysterious death itself, the question of heirship was the great topic on every tongue. This was natural enough. Such things have been since the world began, and will doubtless be as long as the world endures, unless the socialists get the upper hand, and take care that a man has no estate to leave, no probable last will and testament to be canvassed before the breath has fairly left his lips. Solemn and long-faced as Arthur's friends and kinsmen were, their grief was not so absorbing but that they were able to take a very lively interest in wondering whether he had ever thought of making a will, or whether the young soldier, and half-foreigner, whom none of them particularly liked, was to fall heir to the rich inheritance.

The day—which chanced to be Sunday—seemed of the length of many days, both at Strafford and Rosland. At the former place, it was more like a hideous nightmare than any thing else—at least, to Max—servants distraught, people thronging everywhere—filling with a strange tide of life the quiet old rooms, the halls, the piazzas—and Arthur lying in state apart from all, with the majestic calm of death on his fair, handsome face.

Mr. Middleton did not go home to luncheon, not because he was not hungry, not because he would not have been heartily glad of a little quiet and rest, but because he shrank with all the proverbial and universal cowardice of his sex from the tears which, he was well aware, reigned supreme at Rosland. Instead of luncheon, dinner was served at Strafford for half a hundred people (more or less), unlimited eating and drinking being a recognized consequence of death in the country districts, where old customs and traditions still linger. After dinner, Mr. Middleton escaped from one or two inveterate talkers who had clung to him all the morning, and took his meerschaum and himself out on the terrace where Arthur and Norah had stood when Mrs.

Sandford overheard their conversation from the library-window. All was quiet and still there. The old-fashioned flower-garden, neglected and overgrown, but still beautiful, lay immediately below; the shadows were long, the afternoon was full of golden serenity and beauty—it seemed impossible to realize that death was so near, that the master of all these fair acres could now only claim the allotted six feet of earth to which every child of man is entitled.

While Mr. Middleton sighed and smoked, and smoked and sighed—thinking now of Leslie and now of Arthur—a quiet footstep came round the house and advanced toward him. Being slightly deaf, and not listening besides, he did not hear it, and it was not until an unexpected voice at his side said, "Can I speak to you a moment sir?" that he started and turned.

Then he saw that it was Arthur's English servant who had addressed him.

"Well, Giles," he said—"I believe your name is Giles, isn't it?—what do you want?"

"I should like to speak to you, if you please, sir," repeated Giles, respectfully.

"Very well," was the careless reply, "speak away! Though you had better have gone to Captain Tyndale if you have any business on hand."

"I couldn't 'ave gone to Captain Tyndale, sir, because I want to speak to you about Captain Tyndale," responded Giles, solemnly.

"About Captain Tyndale—indeed!" said Mr. Middleton. He looked up, at this, with more attention. What did the fellow mean? The fellow in question looked pale and a trifle agitated, but also determined, and animated, perhaps, by that "sense of duty" which plays such an important part in the resolves of his betters.

"I 'ave nothing against Captain Tyndale in any way, sir," he said, meeting Mr. Middleton's glance. "He 'us been a gentleman to me in every way, and I wishes him no ill in the world; but duty is duty, sir, and that I'm sure you'll agree to."

"Certainly," said Mr. Middleton. "I'll agree to it with pleasure. Duty is duty, unquestionably, and should always be performed, even if it is not particularly agreeable. But what has your duty to do with Captain Tyndale?"

"It 'as this, sir: that I'm of the opinion that it's my duty to let the gentlemen who 'ave been sitting on Mr. Tyndale's body know certain things what came to my knowledge last night, sir—quite accidental, as one may say."

"Facts about his death?" said Mr. Middleton, startled into interest at once. "Of course, if you know any thing about that, it is your duty to tell it immediately. The jury of inquest are done with the case; but, if you know any thing about how Mr. Tyndale came to his death—any thing of real importance—you can go to a magistrate and give your evidence on oath. Give it to me first, however, and let me judge of its value. Now, what is it?"

Thus energetically brought to the point, Giles—who, to do him justice, evinced no disposition to fall back—made a plain statement of the facts, with which the reader is already acquainted of the altercation between the two cousins, which, according to his testimony, had reached the point of personal contest when he surprised them; of Captain Tyndale's leaving the house; of Arthur's following him; of the return of the former alone some time after midnight. Told simply, and, as the man averred, honestly, without any ill-feeling toward Max, the story was even more effective that if it had been freely colored by suspicion or partisanship. "It's my duty to my dead master, sir, to tell what I know, and that's what I know," he said, in conclusion. As for Mr. Middleton, he was amazed, startled, aghast, and yet incredulous. He attached very little importance to the account of the quarrel—setting most of it down to the exaggeration which seems inherent in the serving nature and he did not believe for a moment that Max had borne any part in his cousin's death; but he was certainly confounded by the circumstantial evidence thus abruptly brought forward against him. "Good Heavens!" he said to himself. Here was a new element of trouble—an element which he must, if possible, nip in the bud. Hence, after a minute's reflection, he turned to Giles:

"It is an excellent thing, and shows your I discretion, that you came privately to me with this story," he said, gravely. "I do full justice to your motives, which I am sure are good ones; but

you are entirely wrong in your conclusions, and might have done great mischief if you had expressed them publicly. It is impossible to connect Captain Tyndale in any way with his cousin's death, and the events which seem so important to you strike me in the light of mere coincidences. They would have no legal value, I am sure; but they might cause a great deal of scandal and gossip. Therefore, if you wish to serve your master as well as Captain Tyndale, you can best do so by holding your tongue."

Giles's face fell a little. He looked disappointed—and obstinate. Mr. Middleton saw the first expression: the latter escaped his observation.

"I am sure you mean well," he said again, with emphasis. "But this story must go no farther. Understand that. It is a family matter, of which nothing must be said."

"I can't help thinking that it's my duty, sir, to let the jury know," said Giles, with some of the obstinacy of his face creeping into his tone, and asserting itself very distinctly there.

"The jury be hanged, sir, and your duty, too!" said Mr. Middleton, angrily. "Do you mean to set your judgment up against mine? The jury have brought in their verdict, and their business is done. Yours is done, too, when you have brought your story and told it to me. The responsibility of acting or not acting upon it is my affair. No one could have better reason for desiring to discover the murderer of your master than I have; but, as for crediting an absurdity like this—Again I repeat, that your motives are no doubt good, but I don't wish to hear any more of the subject."

"Very well, sir," said Giles. "I am sorry to have troubled you. I'll take care not to trouble you again."

"The trouble is of no importance," said Mr. Middleton. "You were right to come to me. I only wish you to understand that the matter is to go no further."

Giles made no reply. He took his dismissal very quietly and walked away; but, if Mr. Middleton had seen his face and read its expression rightly, he would not have entertained any very sanguine expectations of his letting the matter go no further.

In truth, Giles was as determined as a man could be that, since Mr. Middleton declined to act for him, he would act for himself. A sense of duty had something, perhaps, to do with this resolution, and sincere regard for his master had more; but, most of all, was the important sense of possessing a clew to the mysterious murder which no one else possessed. Holding this clew—this positive knowledge—should he make no use of it? "The man what knows of a crime, and conceals a crime, as good as commits it," said Giles, solemnly. Where he had learned this scrap of legal or other kind of wisdom, it is impossible to say; but he was fully resolved to act upon it.

Before taking any further steps, however, he waited until Mr. Middleton left Strafford which that gentleman did in the course of the afternoon. "I'll go home, take a little rest, and be back to-night," he said, as he shook hands with Max at parting. "Not but that you'll have enough and more than enough people on your hands."

"I suppose so," said Max, who looked as thoroughly broken down as a man with strong fibres and strong nerves ever appears. The excitement and "worry" of the day, following close upon the terrible shock of the morning, had tried him almost beyond endurance. Mr. Middleton, who had thought of giving him a hint concerning Giles's story, had enough of kindly discretion to hold his tongue when he noticed how pale and worn he looked. He left without having said anything, and Max, not long afterward, went to his own room and locked himself in to rest, he said.

In this way, the coast was left clear for Giles, who, from his position in the background, was keeping his eyes and ears very well open indeed. Having failed so utterly with Mr. Middleton, he made up his mind that the next person to whom he applied should be of an entirely different stamp from that worthy gentleman. He had sense enough to know that his story would not be likely to receive much more attention from a magistrate than it had already received from Mr. Middleton, unless he was supported by some gentleman of influence, and, if possible, a connection of the murdered man. There were several connections of the murdered man in the house, and one, in especial, was of marked influence and position. This was a distant cousin of

Arthur's—one of the disagreeable relations concerning whom he had once spoken to Leslie, and with whom his intercourse during life had always been as distant as their relationship. The name of this gentleman was Colville, and, though he was an eminently unpleasant man, he was one of the men who seem to mount in life on the score of their very unpleasantness. Nothing, perhaps, in human nature is more marked than the tendency to allow itself to be browbeaten and bullied by almost any man who possesses sufficient force of character for the purpose. Force of character Mr. Colville certainly possessed, united to aggressively violent opinions on every possible subject, and an indomitable obstinacy. He was a man who "owned" half the county, people said. They did not mean its literal acres, but its flesh-and-blood inhabitants. What of such and such a man? somebody would say, and the answer would be, "Oh, he belongs to Colville!" In other words, Mr. Colville had succeeded in reducing a certain number of his fellow - citizens to the condition of puppets, who moved with exemplary obedience as he pulled their strings. With this kind of man there are only two courses open—you are his subject or his opponent. Arthur Tyndale had never been a subject, therefore Mr. Colville at least had always reckoned him an opponent. Of Max this gentleman knew little, but that little was, in his opinion, of a disparaging character. Since his arrival at Strafford, his harsh voice had been chiefly heard in loud disapproval of every thing which had been done, and protest against every thing which it was proposed to do. This was the man to whom Giles went with a request for a private interview.

It is almost unnecessary to say that Mr. Colville at once acceded to this request. Nothing gratified him more than such an appeal. He left a group, whom he was instructing in their social, moral, and political duties, to enter the library, seat himself in Arthur's favorite chair, and bid Giles, in his loud, patronizing voice, "speak out."

This Giles, who was by no means troubled with diffidence, proceeded to do. He told his story as he had told it to Mr. Middleton, simply and without pretense. Again he laid stress upon the fact that he had "nothing against" Captain Tyndale; it was a pure sense of duty which urged him to make this statement, he said; and, indeed, to do Giles justice, he was undoubtedly buoyed up by a consciousness of disinterested virtue, which was, in a certain sense, its own reward.

After the cold water which Mr. Middleton had thrown on his story, it was unquestionably gratifying to excite such vivid interest and belief as that which made Mr. Colville's grizzly hairs stand on end. No thought of incredulity came to him. Amazement, certainly horror, perhaps disgust fit his own obtuseness in a measure; but not incredulity in the least degree.

"Good God!" he said, when he found voice to speak at last. "Who would have believed it? Here, under my very eyes, and nobody to suspect such a thing for a minute! Even I—I never—to think of it! You should have spoken to me before," he said, turning sternly upon Giles. "What on earth do you mean by letting the whole day pass, and waiting until sunset, before you open your mouth to give such important information as this?"

"I did speak before, sir," said Giles, who was deeply offended by such a mode of address. "I went to Mr. Middleton, but he didn't seem to think the story worth any attention."

"Mr. Middleton!" repeated Mr. Colville, in a tone of inexpressible scorn. "What the devil put it into your head to go to Mr. Middleton? If you had wanted to find an incompetent person, you couldn't have done better; And pray what did Mr. Middleton say?"

"He said I had better hold my tongue, sir—that the story would only make scandal and gossip—but I had a sense of duty, sir; and I couldn't think but what I ought to state the facts."

"Hold your tongue! Heaven and earth!" said Mr. Colville, his gray hair bristling more and more on his scantily-covered head "I never heard any thing to equal it!" he said, with indignation rising hotter. "That any man, with the least sense of duty, should endeavor or desire to conceal such a crime it is almost incredible! To conceal a crime is to connive at it!" said he, bending his bushy-gray eyebrows and small gray eyes in a terrifying manner upon poor Giles. "It is a good thing that you did not take Mr. Middleton's most extraordinary—I may even say, most criminal—advice! It is a good thing that you came to me. But it would have been a better thing if you had not wasted time, if you had come to me at once!"

"I'm sorry I did not, sir," said Giles, overawed, as Mr. Colville mostly did overawe those with whom he came in contact. "But I knew Mr. Middleton best, and Mr. Tyndale was engaged to his niece, and so I thought—"

"There is no time to waste in excuses," said Mr. Colville, waving his hand. "You should have known my position in the family sufficiently to come to *me* at once. Now, go and find Mr. Armistead and tell him that I wish to see him—here in the library. Hold yourself in readiness to ride to Wexford with him in the course of the next hour, and take care that you don't open your lips, so that a word of this comes to Captain Tyndale's ears."

"I shall take care, sir," said Giles, meekly.

He went in search of Mr. Armistead—another connection of the family, and loyal vassal to Mr. Colville—whom he found on the front portico, listening to a voluble gentleman, who was proving, to his own entire satisfaction, that Arthur's death had been purely accidental. "Yes," Mr. Armistead was saying, meditatively, "I quite agree with you;" when Giles summoned him away to the presence of his dictatorial chief. He was a pleasant, gentlemanly man, of mild temper and indolent habits, who found that it saved trouble to be governed by his wife at home and by Mr. Colville abroad—a man whose abilities might have helped him to a very fair position in the world, if he had not chanced early in life upon the misfortune of marrying an heiress. That fact had crushed all active manhood out of him, as it has crushed it out of many another man. "I suppose I may be allowed a word about the management of the property, Mr. Armistead, since *I* brought it into the family!" his sharp - tongued better - half would say. "As many words as you please, my dear," Mr. Armistead would answer, taking up his gun—hunting and shooting were the only things in which he really felt an interest—and walking away. This was the man whom Mr. Colville summoned to his privy council, and who strolled into the library with his hands in his pockets, and an air of exceeding listlessness on his face. The listlessness died away, however, when he saw the bent brows and bristling hairs which made Mr. Colville's visage a thing of terror and dismay.

"What is the matter, Colville?" he cried. "What the deuce has happened?"

Mr. Colville frowned majestically. He was swelling with a sense of dignified importance, on which the other's free-and-easy question jarred.

"What has happened," he said, "is not a subject for levity. Even ignorant levity may sometimes be very ill-advised."

"I was not aware that I had displayed any particular levity," said Mr. Armistead, carelessly. "I only asked what had happened; a man may do that without giving offense, I suppose."

"Nothing has *happened*—at least nothing new," said Mr. Colville, after a minute—he disliked few things more than to answer a question, or enter upon an explanation; but sometimes, as in the present instance, he was obliged to do it "I have only received positive information touching the murder of poor Tyndale."

"The devil you have!" cried Mr. Armistead, excited for once. "By George! Why, Denton has just been trying to prove that he was killed accidentally."

"Denton's a fool!" said Mr. Colville, sharply. And people who waste their time listening to him are not much better! I knew, of course any man with eyes must have known that Tyndale had been murdered; but I confess that I did not think of attaching suspicion to the very man whom a child might have suspected—the man who, in all probability will profit so largely and exclusively by his death."

Mr. Armistead had sat lazily down in a chair after the rebuke to his levity; he sprang now to his feet, as completely astonished, as thoroughly startled, as a man could be imagined.

"Great Heaven!" he said. Do you mean Max Tyndale ? Is it possible you suspect Max Tyndale?"

"I did not say that I *suspected* any thing, but that I *knew* the truth," responded Mr. Colville, sharply. If Giles was not a partisan, *he* certainly was. There are some people to whom an impartial frame of mind, even for five minutes, is impossible.

"I suppose you have no objection to letting me hear what your grounds of belief are?" said Mr. Armistead, sitting down again.

"Since you are, in a measure, a connection of the family"—Mrs. Armistead had been a Miss Colville, and a forty-second cousin of Arthur—"I sent for you for that purpose," said Mr. Colville, magisterially. He then recapitulated what Giles had told him—a relation which, as it may be imagined, took liberal color from his own belief, and therefore impressed his hearer even more strongly than it would otherwise have done. The train of circumstances was clear enough, however, to have impressed any one—especially a man of indolent mind, who usually liked his thinking done for him. When the story was ended, Mr. Armistead agreed that the events were "suspicious—very suspicious, indeed!" but he ventured to add a hope that the other did not mean to "make them public."

"Not make them public!" repeated Mr. Colville, the blood rushing into his face, angrily, his hairs bristling again. "I shall certainly see that the evidence is brought before a magistrate as soon as possible, if that is what you call making it public! I have a sense of duty, sir; and to allow a murderer to go scot-free, because his apprehension might reflect discredit on the family, is something that I have no idea of doing."

"Well, what the deuce do you want with me?" said Mr. Armistead, rather more snappishly than he usually spoke. "You are a magistrate: you can take the matter in hand, and hear the evidence, if you've a mind to."

"I am a magistrate, it is true," said Mr. Colville; "but, as a member of the family, I should prefer that the case was not brought before me. I want you, therefore, to take this servant and go over to Wexford. Let him give his evidence before Purcell; and see that the warrant is issued as soon as possible, and sent out here."

"I'll be d—d if I do!" said Mr. Armistead, with a flat rebellion for which his chief was wholly unprepared. "I don't call this the conduct of one gentleman to another gentleman. Before taking the evidence of a servant against Captain Tyndale, it is as little as you could do to send for him and give him a chance to speak for himself."

"A chance to saddle a horse and leave the country, more likely!" said the other, with angry contempt. "One gentleman to another gentleman, indeed! I am not intending to treat Captain Tyndale as a gentleman, but as a criminal—which he certainly is. If you don't choose to take the servant to Wexford, however, you have only to say so, and I'll take him myself!"

"Oh, I suppose I can take him," said Mr. Armistead, apparently thinking better of his resolution. "It is not *I* who have to give the evidence. But you see how late it is! It strikes me it is scarcely worth while to go this evening. Won't to-morrow morning answer as well?"

"It will not answer at all," said Mr. Colville, emphatically. "There has been too much delay already; I'll not take the responsibility of an hour longer on my shoulders. If Giles had not been fool enough to go to Middleton, instead of coming to *me*, there would not have been the delay there has been!"

## CHAPTER XXXII.

"Most learned judge! A sentence: come, prepare."

NOTWITHSTANDING Mr. Colville's anxiety for haste, it was not until the next morning that a constable arrived at Strafford with a warrant of arrest for Captain Tyndale. His appearance fell like a thunder-bolt on the assembled party. To chronicle all the disjointed

exclamations, and all the Babel of discussion which ensued, would be to try the patience of the most long-suffering reader, and would, moreover, serve no purpose in advancing the history of events. Max himself, after the first shock, was perhaps (with the exception of Mr. Colville, and one or two of his most intimate subjects), the person least taken by surprise. Not that he had definitely expected such a result as this, but he had been so thoroughly conscious all the day before of the false position in which his reticence was placing him, that instinct may be said to have warned him of its consequences. Public sentiment, generally, was one of disapproving surprise. It was an underhanded piece of business, men said, who, whatever their other faults, believed in, and, as a rule, stood up for, fair play. Only two or three of Mr. Colville's immediate friends were found to support the measure. "Wait until you hear the evidence against him!" they said, nodding sagely.

As for Mr. Middleton, he was overcome with indignation when he heard the news. He blamed himself severely that he had not warned Max of the story which Giles had brought to him. "I ought to have done that at once!" he thought, as he went in search of the young man.

He found him in his own room, dressing, having lain down to snatch a little sleep in the latter part of the night, and having been ruthlessly wakened on the appearance of the constable and the warrant. If he had lost his composure in the first shock, he had by this time regained it, for he turned to Mr. Middleton with a coolness which excited that gentleman's surprise and admiration—though an under-current of emotion seemed vibrating through his voice when he spoke.

"I suppose you have heard what has happened," he said. "What do you think of it?"

"I think that I am more sorry than I can say that I did not warn you yesterday that your cousin's servant came to me with a story which I suppose he has since carried to more credulous or malicious ears, and of which this is the result," Mr. Middleton answered. "I take it for granted that you know what I mean. Something about a difficulty between Arthur and yourself."

"Giles!" said Max, starting. A flash of light seemed to come to him. "So it was Giles, was it? I did not think of that. And you say he came to you with the story?"

"He came to me yesterday afternoon, and, when he found that I paid no attention to it, he went—so I judge from what I hear down-stairs—to Colville. You know Colville. You won't be surprised to learn that he is at the bottom of the whole affair."

"No, I am not surprised," said Max; but he stood for a minute—apparently lost in thought. "I mean I am not surprised that Mr. Colville, who seems to dislike me, should be ready to believe any report to my discredit," he added, after a while; "but how he or any one else could think this—"

"Colville dislikes every one who does not belong to him body and soul," said Mr. Middleton, dryly; "but you need not go far to find a reason why he dislikes you particularly, or why he is ready enough to credit even this—you are the heir-at-law of the Tyndale estate."

"Good God!" said Max, with uncontrollable agitation, "but that makes it all the more terrible. How can any man believe that I—the heir-at-law, as you say—could have laid violent hands on Arthur; that I could have left him dead and come back to sleep under his roof; that I could—Great Heaven! is it for *that* they suspect me of murdering him?" demanded he, turning upon Mr. Middleton, with passion and horror mingled in his face.

"It is very likely they have not stopped to think about it at all," answered the other. "A sort of frenzy seizes people at such times, you know; a fever of suspicion and doubt. Colville is a sort of moral bull-dog, moreover, and there is no more use in appealing to his sense of reason than there would be in appealing to a deaf man's ears, or a blind man's sight. The magistrate who issued this warrant—Purcell, of Wexford—is a blockhead also, and very much under his thumb. You can scarcely appreciate the nature of the charge better than I do," he went on quickly; "but, surely it will not cost you much trouble to prove the groundless folly—I may say the infamous outrage—of it!"

"I cannot tell," said Max. "It ought to be easy; but with such men as you describe, who knows? One or two points may tell against me." He drew on his coat as he spoke, then paused a moment; his bronzed face grew paler than it had been before, his eyes were cast down, his hand went as usual to the long ends of his mustache. "Who knows?" he repeated. "There are one or two things which it is impossible to explain—the cause of the dispute between Arthur and myself, for instance."

"Was it a serious dispute?" asked Mr. Middleton, anxiously. "You will excuse the question, but I should like to know."

He was interrupted by a tap at the door. "Ready, sir?" asked the constable's voice on the outside.

"Yes, I am ready," answered Max. "I hope I shall be able to clear myself," he said, turning to Mr. Middleton; "but, if not—"

"I am going along to stand by you in any emergency," interrupted that gentleman. "I ordered the dog-cart when I came up, and we'll drive over, settle that insolent English rascal, and bring Purcell to his senses, before breakfast."

"You are very kind," said Max, gratefully; but it is likely that he had his own reasons for not feeling quite so sure of accomplishing these desirable results, either before breakfast or after, as Mr. Middleton did.

When they went down-stairs, they found a number of horses and buggies before the door, and a number of men assembled in the hall and portico. The whole clan were evidently intending to follow the prisoner into Wexford. There did not breathe one man with soul so dead that he was not eager to hear the examination. Indeed, the sensation of to-day almost paled the sensation of yesterday, and the living Tyndale suddenly became of infinitely more importance than the dead one, even in the eyes of the friends and kinsmen who had gathered to do the latter such scant honor and reverence as it is in the power of life to pay unto death. When Max appeared, there was a movement which was almost unanimous toward him. Men pressed forward to shake his hand warmly, to express indignation, sympathy, and hearty wishes for his speedy release. He thanked them briefly, and then, accompanied by Mr. Middleton, and followed by the constable who looked decidedly sheepish, as if he felt rather ashamed of his part of the business he walked to the dog-cart and sprang in. They drove off rapidly, and with various degrees of speed every man followed—leaving only Arthur behind, with the calm serenity of his face unruffled by this paltry tumult of life.

Mr. Colville had gone on to Wexford considerably in advance of this, and, on entering the justice room, neither Max nor Mr. Middleton was surprised to find him in consultation with a tall, gaunt, gray-whiskered gentleman who was plainly the magistrate. They were both sitting behind a table on which lay a greasy book and some papers. Giles, looking rather uncomfortable, was standing by a window not far off, and had watched Captain Tyndale's arrival. Mr. Armistead was not visible; but a dozen or so other men were lounging about, or gathered into knots talking. Some of them were from the country, others belonged to the village. These last stared with undisguised interest and curiosity at the prisoner, who was also the heir, as he entered. Mr. Middleton and himself were talking as they came in, but they broke off before any one could catch the subject of their conversation, and the former gentleman, advancing up the room, addressed one of the ministers of justice very unceremoniously.

"Well, Purcell," he said, "here is Captain Tyndale come to see what the devil you mean by such a confounded piece of folly as this."

"I am glad to make Captain Tyndale's acquaintance," said Mr. Purcell, bowing gravely, "though I should have preferred making it under other circumstances. I shall be happy if he is able to prove that the charge brought against him is unfounded—but I am sure you are aware, sir" (turning to Max, who also had advanced), "that a magistrate is bound to do his duty, and that it would have been impossible for me to dismiss without examination such a grave charge as this which is brought against you."

"Since the charge has been brought, it is of course your duty to examine it," said Max. "You will excuse me if I say that the sooner that is done the better. I cannot defend myself until I know what is alleged against me."

He sat down as he spoke. Every one present noticed the perfect coolness of his manner. Yet he knew well what was coming.

It came at once, for there was no delay in the proceedings. Mr. Purcell may or may not have been a blockhead, but he was at least a good magistrate—a man who did not waste time, who knew the law passably well, and who had a mind sufficiently clear to seize the strong points of evidence. Giles, being summoned, testified on oath to the circumstances which he had already related to the "difficulty" between the two cousins, to Arthur's angry words and excited manner after Captain Tyndale had left the house, to his having seen him follow his cousin, and to having heard Max return after midnight alone. When he finished, Mr. Purcell turned to Captain Tyndale and asked what he had to say in reply to this strong array of circumstantial evidence.

The young man rose to his feet with no trace of nervousness in his manner, though his dark eyes were glowing in his pale face.

"With your permission, sir," he said, quietly, "I will answer by putting a question or two to this witness, who seems anxious to afford some material for gossiping wonder in a case so mysterious as the one under consideration—though I am sorry to be obliged to bring forward a fact which otherwise need not have transpired." Then, turning to Giles, he continued in the same tone:

"What condition was your master in at the time of the 'difficulty' you have just described?"

Giles's face had fallen during the first part of the foregoing sentence. Perhaps he had scarcely been aware how much the motive attributed to him had influenced his course of action, until the idea was thus put into words. It fell still more, however, at the concluding interrogation. He colored, cleared his throat, hesitated but Captain Tyndale's keen eye was on him; he answered at last, stammeringly:

"He was a little—he 'ad been drinking a little too much, sir."

"A *little* too much! Was that all?" The man looked down; his face answered the question plainly enough, but his inquisitor demanded words.

"Well?" he said.

"He—he wasn't at himself, sir."

Max turned to the magistrate.

"As I said before, I very much regret being compelled to bring forward a fact which I should not have mentioned to any one—much less publicly—if the necessity had not been forced upon me in this way. I will now make a plain statement of what has just been presented in a very distorted light:

"On Saturday night, at a dinner-party at Mr. Middleton's, wishing to speak to my cousin, I looked through the company, both in the house and on the lawn, without finding him. I had observed at dinner that he was drinking too much—and afterward I noticed that his face and manner both showed the effects of this to one familiar with him—though, to an ordinary observer, he was at that time apparently sober. As I could neither see nor hear any thing of him, when I was searching for him, I thought it likely he had become conscious that the wine he had taken was affecting him, and had therefore gone home, and I followed, intending to see him for a few minutes, and then return again to Rosland—as I afterward did—it being still early in the evening.

"I was surprised and concerned to find Arthur in the dining-room, with wine and brandy before him. He had been drinking deeply since his return home, and it soon became evident to me that he was not in a condition to speak rationally on any subject. I made one or two efforts to talk to him; that is, to induce him to listen to what I had to say; but, as he was perfectly impracticable—being, in fact, too much under the influence of wine to know what he was doing or saying—I rose to go. With the folly of a drunken man, he began to complain of the manner in

which I was treating him, and placed himself before me to prevent my leaving the room. I had just put him aside quietly, of course and turned to the door to go, when it opened, and this servant entered the room. He accounted for the intrusion by an excuse which satisfied me at the time as reasonable enough; though his subsequent conduct proves that he must have been watching about for some mischief-making purpose."

"No, sir!" here interposed Giles, in a half-deprecating, half-indignant tone. "If you will allow me to speak, sir?" he added, and, Max not objecting, he went on, with some excitement of manner: "It was just as I told you at the time, sir. I 'ad no wish, and I 'aven't any now to make mischief, but I didn't know what to make of there being a light in the dining-room that time o' night—"

"Very well," interrupted Captain Tyndale, cutting short the man's flow of words, and again addressing the magistrate. "I left the room and strolled back to Rosland. Finding it later than I had thought, I did not go into the house, but, after smoking in the grounds for a while, returned to Strafford, and immediately went to bed. The next morning at five o'clock I was awakened by my cousin's servant, with the information that his master had not returned home the night before. Though rather surprised to hear this, I was not alarmed until I suddenly remembered a circumstance which had occurred while I was in the Rosland grounds the last time; the recollection of which made me a little uneasy. This was the sound of a pistol-shot in the direction of the bridge. I had attached no importance to it at the time; but now the more I thought of Arthur's non-appearance, the more strange it seemed, and I grew very uncomfortable, not to say alarmed, at the idea that there might be some connection between the shot I had heard and his absence. Considering his condition when I parted from him, there was no telling what he might have done or where he might have gone. I thought it not improbable that he had started to go to Rosland, stopped by the way, been overcome by sleep, and spent the night in the open air. At all events, I could not leave Strafford—as I was intending to do that morning, to take the train at Wexford—without ascertaining what had become of him; and so I walked toward the bridge, purposing, if I did not find him asleep somewhere by the way, to go on to Rosland and see if he were there. Before I reached the bridge I met Lewis, one of the Strafford servants, who had just discovered his body."

His voice sank at the last words: something of the grief and horror he had felt at the moment to which he alluded, vibrated through its tones, as every one present could not but observe; and the short pause which he made was unbroken. After an instant, he resumed:

"These are the circumstances, which have been distorted and exaggerated by my cousin's servant into what you were pleased to call 'a grave charge,' sir."

Again there was a short pause: Mr. Purcell hesitated, and even looked slightly embarrassed. He had opened his lips to speak, but to what effect did not appear; since at this instant Mr. Colville, who sat close beside him, and who had been moving impatiently in his chair, leaned over, and said a few words in his ear. The magistrate's face cleared.

"You say you heard a pistol-shot while in the Rosland grounds. Did the rest of the company, who were in the grounds at the same time, hear this shot also? and did no one express surprise fit such a circumstance, or think of ascertaining what it meant?"

"As I mentioned before, I found it later than I was aware it was when I looked at my watch shortly after entering the Rosland grounds; and, supposing probably that Mrs. Middleton's guests were dispersing by that time, I did not go on to the house, but turned aside and sat down on the steps of a summer-house, smoking for a while: after which I returned to Strafford."

"You did not see any one at Rosland, then? You cannot call upon any witnesses to testify as to your presence there?"

"I cannot produce any witnesses," answered Max, quietly.

Mr. Purcell shook his head. "That is unfortunate," he said; adding, in a tone which was equally compounded of gentlemanly apology and magisterial pomposity: "All men are equal in the eye of the law, and in legal affairs the same formality is required in all cases. However

unimpeachable the character of a man may be, these formalities are demanded and must be complied with. I am sorry to say, Captain Tyndale, that the fact of your not being able to bring testimony to prove your presence at Rosland, makes a rather strong point against you in law. The witness there"—he pointed to Giles—"testifies on oath that on Saturday night—the night on which Mr. Tyndale came to his death—there occurred a difficulty amounting to a personal collision between the deceased and yourself; that you left the house shortly afterward, and were followed almost immediately by the deceased; that he—the witness—heard you return after midnight alone. You say yourself that you entered the grounds of Rosland, but did not go to the house, or see any of the company assembled; that you turned aside to a summer-house, and, after some time spent in smoking, returned to Strafford and went to bed. You say, also, that, while in the grounds at Rosland, you heard a pistol-shot in the direction of the bridge; that you attached no importance to the circumstance at the time, but the next morning, when informed that deceased had not returned home the night before, you recollect this shot with some uneasiness, and walked toward the bridge, the direction from which it had sounded. In the investigation, which took place before the coroner's jury, did you mention the fact of your having heard this shot?"

"I did not," said Max. "There seemed no necessity for doing so; it being evident that the wound which caused my cousin's death could not have been made by a pistol-ball."

"I think I have understood that a pistol was picked up upon the ground?"

"You have understood correctly. A pistol, belonging to my cousin himself, was found by me upon the spot. Mr. Middleton was present when I discovered it, and I mentioned to him that I had heard a shot the night before.—You remember this, I suppose, Mr. Middleton?"

"Yes, certainly," answered that gentleman, who was overcome with indignation at the manner in which the magistrate was proceeding.

"Did it not occur to you, Captain Tyndale, that the shot might have been fired by the deceased, as it was his pistol?"

"I did not, and do not yet, know what to think about either the pistol or the shot," answered Captain Tyndale, who was as thoroughly aware as the magistrate, or any one present, that the evasive answers he was giving could not but make another "rather strong point in law," against him. But what could he do? Compromise Norah he would not—that he was determined—let what might happen to himself. And, thanks to his sound nerves and habitual self-control, he succeeded in maintaining a composure and ease of manner which went far to counterbalance the effect of his seemingly suspicious reticence not only in the opinion of the by-standers, but in that of Mr. Purcell himself. Mr. Colville, however, was not to be hoodwinked by this "military effrontery," as, in his own mind, he pronounced Max's self-possession to be. Once more he leaned close to the ear of the presiding magnate, and uttered a few sentences in a low but sharp and vehement tone. And once more Mr. Purcell, thus primed and loaded by his leader, returned to the charge.

"You mentioned, I think, Captain Tyndale, that it had been your intention to leave Strafford on the morning following the murder. Was this intended departure caused by the altercation which had occurred between Mr. Tyndale and yourself?"

At this question there was a sudden flicker of haughty light in Max's dark eyes—his brows contracted sternly for an instant. But he recovered himself almost immediately, and replied as readily as ever, though perhaps there was a shade of curtness now in his tone:

"I cannot conceive that it rests within the province of the law to inquire into a matter entirely personal to myself. My motives for leaving Strafford are aside from any question involved in the present investigation. The fact of my having made my arrangements to go, may be another thing; and this fact I can prove by my cousin's servant there." Turning to Giles—"I presume you have not forgotten what I said to you in the hall on Saturday night, just before I went out?" he inquired.

"No, sir," answered Giles; "I remember very well what you said. You ordered me to tell Anderson to have some conveyance at the door to take you to Wexford in the morning in time for the train; and to be sure to wake you early enough for you to get off."

"You decline, then, Captain Tyndale, to answer my question as to whether there was any connection between your intended departure from Strafford, and the difficulty which you admit existed with Mr. Tyndale?" said Mr. Purcell, in a much more magisterial tone than he had spoken before.

"I decline to answer a question which seems to me irrelevant," was the reply.

"I must suppose, sir," said the magistrate, with increasing coldness, "that you are not well acquainted with the laws in force here—I understand you are a foreigner—or you would be aware that any circumstance, bearing the most remote connection with a case of this kind, and likely to throw light upon it, is legitimate subject of legal investigation. It is in virtue of this fact that I must request you to explain the nature and subject of your conversation with Mr. Tyndale on the night before his death."

"That I absolutely decline to do," answered Max, quietly, but very decidedly. "I can only say that it related to a matter of business about which my cousin had consulted me, and which did not in the slightest degree concern myself."

There was a pause. Then the magistrate said:

"I recommend you to reconsider your reply."

"That is impossible," the young man answered in the same tone as before.

"In that case I have no further questions to ask," said the magistrate, after exchanging a few words with his coadjutor. "It only remains for me to perform what, I assure you, sir, is a very painful duty."

With this preface, he proceeded to recapitulate the evidence in the case; beginning with the charge brought against Captain Tyndale by Giles, pointing out the train of circumstantial evidence upon which this charge rested; dwelling on Captain Tyndale's inability to produce any proofs, or make any explanations to exonerate himself from suspicion; and ending by committing him to prison to await the action of the grand-jury.

At this stage of the proceedings the justice-room became a scene of no small commotion and excitement. There was a general murmur of dissatisfaction; a large majority of those present having already arrayed themselves as partisans on the side of Max. It was true that they knew him very slightly—many of them not at all. But there was something in the man himself which excited confidence and sympathy; while the fact of his being a stranger added to the latter feeling. As for Mr. Middleton, his wrath exploded in a burst of passionate invective against the magistrate and his "wire-puller," as he denominated Mr. Colville, the like of which he had not been guilty of indulging for years. There is nothing more true than that it is good-natured, equable-tempered people who are always most violent when once roused. This gentleman, usually so mild and courteous, was, upon the present occasion, so much the reverse; and gave the two offenders in question the benefit of hearing a few home truths in such very plain and emphatic language that several of the other gentlemen present deemed it prudent to interfere as pacifiers, seeing that the said offenders (Mr. Colville in especial) began to swell and redden with a passion which threatened to emulate that by which it had been excited. Max himself—who, whatever were his feelings, still retained an unruffled demeanor outwardly—was one of the principal of these peacemakers. "For Heaven's sake, my dear sir, don't let me be the cause of your involving yourself in a difficulty with two such men as these!" he said, earnestly, in a low tone. "Come, come, Middleton, you're rather too hard on Purcell! He can't help being a fool, you know!" whispered a friend into his left ear. "You'll do a good deal more harm than good," said another friend, with a warning shake of the head, and knitting of the brows. "At this rate of going on, you'll not be allowed to give bail, as I suppose you want to do," cried a third into his right ear.

This last significant suggestion had an immediate effect in restoring Mr. Middleton to something like his accustomed manner. As a matter of policy, he even tried to smooth matters

over a little for the wounded *amour propre* of Mr. Purcell, remonstrating still with that gentleman, but in a different tone. But remonstrances, representations, persuasion, all proved vain; the magistrate was too deeply offended by some of the stinging truths he had just been obliged to listen to, and which had been heard and appreciated, as he knew very well, by the crowd around, not to be glad of an opportunity for annoying his assailant in turn. He was obstinately deaf to all appeal from his first decision.

"Well," said Mr. Middleton, at last, "I suppose it is useless to say any thing more—"

"Quite so," interrupted the magistrate, dryly. "Constable—

"But of course you'll take bail," continued Mr. Middleton, quickly. "What shall the amount be?"

"Excuse me," said the magistrate, stiffly (so effectually had his spleen been roused that he needed no prompting or bolstering from his wire-puller now), "I cannot take bail in this case."

And to this resolution he adhered.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

"The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree  
I planted; they have torn me, and I bleed.  
I should have known what fruit would spring  
from such a seed."

MR. MIDDLETON, having shaken hands with Max, and cheerfully advised him to keep up his spirits, took his way home, with his own spirits reduced to as low an ebb as could well be the case with a gentleman who, having reached mature years, knew better than to allow other people's troubles to annoy him in any great degree. He was a man who liked to be comfortable, however, and he could not help thinking that matters were in any thing but a comfortable condition. There was not only poor Leslie, for whom the stout fibres of his heart ached, but there was Arthur cut off in the very flower of his youth, and Max in a position which was decidedly unpleasant, to say the least of it. Then he fell to considering why Max was so remarkably reticent with regard to that interval of time at midnight which he had affirmed that he had spent in the grounds of Rosland. Some men—men of the Colville stamp—would have regarded this reticence as very suspicious; but Mr. Middleton had more knowledge of character. His belief in Max's innocence was unshaken—indeed, it was only natural that it should have been deepened by that partisanship into which men are so readily beguiled, and by the natural and excusable desire to see Colville and Purcell held up to universal scorn as the fools which he esteemed them. Still, he could not but confess that Max's obstinate silence was calculated to prejudice the public mind against him. "He must have seen *somebody* in my grounds," the puzzled gentleman thought. "If he would only say who it was—if he would only call a witness—the whole charge must fall to the ground."

Full of these thoughts, he turned his horse's head into the gates of Rosland. He knew that he could not remain there long; that since Max was under arrest—the fact came back upon him now and then with the actual sensation of a physical shock—the arrangements with regard to the funeral would devolve upon him; but it was impossible to resist the temptation for a little rest; besides which, he knew that no one would be so well able as himself to break the news of this additional misfortune to his wife. As he entered the gates, he noticed the fresh track of carriage-wheels (there had been a rain the night before) curving in from the road. This fact seriously disquieted him, for he feared that there might be visitors at the house, and, in that case, he unhesitatingly made up his mind to go back to Strafford at once. Any thing was better than to be

forced to hear and to answer a stream of gossiping questions. On this point, however, he was reassured when he reached the door.

"What is the meaning of this?" he said to the servant who appeared, pointing with his whip to the tracks so clearly apparent on the damp gravel. "Is anybody here?"

"Nobody at all, sir," was the answer. "That is, I mean no company. Mrs. Sandford and Miss Desmond's here. Mistis and Miss Leslie's gone over to Strafford, in the carriage, sir."

"Gone over to Strafford—is it possible! When did they go?"

"Bout an hour ago, sir, I reckon."

"Did you hear when they expected to be back?"

"No, sir, I didn't."

"Hum!" Mr. Middleton paused and looked meditatively at the speaker. He had no intention of going to Strafford now on the contrary, he was very glad that he chanced to be away and an idea struck him that, since he was at Rosland, he might inquire whether, by any chance, anybody had seen ! Max the night before, though Max was unable to say whether or not he had seen any one else. "You say Miss Desmond is in the house?"

"Yes, sir."

Alighting, he walked into the silent house, over which an unseen pall of grief seemed to hang. Singularly enough, this aspect struck him much more here than at Stratford. Perhaps the cause of this rested in the fact that, at Strafford, there were no women, only men, who, with the exception of Max and himself, felt little affection, and nothing more than conventional regret, for the dead. Here there had been sighs, and sobs, and bitter tears. Albeit the farthest in the world from a fanciful man, Mr. Middleton felt them in the very atmosphere. He shook his head mournfully as he walked into the empty sitting-room and rang the bell. "Tell Miss Desmond that I would like to speak to her," he said to Maria, who answered it.

Having sent this message, he sat down and fanned himself, hoping devoutly that Mrs. Sandford might not flutter down upon him from some unforeseen nook or corner. He might have spared his fears. Mrs. Sandford was at that moment in her room busily engaged in writing an account of all that had occurred to her friends in Alton. Little as Mr. Middleton thought it, the last sensational item had reached Rosland, and was at that moment being chronicled as fast as pen could go, with many double underscorings and exclamation - points. The fair correspondent had that morning debated whether she would not pack her trunk, and bid adieu to a house which had become any thing save an abode of gayety; but a keen desire to see "the end of the matter" had for once prevailed over *ennui*. Now she had her reward. Now it would be her privilege to send this second item of intelligence like an electric shock into the circles of Alton society. "You can imagine the state of painful excitement, the terrible nervous distress that I am in," she wrote, "but, of course, it is impossible for me to think of leaving dear Mrs. Middleton and our poor darling Leslie, both of whom seem to lean upon me."

Mr. Middleton had not long to wait for Norah. He had scarcely settled himself and begun to appreciate the coolness and quiet of the room, when a step sounded in the hall and she stood before him in the open door. As he rose she advanced, and he had time to notice as she crossed the floor how strangely pale she looked—not nervous, not as if she had been weeping, not overwrought or hysterical, but simply devoid of all color, and consequently wholly unlike herself in appearance.

"Is it true?" she said, as she came near him—speaking before he could utter a word—"is it true that Captain Tyndale has been arrested on a charge of—of having caused his cousin's death?"

"I am sorry to say that it is quite true," Mr. Middleton answered, surprised at being met by the knowledge which he meant to impart. "He has not only been arrested, but the examination is over, and, thanks to a pair of obstinate, dunderheaded fools, he has been committed—"

"Committed?"

"To jail for trial. They absolutely went so far as to refuse bail."

Norah uttered a cry—it was her first, so she may be pardoned—and sank into a chair which chanced to be near by. There was nothing of affectation in this, her limbs absolutely refused to support her. She put her hands to her face and shuddered. Strong and brave as she was, her nerves and her heart both gave way. Arrested!—committed! It seemed too terrible to believe!

"It is astonishing with what rapidity bad news travels!" said Mr. Middleton, in a vexed tone. He thought her nervous and theatrical, and felt more than half sorry that he had sent for her. "May I ask how this information reached you? and have my wife and Leslie heard it?"

"It reached us through a servant who was at Strafford," answered Norah, looking up. "Yes, Mrs. Middleton and Leslie have both heard it. It was because they heard it—because the servant told them that every one at Strafford had gone to Wexford—that they went over there. Leslie insisted upon going, and Mrs. Middleton thought it best to take advantage of the house being empty."

"It was very well that she did!" said Mr. Middleton, who was heartily glad that he had gone to Wexford. There was scarcely any place, indeed, to which he would not have gone to escape the pain of being under the same roof that witnessed Leslie's last parting with her dead love.

"This is a bad case for Tyndale," he said, after a minute, "though he has his own obstinacy to thank, as well as the folly of others. He admits that he was in the grounds here at midnight which was about the time that poor Arthur was killed, as near as we can tell but he either can't or won't give the name of any person whom he saw or talked with; so that his own admission tells against him. I confess that I don't understand it!" said he, in a half-annoyed, half-puzzled tone. "I can't believe that he was the person who had that struggle with Arthur at the bridge, and yet his silence is inclining people to suspect him who never thought of doing so at first."

"You mean, then, that he acknowledges he was here in these grounds at midnight?" said Norah, in a voice which scarcely sounded like her own, so tense and sharpened was it.

"Yes, he acknowledges it. He had no option, indeed, about doing so—the servant's evidence proved that he left Strafford, and that Arthur followed him. What took him out at that hour of the night he won't say, however. It is a queer business altogether," said Mr. Middleton, summing it up sharply. "The more I think of it, the queerer it seems. If I had chosen to volunteer my evidence, and say that the guests here had all left before he could have got back—according to Giles's statement of the time he left Strafford—it would have made the matter still more suspicious. As it is, I cannot conceive what he did with himself that he is so loath to tell."

As he ceased speaking, silence fell—a silence in which he might almost have heard the quick breathing of the girl near him. She put her hand to her throat, where something seemed choking her. As in a mirror she saw all the array of merciless consequences that must follow if she opened her lips, and said, "He came to meet me." Yet, it must not be supposed that she was silent because she hesitated to say it. She was silent literally because she could not speak. Such a host of emotions assailed her that she felt like one whose breath is taken away in the whirl of a great tempest. Foremost among these was amazement—amazement that Max should endure arrest, suspicion, imprisonment, should face the thought of all that might ensue, sooner than utter words which might throw a shadow on her name. To understand the light in which Norah regarded this which Max took to be a very plain and simple rule of honor, it must be remembered that she had spoken according to the stern letter of the truth when she said that, though admiration and love had been freely offered her in the course of her life, consideration and that chivalry of respect which is the flower of courtesy, had rarely, if ever, come within the range of her experience. "What is my good name to him, that he should guard it?" she thought, with such a rush of supreme gratitude that, at that moment, she even forgave him the words which he would "never have spoken to Leslie."

"I did not know that you had heard the news of the arrest," Mr. Middleton said, while she still remained silent—still gasped for breath, still felt that, if she tried to speak, she would

probably disgust and shock her listener by bursting into tears—"so I thought I would come in and tell you, since Mrs. Middleton is not here. Do you know, by-the-by, how long she is to remain at Strafford?"

"No," answered Norah. It cost her such an effort to articulate the word that it came out with a force which was almost equivalent to a moral cannon-ball startling Mr. Middleton not a little. He looked at her suspiciously. What ailed the girl? He noticed again that she was deathly pale, and that her lips quivered. He began to be afraid of hysterics. He extended his hand, and grasped his hat, which was on a table near by.

"I have a good deal of business," he said, hastily. "I think I better—

"Be going," he would have said, if Norah had not suddenly risen, and, in so doing, barred his way. Her great eyes burned steady and lustrous in her white face. There was no faltering or hesitation now.

"If you can spare a few minutes longer," she said, "I wish you would be kind enough to tell me what I must do—how I must give my evidence. *I* know what Captain Tyndale did in the grounds here that night."

"You know!" repeated Mr. Middleton, amazed. "Why, how on earth do you know?"

"Because he came to meet me," she answered. "Because he *did* meet me, and we spent some time—an hour, perhaps—on the steps of the summer-house. We were sitting there together, when we heard the report of the pistol, which was found near Arthur Tyndale's body."

"God bless my soul!" said Mr. Middleton.

He was so astounded that he sat down again in the chair from which he had risen. "Is it possible?" he said, after a minute. "Are you really in earnest in telling me this?"

"I am perfectly in earnest," she answered—a sudden flush, like the hectic spot of fever, coming into her cheeks. "Do you think I would say such a thing if it were not true? What reason could I have for doing so? Surely you must see that Max Tyndale has been silent in order to spare *me*. He has borne this suspicion rather than involve *me*, rather than drag my name into such a matter. But he thinks more of me than I think of myself!" she cried, passionately. "No earthly consideration could make me accept such a sacrifice. Sir—Mr. Middleton—tell me where to go, and what to do, and I will do it this minute!"

"Sit down, and be quiet," said Mr. Middleton. "That is the best thing you can do at present. Neither the magistrates nor Tyndale are likely to run away. Now tell me what is the meaning of this? Why should he have come to meet you, at midnight, in the grounds, when you could see him at any hour of the day in the house?"

Then it was—face to face with this inquiry, and the keen eyes enforcing it—that Norah felt the consequences of her disclosure. How could she say what she must say, how could she explain what must be explained, without telling the whole story of Arthur's deception? It would have been hard to do this at any time; but it seemed doubly hard now that he was dead, now that he could utter never another word in his own defense. It seemed cowardice to assail the dead; but, then, might not mercy to the dead mean injustice to the living? Max was already suffering from Arthur's fault; should he suffer still more? This thought ended her doubt. Mr. Middleton saw the lines of her face settle into determination, the lips brace themselves for a second, the drooping lids lift. He was a man, though an elderly one, and the mute though proud appeal of her eyes touched him before she spoke.

"It is a long story, and not a pleasant one," she said; "but, if you wish to hear it—if it is necessary for you to hear it—I am ready to tell it. But I warn you beforehand that it will make you think bitterly of him that is dead—of him who can never speak in his own defense again."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Middleton. He felt bewildered, and yet something like a gleam of light shot athwart the cloud of puzzled doubt which surrounded him. His brows bent, a spark of angry light came into his eyes. Had Arthur Tyndale forgotten his honor and his faith far enough to let this fair-faced siren make a fool of him? Had he been going to meet her when he

met his death? "What do you mean?" he repeated, sternly. "Whatever it is, you must explain." At that moment he had neither respect nor compassion for her in his heart.

But, as she read his thoughts, her color rose, her eyes began to glow, the majesty of bearing, which chiefly made her beauty so unlike that of other women, came back to her.

She looked at him like a queen—one born to rule, by right divine, over the great realm of hearts.

"I mean this," she said, "that, when Max Tyndale came to meet me on Saturday night, he did not come on his own behalf, nor with regard to any thing which concerned himself; he came in the cause of the man of whose murder he stands accused, the man who was engaged to me before he ever knew Leslie—the man whose letters are in my possession now to prove that I speak the truth."

"Engaged to you!" repeated Mr. Middleton. Astonishment stupefied him. "Do you—do you know what you are saying?"

"It was about those letters, which Arthur was anxious to recover, that Captain Tyndale came to me," Norah went on, with restless impetuosity. "I had agreed to surrender them; but I wanted—not unnaturally, you may think—some guarantee of good faith on his part, some proof that he would not return my generosity by slander. Perhaps you are not aware that men do such things sometimes, even fine gentlemen such as Arthur Tyndale—was." Her voice dropped over the last word; it seemed as if, in the midst of the old bitterness, a thrill of remembrance came to her that he of whom she spake now only "was." There was a short pause; then she resumed more quietly: "All of this I can prove, if you care for proof. But it is not of these things I wish to speak. It was of Captain Tyndale. I want you to understand why he came to meet me; I want you to believe that he had no personal reason for desiring to see me. It was as entirely a matter of business with him as if *I* went to see my banker—supposing that I had one. So it seems hard that he should suffer, does it not? And I—how much of this will I need to tell? Surely not the whole, for Leslie's sake, and even for his sake—who is dead."

"Good Heavens!" said Mr. Middleton. "How can I tell? Give me a minute to think—to take it in! I never liked him; but to suspect him of such dishonorable conduct as this never occurred to me—never for an instant! The false-hearted scoundrel!" said he, grinding his teeth, and forgetting for a moment what stupendous gulf—silencing all speech, ending all wrong—lay between himself and the man of whom he spoke.

"He was not so false as weak, I think," said Norah, gravely. "But it does not matter now. Leslie has forgiven him—"

"Does Leslie know?" interrupted he, quickly, almost fiercely. "Surely you had humanity enough not to tell *her* this story?"

"I told her the truth when I found that she had heard a garbled falsehood, which was worse than the truth," Norah answered—and the dignity of her manner impressed, even if it did not convince her listener—"I told it to her on that night, after I came in from the shrubbery. I had no alternative. Mrs. Sandford had overheard a conversation, and so knew enough to make mischief. This mischief she made. Again I repeat, that her garbled falsehood was even worse than the truth."

"But," said Mr. Middleton, with gathering indignation in his eyes and in his voice, "she could never have overheard any thing, she could never have found any thing, she would never have been able to make mischief, if you had not put it in her power to do so! Do you think that it was honorable conduct to come here with such a secret as this in your possession, Miss Desmond? If you knew any thing to Mr. Tyndale's discredit, and wished to break off your sister's engagement, it would have been honest to write and warn her. But to come here—to hold intercourse—to write letters—to meet him clandestinely—nothing can justify it!"

"I know that now," said Norah. "I recognize it as fully as you can do. But I—well, I knew no better. I have lived a more vagrant and hap-hazard life than you can well imagine," said she, looking at him with something half pathetic in her eyes. "Nobody ever taught me any thing. I have had only my own instincts and impulses to guide me, and it is not strange that I—a girl of

nineteen—have been sometimes guided wrongly. I am sorry, very sorry, that I came to make trouble in your home as I have done—but I promise you that I will not stay any longer than it is necessary for me to do in order to clear the name of an innocent man. Oh, sir," she clasped her hands and leaned toward him with great crystal drops—drops which did not fall—standing in her eyes, "don't think of me just now. Restraine your indignation for a little while, and think of Captain Tyndale. Where must I go, what must I do, to give my evidence for him?"

"Good Heavens!" said Mr. Middleton, irritated, exasperated, and yet touched. "Try to be a little reasonable! Women can be reasonable sometimes, I suppose if they try! Did I say any thing about—about wanting you to go?" (The words nearly choked him, for he would have said any thing in the world sooner.) "I said that it was a pity you came with this secret in your possession, unless you came to give an open, honest warning to your sister. However, that is over, and we are not likely to gain any thing by going back upon it. You want to know what you must do now to give your evidence for Tyndale. Well, it is a disagreeable necessity, and one which will make any amount of scandal and gossip, but you must go with me to Wexford and testify to the fact that he was in the grounds with you, before the magistrates who committed him like a couple of fools as they are!"

"To Wexford! must *I* go?" said Norah. She shrank back piteously, and covered her face with her hands. A terrible, cowardly instinct said, "Why did you not keep silence, and this need not have been?" A vision of all the scandal and gossip of which he spoke rose up before her. How could she meet it—court it, as it were?

"You must certainly go, unless you mean to let that poor fellow suffer all the consequences of what you say was no fault of his," answered Mr. Middleton, dryly. "I am as loath to advise such a thing as you can be to do it, for it will let loose a thousand tongues like so many hounds upon you, upon Leslie, upon all of us; but there is no alternative. Processes of law are not enacted in the corners of drawing-rooms. Young ladies have to pay heavy penalties sometimes for appointing midnight interviews in the grounds."

His tone roused Norah more quickly than any thing else could have done. Her hands dropped, and she looked up. The short-lived color had ebbed from her face; it was pale again and very firm. In that moment, "strength came to her that equaled her desire." She put the weakness, which had almost conquered her, down, and set her foot upon it.

"You are right," she said—her voice was as clear and steady as the notes drawn from a violin by a master's hand—"the consequences of what has happened must fall where they belong, and they certainly do not belong to Captain Tyndale, whose only fault is that he has served his friends too well. I am ready to go with you at once. After all, what is my name worth, that I should guard it so tenderly? Less than nothing if, by bringing a shadow on it, I can clear one on which no shadow belongs!"

"In talking that way, I do not think you realize at al—" Mr. Middleton began, shocked by the recklessness which was ready to sacrifice even that which women in general hold to be worth more than life. But, as he spoke, a figure stood in the open door, the appearance of which hushed the words on his lips.

It was Leslie, with the long veil which she wore thrown back from her fair face—a face which the majesty of sorrow lifted into a nobler beauty than it had ever known before. It was but an instant that she stood there—framed like a beautiful and touching picture to their sight—then, seeing that the room was not empty as she had imagined, she turned, without a word, and passed across the hall and up to the staircase, her head drooping a little, but her whole bearing otherwise unchanged.

Though she had come and gone so swiftly and so noiselessly, her appearance, which had broken the thread of their conversation, seemed to come with a certain strange appeal to both of them. It seemed to plead for gentle thoughts and merciful silence toward him whom she mourned, him from whose dead presence she had come. "We must think of her!" Mr. Middleton muttered; and, as he spoke, his wife entered the room.

"Are you here, George?" she said, with a gleam of pleasure coming over her sad, weary face. "How glad I am of it! I have just been making myself doubly miserable by thinking how worn-out and worried you must be! Are you not tired to death, dear?" she asked, laying one hand on his shoulder as she reached his side. It was a gesture full of tenderness, and as near a caress as Mrs. Middleton would have permitted herself in the presence of a third person.

"I suppose I am," said George, taking the hand into his own, "but I have not had time to think about it. One thing has followed so fast on another. Sit down, Mildred: I have a great deal to say to you, and you are just in time. Miss Desmond tells me that you have heard of Tyndale's arrest?"

"Is it true, then? Servants have such a singular capability for distorting facts, that I never know what to believe, that comes through them—but they were all very positive about it at Strafford."

"It is unfortunately quite true. He has been arrested, examined, and committed to prison by those pillars of law and wisdom, Colville and Purcell."

"O George, is it possible?—how terrible! What grounds are there for such a charge?"

"Scant enough grounds, but it is astonishing what a number of blockheads there are in the world. *I* knew all the time that the whole charge was absurd, but because he was not able—or, rather, because he would not say exactly what he was doing at midnight in my grounds, they committed him to jail."

"At midnight!—but what *was* he doing at midnight here?" exclaimed Mrs. Middleton. "Every one had gone home some time before that, and Captain Tyndale I was sure—I was certainly under the impression—left early in the evening!"

Mr. Middleton looked at Norah. Now was her time to speak. But what woman has not felt what Norah felt then, that it is easier to make almost any cause good to a man than to a woman? She flushed and paled as she felt her hostess's glance follow her husband's and rest on her face. But, if the explanation must be given, it might as well be given at once. That thought nerved her to return the look of the cold eyes bent on her, and say:

"Captain Tyndale did leave the grounds early in the evening; but he came back—to meet me."

The audacity of this assertion almost took Mrs. Middleton's breath away. "To meet *you*, Miss Desmond—at midnight! Is it possible that I hear you aright?"

"You certainly hear me aright, madam, though you may not understand me," Norah answered. "I repeat that Captain Tyndale came to meet me, that he was sitting with me on the steps of the summer-house when we were startled by hearing a pistol-shot, and that he was with me for some time afterward—facts which prove conclusively that he could not have been the assailant of his cousin."

"They may prove that," said Mrs. Middleton, with icy coldness, "but you must excuse me if I say that they also prove that you have very little idea of decorum. You are a young lady in my house and under my care, Miss Desmond, therefore I have a right to say—indeed it is my duty to say—that such conduct as this is totally opposed to any code of propriety with which I am acquainted."

"That may very readily be," said Norah. "But it is enough for me that I hold the necessary evidence for clearing the name of an innocent man—a man who came to meet me, not, as you may imagine, madam, because he wished to flirt with me, but because he was anxious to serve the interests of his cousin and of Leslie."

"And pray may I ask," said Mrs. Middleton, haughtily, "what possible concern there was between a midnight interview with yourself and the interests of Mr. Tyndale and Leslie?"

"More than you imagine, perhaps," was the reply. "More than I like to remember, for it is the bitterest memory of my life that I was once engaged to Arthur Tyndale."

"You!" said Mrs. Middleton with a gasp. She could say no more. If she had not been the thorough-bred woman that she was, she would have said, "It is false!" As it was, her look said it for her, and Norah caught that look.

"I see that you do not believe me," she said. "Fortunately, your belief is not a matter of any importance. If it were, proofs, and to spare, are ready to my hand. Mr. Tyndale's letters are still in my possession, though it was to return them that I met Captain Tyndale on Saturday night. I am dull on the subject of decorum, I suppose, but I could certainly see no glaring impropriety in turning from my last good-night to your guests, and going to fulfill an appointment with him at the summer-house in order to speak without interruption on a matter which in reality concerned either of us very little. I was willing to relinquish Mr. Tyndale's letters—relics as they were of a past which had lost all association save that of pain for me—but I should have been mad if I had given them up without some pledge of good faith from him. This he refused to give, and so the letters are still in my possession."

"If this is all true," said Mrs. Middleton, "and I—I can scarcely realize that it is—do you appreciate how great your duplicity has been? If Mr. Tyndale was so utterly false to Leslie, what were *you*? What did you expect to gain by it?" she cried, with a passion which was totally foreign to her usual manner. "You must have had an object—you could not have come here and made all this mischief without one!"

"I cannot enter upon my object now," said Norah, putting her hand with a sudden, involuntary gesture to her head. It was not strange that the latter began to swim a little, that she began to ask herself when and where all this would end. Then she turned abruptly to Mr. Middleton—"Are we not wasting precious time?" she said. "Should I not go at once and give my evidence? Surely they will not refuse to hear it without delay. And every hour counts with *him*—Captain Tyndale!"

Before Mr. Middleton could answer, his wife interposed.

"Are you mad, Miss Desmond?" she said. "Can it be possible that you think of taking *this*—this story into a court of law? If you have no regard for your own good name—if you have been reared so as not to know that when a woman's reputation is breathed upon, it is gone—you might at least think of Leslie, you might think of *us*! It is infamous!—it is impossible! I have a right to say that I will not allow it! I have a right to say that you shall not leave this house to go and drag our names through the mire of public gossip and public scandal!"

"Madam," said Norah, firmly, "you have no such right at all! Though I have had no advantages of social training, I know as well as you can tell me, that when a woman's reputation is breathed upon it is gone, and I have tried hard—very hard—to keep mine from being breathed upon; but, even for my reputation's sake, I have no right to hold back and be silent when the truth will clear an innocent man. Not even for Leslie's sake, not even for the sake of the dead, have I any right to hesitate—though I trust," she added, almost wistfully, "that I may take the whole burden on myself. Will it be necessary to mention why I went to meet Captain Tyndale?" she asked, turning to Mr. Middleton.

"I do not think so," he answered, hesitatingly—"at least, I hope not.—I am afraid there is no help for it, Mildred," he added, turning to his wife. "I feel it as much as you can do, but I see no alternative. Captain Tyndale, like a man of honor, has refused to say what brought him into the grounds. For this silence he is now suffering, and since Miss Desmond knows what brought him—since she saw and spoke with him—it is only right that she should give her evidence in his favor."

"Not at such a sacrifice as this," said Mrs. Middleton, with a face set like granite. "Captain Tyndale is a man—he is able to endure suspicion. But for a woman to come forward and give such evidence against herself—it is beyond every thing that he could ask or expect."

"There is no help for it," repeated Mr. Middleton, with a sigh. Then he turned to Norah—"You are right, Miss Desmond," he said, coldly. "We are wasting valuable time. If you will put on your bonnet, I will drive you into Wexford and try to settle the business at once."

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

"... In her youth  
There is a prone and speechless dialect,  
Such as moves men; besides, she hath prosper-  
ous art  
When she will play with reason and discourse,  
And well she can persuade."

WHEN Norah went up-stairs to put on her bonnet as Mr. Middleton had directed, she paused in the act of doing so, and looked intently at her face as reflected in the mirror. It was paler than usual, but this paleness, instead of detracting from its loveliness, rather drew attention from the mere brilliancy of coloring to the perfect outlines of the nobly-cut features, to the rich, sculpturesque waves of her chestnut hair, and the full-orbed splendor of the eyes. Any woman might well have been content with such a face, yet Norah looked uncertain and dissatisfied. In truth, she was wondering what effect her beauty would have upon the magistrates whom she expected to confront, and whether she had better enhance it—as a pretty woman knows so well how to do—or to disguise it as much as possible which it would have been impossible to do in any perceptible degree. She had not lived nineteen years in the world without having learned to appreciate fully the power which this face exercised over men of all ages and all degrees. Wherever she went, the sterner sex (called thus in irony!) were willing and ready to do her service, obdurate officials melted at a glance from her eyes, no one was too high or too low to refuse her the homage to which beauty is entitled, and which it ever commands. The question she now asked herself was whether this beauty would tell for or against Max Tyndale. Would the magistrates yield their point to her, as many men, older and wiser had done before? or would they fall into the grave error of thinking that it was love or admiration for her which had drawn Max to Rosland on that fatal night? In that case—if they once had a clew to her connection with Arthur Tyndale—her beauty might very readily work harm instead of good. "Is not here a cause," they might say, "a cause of strife and bloodshed old as humanity? Need we go farther than that fair face to find a reason for all that has occurred?"

Having given this probability due weight, and after mature deliberation—deliberation so mature, indeed, that Mr. Middleton grew quite impatient below—Norah, who had as little vanity as any woman, short of a nun, could possibly possess, decided to make herself as plain as possible. She descended, therefore, in the course of the next ten minutes, wearing her traveling-bonnet, with all the rich masses of her hair hidden almost entirely from sight, and a heavy veil over her face. Mrs. Middleton had disappeared. Although she had not yielded to her husband far enough to admit that this disagreeable step might be a necessity, she did not choose to make any further "scene" by opposing it. But she had declared, very decidedly, that she could not see Norah again before she left. "I cannot trust myself," she averred. "I do not know what I might say. There are no words to express the bitterness I feel toward her. It was a black day for all of us—but especially for poor Leslie—when she first set her foot across this threshold. I felt it then as clearly as I know it now. Oh, why do we not heed our own instincts more often than we do? They are so seldom wrong."

So it came to pass that Norah found only Mr. Middleton awaiting her. The carriage was at the door. "You will be stared at enough, unavoidably," he said, grimly. "I do not choose for you to be stared at in any way which can possibly be avoided, so I ordered this."

The drive from Rosland to Wexford was short under all circumstances, but it seemed to Norah now of no length at all. She would gladly have drawn it out to twenty miles, so much did she dread the ordeal before her, but, unluckily, it was out of her power to add another yard to the road over which the horses trotted as gayly as if the sinking heart behind had not wished them shod with lead. This was when she thought of herself. When she thought of Max the way seemed

to lengthen interminably, and the horses to creep. But, although she hated herself for doing so, it was natural that just at this time she should think most of herself. That which lay before her might well have daunted the courage of the bravest woman alive—for bravery does not mean audacity, far less shamelessness. Norah was not afraid that her courage would fail her when it was needed, and she kept every cowardly doubt and fear locked fast in her own breast; but, all the same, she shrank, as any woman with a woman's instincts must have done, and wished unavailingly that such a necessity might have been spared her. Very little was said, either by Mr. Middleton or herself, on the way. He gave her a few directions with regard to the manner in which it would be best for her to give her testimony, and added, with a sigh of relief, that he was glad she was not likely to be nervous, or to lose her head. "Women usually make complete fools of themselves," he added, candidly.

As they entered Wexford he grew a little nervous himself. "Purcell can refuse another examination if he chooses," he said to Norah, "and he may do it out of spite to me. I told him very plainly what I thought of his conduct this morning."

"And if he refuses," said Norah, aghast, "what then?"

"Then we shall have to apply for a writ of *habeas corpus*, and take him before the judge of the district."

"Him! Do you mean the magistrate!"

"The magistrate!" (with a laugh), "not exactly. Tyndale, I mean." Then, putting his head out of the window, "Drive to Mr. Purcell's house," he said, to the coachman—adding, to Norah, as he drew back "He is more likely to be there than anywhere else this time of day."

When the carriage drew up before Mr. Purcell's house—a pleasant, rambling, double-story building, in a large grove—Mr. Middleton alighted, and told Norah to remain where she was. "I'll see if he is here, and if he will grant the examination," he said. "He may be more reasonable when he hasn't got Colville by."

"Please persuade him to do it," said Norah. "I know you can if you will try! Or take me along and let *me* try!"

"That is not necessary," said Mr. Middleton, who did not rate as highly as he should have done the valuable aid of Norah's lovely face and Norah's eloquent tongue. So he went to the house alone—passing up the shaded walk, across the piazza, on which were several chairs and a child's rocking-horse, to the wide-open doors of the hall. Here, as Norah's keen eyes perceived, a gray-whiskered gentleman met him, and, sitting down in full view, they proceeded to talk. She watched them eagerly—trying to gain sonic idea of what they were saying from the dumb show of gesture and the expression of attitude. Passers-by on that quiet village street were few, but even those few cast curious glances at the beautiful face, from which the disguising veil had been carelessly pushed aside. For once, Norah was unconscious of either attention or admiration. What were they saying? When would they have done? Did the magistrate mean to grant the examination? These were the impatient questions which filled her mind.

Suddenly an instinct came to her that the magistrate did *not* mean to grant the examination. How this impression was conveyed she did not know, neither did she stop to doubt its accuracy. Her impatience became uncontrollable, and the desire to act, which was always her governing impulse, seemed to take irresistible possession of her. Before she was scarcely aware of what she meant to do, she had stepped from the carriage, crossed the sidewalk, and opened the gate. A minute later she was moving quickly up the over-shadowed walk, conscious that the two gentlemen were regarding her with considerable surprise from the piazza.

As she ascended the steps they both rose. Mr. Middleton looked annoyed as well as surprised. He had found Mr. Purcell very impracticable indeed, and was provoked that Norah should have come forward in this unnecessary manner.

"I am afraid I have kept you waiting some time, Miss Desmond," he said, stiffly. Then, turning to the magistrate, he added: "This is the witness of whom I spoke.—Miss Desmond, let me introduce Mr. Purcell."

"I came in to see Mr. Purcell," said Norah, in her frank, clear voice. She declined by a gesture the chair which Mr. Purcell hastened to offer. He, on his part, was as much struck by her beauty as she could have desired, and felt an involuntary softening of his resolution, if not of his heart. He had not looked for any thing so interesting as this dazzling young lady. Mr. Middleton had spoken of a witness, but he had entered into no particulars, and Mr. Purcell, having his pride and obstinacy both in arms, had declined to grant another examination. Now he began to feel a little curiosity to hear what the witness had to say, and Norah did not leave him long in doubt on this point.

"It is likely that I am very presumptuous in fancying that I may be able to influence you more than Mr. Middleton," she said, with a smile that nearly took the worthy magistrate's breath away; "but I could not remain quiet when so much depends on your decision, and I have come to say that I hope you will grant the examination. Surely—" (looking at him with anxious, wistful deprecation) "you have not refused to do so?"

"I—I have been telling Mr. Middleton that I really—I cannot see why I should do so," answered Mr. Purcell, stammering like a school-boy. "It was in Captain Tyndale's power to have brought forward any evidence which he desired to produce, and he not only refused to do so, but his refusal was given in a very curt and contemptuous manner. Therefore, I cannot see—"

"Shall I tell you why he refused?" interrupted Norah, with her eyes glowing like two stars. "It was because he did not wish to bring *me* into notoriety, as a witness in his favor!—it was because he would not shield himself by throwing the least shadow on a woman's name. I was with Captain Tyndale during the time that he was in the Rosland grounds, Mr. Purcell, and, although he did not choose to summon me as a witness, I have come to testify on his behalf. Do you mean to tell me that you are going to refuse to hear my evidence?"

"Certainly not," answered Mr. Purcell, promptly. "I—of course, this alters the state of the case entirely. If it was a natural and commendable reluctance to drag you into such a matter which made Captain Tyndale refuse to summon you as a witness, it is possible for me to stretch a point, and have another examination of the case.—Usually, however," turning to Mr. Middleton, with an evident desire to save his credit, "this would be quite irregular. After the prisoner has been committed, the only proper way to procure another examination is by means of a writ of *habeas corpus*, issued by—"

"I know all about that," said Mr. Middleton, impatiently. "But it is only a—hem! exceptional magistrate who adheres so rigidly to the letter of the law. There's latitude in these things, Purcell—great latitude. But, since you have finally decided in favor of the examination, suppose that we have it over at once? It is an unpleasant business to Miss Desmond under any circumstances, and the sooner it is done the less attention it will create."

Mr. Purcell made no difficulty about this. He suddenly became as obliging as possible—so obliging, indeed, that Mr. Middleton felt that he had made a great mistake and lost much time in not bringing Norah forward at once. If the truth had been known, however, he would have learned that the worthy magistrate was not only fired with chivalric gallantry by Norah's exquisite face, but he was also burning with curiosity to learn—as it would be his "duty" to do—what part in the tragedy she had played; for, alas! Norah's misgivings were true. Mr. Purcell had already settled in his own mind what her role had probably been. This was the ill turn which that delusion and snare, called beauty, did for her.

They drove at once to the justice-room, and the prisoner was sent for. His first request when left alone had been for pen and paper, and he was writing a letter to Norah when the sheriff came for him. In this letter he had forcibly stated the reasons why she should keep silence with regard to having met him on that fatal night, and it may be imagined, therefore, that his surprise and consternation were great when he entered the justice-room, where the first person whom he saw was Norah, sitting by Mr. Middleton. He uttered an exclamation, and would have walked up to her immediately, if the magistrate had not interfered.

"Excuse me, Captain Tyndale, but I must ask you to defer speaking to the witness until after she has given her testimony. I have been induced to relax my usual rules and grant your case another investigation, because I have been informed that she has important evidence to offer in your behalf—"

"I think there is some mistake," interrupted Max, impetuously. "Miss Desmond knows nothing—it is impossible that she can know any thing bearing at all upon what you are good enough to call my 'case'; in other words, the death of my cousin."

"Miss Desmond is certainly the best judge of what she knows," answered the magistrate. He had no liking for this brusque young soldier, and did not hesitate to show as much. "Be good enough to sit down and keep quiet, sir. Miss Desmond, I am ready to hear your evidence."

Then Norah, who had not spoken to Max—who, indeed, had not done more than barely give one glance at him as he entered—advanced to the table, behind which the magistrate was sitting. Despite Mr. Middleton's anxiety to get the thing over and keep it quiet, the news of another examination had spread, and a considerable number of sightseers had followed in the train of the sheriff and prisoner. From lip to lip the intelligence had passed that Mr. Middleton had brought in a lady to give evidence—a young lady, a pretty lady, those who had seen her in the carriage at Mr. Purcell's gate averred—therefore the justice-room was filled in an almost incredibly short space, and Norah faced quite an audience when she rose.

Then it was that the training of her life stood her in good stead. If her beauty, when she threw back her veil, sent a thrill through all present, the supreme dignity and grace of her bearing—her perfect self-possession and complete unconsciousness—astonished them still more. As for Max, he held his breath as he looked at her. He was enraged—enraged that she should causelessly (as he thought) draw down upon herself all the comment, the certain gossip and possible scandal, which would ensue: but he was also fascinated so deeply that for a minute he forgot the presence of every one but herself. He wondered that he had never seen before the grandeur that dwelt in those perfect features, the brave, strong, dauntless soul which looked out of the lustrous eyes. In a position where almost any girl would have trembled, and blushed, and faltered—for not another's woman's face was in the crowded room—she stood like a princess, with no deepening flush of color on her fair face, no quiver of self-consciousness in her manner.

Having taken the necessary oath, she made her statement in a voice which was distinctly audible to every one present—her clear, pure enunciation serving instead of any elevation of tone.

"On Saturday night," she said, "there was a dinner-party at Mr. Middleton's. I think it must have been about ten o'clock that Captain Tyndale came up to me as I was sitting on the lawn, and told me that he had been looking for his cousin, but that, not being able to find him among the guests, he thought it likely that he had gone back to Strafford. He intended to follow him, he said, in order to speak on a matter of business; and he asked me since I, also, had some connection with this business if I could not see him if he came back to Rosland afterward. I thought that the company would probably not be dispersed by that time, and I agreed to do so—telling him that I would meet him at a summer-house in the grounds at half-past eleven o'clock. At that hour the last of the guests were taking leave—most of them saying that they could not stay later because it was Saturday night and it chanced that nobody observed me when I entered the shrubbery to keep my appointment with Captain Tyndale. I found him waiting for me at the summer-house, and the first thing which he told me was that his cousin had been drinking so deeply that he was quite impracticable, and had refused absolutely to listen to him. We were both sorry for this, and discussed it at some length. Afterward we were talking of other things, when we were startled by the report of a pistol apparently in the direction of the bridge. Captain Tyndale was anxious to go and see what it meant, but I objected to being left alone, and therefore he remained with me. Since no other report followed, we did not attach much importance to the shot, and soon returned to the conversation which it had interrupted. Not very long after this we separated. That, sir, is all that I know, and I am sure it is all that Captain Tyndale knows, of the murder of Arthur Tyndale."

After the clear tones ceased, there was a moment of dead silence. Mr. Purcell looked, as he felt, embarrassed what to say. The spectators held their breath and pricked their ears to hear what would come next.

As the minute of suspense ended, people became conscious that a gray-haired man, with bushy, gray eyebrows and a short whip in his hand, was pushing his way roughly through the crowd to the magistrate's table. This was Mr. Colville, who, by a lucky chance (as he said to himself), had not left town when the news of the second examination reached him. He hurried at once to the justice-room and entered the door in time to hear Norah's testimony. As he came forward now, she, like every one else, turned to look at him, and, although she was not aware of his importance in the eyes of his neighbors or of himself, she recognized at a glance that he was a man of influence, and she also recognized that he was an obstinate believer in Max's guilt, and a man who would be proof against even the fascination of her beauty.

He walked past her as if he had not seen her, and addressed himself with a frowning brow to the magistrate.

"I am astonished at this, Purcell—really astonished! If you meant to do any thing so wholly unnecessary and foolish as to grant a second examination, you might at least have notified me of the fact, and not assumed the entire responsibility in this manner."

"I should of course have sent and notified you at once, but I thought you had left town," Mr. Purcell hastened to answer, in rather a deprecating tone. "I—I could not well refuse the examination under the circumstances," he went on, lowering his voice, "but I am glad to see you—very glad. I think you will have to take the case in hand. Really, I am quite at a loss what to think. Here's an alibi proved very plainly."

"Nothing of the sort," said Mr. Colville, in his hard, rasping voice. "The young lady merely asserts that Captain Tyndale met her at midnight in Mr. Middleton's grounds—for what purpose she does not state—but this fact does not at all exonerate him from the charge against him. The murder may have occurred at any time between midnight and daylight,"

Mr. Middleton and Max both rose on the same impulse to speak, but, before any words could escape from the lips of either, Norah's clear voice sounded.

"There is one point in my evidence which, in making such an assertion, you certainly overlook, sir. I have distinctly testified on oath that Captain Tyndale and myself heard a shot, which effectually proves when Mr. Tyndale was assailed—since I have understood that a discharged pistol was found near the scene of the struggle."

A lawyer could not have made this point more neatly, and so Mr. Colville felt. He first stared and then colored. In his zeal he *had* overlooked that fact, and it would have been disagreeable enough to be reminded of it by anybody, but by a girl it was intolerable!

"You attach more importance to that point than it deserves," he said, sharply. "The pistol which was found had no apparent connection with Mr. Tyndale's death. It might very readily have been placed near the spot where the struggle—evidently a *personal* struggle, closely resembling one which Mr. Tyndale's servant testifies to having witnessed in the house—took place, in order to draw off suspicion, and with a view to the fact that you had heard a pistol discharged in that direction at or about midnight."

Mr. Middleton and Max looked at each other. "This is intolerable!" said the latter between his clinched teeth; and, regardless of consequences, he was about to step forward, when the elder gentleman's hand fell on his shoulder.

"Keep quiet!" he said, though his own voice was trembling with anger. "You'll only do harm by making a scene. Not but that I should like amazingly to knock the insolent blockhead down myself!—still, it is best to keep quiet. I believe Miss Desmond will prove a match for him anyhow."

"But how on earth can you expect me to stand by and see her browbeaten and insulted on my account!" said Max, who was almost choking.

"He'll not insult her," said the other, significantly. "Let him bluster as he will, Colville knows *me* better than to try that!"

This colloquy, which took place in short, nervous whispers, did not occupy a minute. With a parting "Keep quiet!" Mr. Middleton moved forward to the side of Norah. But Norah needed no defender. She regarded Mr. Colville with eyes so steady that they almost abashed him, and a face filled with eloquent, indignant scorn.

"Your private suppositions, sir," she said, coldly, "cannot possibly affect the evidence. That," turning to Mr. Purcell, "I have given before the magistrate, and it is for him to act on it."

"Mr. Colville also forgets or ignores one thing," said Mr. Middleton, speaking here. "The servant, on whose single and unsupported evidence all this infamous and insulting accusation rests, testified explicitly that he heard Captain Tyndale return to Strafford and enter his room a little after midnight. It follows, therefore, that he must have returned home immediately after parting with Miss Desmond."

"I really think the case is very strong in his favor, Colville," said Mr. Purcell, in a whisper.

"So far from being in his favor, the case is as strong as ever against him," said Mr. Colville, in a loud, positive voice. His blood and his mettle were both up. He looked upon his colleague as a weak-minded fool, and would not have hesitated to tell him so. He believed that Max was guilty, and he meant to prove him so. The idea that he—the murderer—should be sent forth scatheless to enjoy the inheritance of the man he had murdered, seemed to Mr. Colville too monstrous to be allowed!

"There is one point—the most important point—which rests in mystery yet, and which it is necessary should be cleared before any evidence can be said to be in the prisoner's favor," he went on, after a short pause. "This is the subject of his dispute with the murdered man. He refused to give any account of it himself, but, since Miss Desmond has come forward to offer her evidence on another point, it is likely that she may be able to enlighten us also on this.—Will you state," turning to Norah, "what was the exact nature of that 'business' which Captain Tyndale had with his cousin, and in which, you have already said, that you also were concerned."

"That can have nothing to do with the matter—that cannot be necessary," said Norah. Max, watching her closely with eager, anxious eyes, saw that she did not flush, but, on the contrary, turned very pale. He thought she would recognize now, with a sense of dismay, what she had brought upon herself. He did not know that she had seen it all, and counted the cost of it all beforehand.

"Do you refuse, then, to answer the question?" said Mr. Colville, growing exceedingly like a turkey-cock in the face.

Norah hesitated. She did not know how far his power extended, but she had a vague fear of consequences if she did refuse. Not consequences to herself—she had flung all thought of herself to the winds—but to Max. Was the *whole* truth the only thing which would clear him? Yet she had hoped to leave part of it untold, if only for Leslie's sake. Suddenly it occurred to her that Mr. Colville had no right to make such an inquiry, and, acting upon this thought, she turned to Mr. Purcell with the dignity and grace of her bearing unchanged.

"I thought that *you*, sir, were conducting the examination," she said. "Will you allow me, therefore, to ask if it is necessary that I should answer the question which this very courteous gentleman thinks fit to address to me?"

"This gentleman is Mr. Colville, and a justice of the peace as well as myself," said Mr. Purcell, hurriedly. "I—hem!—think it would be best for you to answer the question he has asked."

Norah looked at Mr. Middleton, appealingly, but her glance received no answer. Angry, mortified, indignant, furious with Colville, yet knowing that the story of Arthur Tyndale's conduct must sooner or later transpire, he looked down, and dared not trust himself to utter a word lest he should explode in the invectives which he had used once before that day. Then she looked at Max. It was the first time that their eyes had met, and the mute appeal of her glance was

too much for the young man, who had momently felt the leash in which he held himself slipping from his grasp. He sprang to his feet with a quick motion, and, before the sheriff or anybody else could interfere, stood by her side.

"Take care that you do not go too far, sir!" he said, addressing Mr. Colville, with a ring in his voice, and a glance in his eye, which made that gentleman take an involuntary step backward. "The charge on which you have seen fit to cause my arrest is infamous and unfounded enough, as you must be aware; but when you undertake to browbeat and insult a lady, who has generously come forward, of her own accord, to testify in my behalf, you are going too far—much too far! If you presume on the fact that I am a prisoner now, you might remember that I am not likely to remain one for, surely, in this country judges and juries are not fools as well as magistrates!—and when I am at liberty, sir, you shall answer for this conduct, as surely as there is a sun in the heavens!"

"Tyndale! Tyndale!" said Mr. Middleton, in a warning tone—but Max, having yielded himself up to passion, had no ear for friendly remonstrances. He shook off the other's hand, impatiently, and looked at Mr. Colville with the most fiery eyes which it is likely that gentleman had ever encountered in his life. But Mr. Colville, who was not easily intimidated, saw his advantage, and in a moment seized it.

"Any one who doubts this man's guilt," said he, looking magisterially around at the breathless but excited crowd, "has now an opportunity to test the justice of his opinion. The man who would venture to threaten a magistrate in the prosecution of his duty, would, certainly, be capable of assaulting his cousin, with whom he had some mysterious cause of disagreement, and whose heir-at-law he was, in a secluded place at midnight."

Whatever this argument might have been called in logic, it had its effect upon the listening crowd. A slight murmur rose. Norah turned to Max.

"See what you have done!" she whispered. "Pray—pray, go back and be quiet! I might as well answer the question. It must come out sooner or later."

"Don't think of such a thing!" answered he, impetuously. "For God's sake, don't think of it! They have no right—it is infamous!"

"Tyndale, if you don't want a scene, you had better go back to your seat. Colville is speaking to the sheriff," said Mr. Middleton, anxiously.

"The first thing that Mr. Colville knows, he, or his friends, will have something for which to commit me in earnest!" said Max, who felt that patience and forbearance had some time since ceased to be virtues in this particular case.

Affairs were in this interesting condition, the spectators were growing more excited, and Mr. Colville more angry every instant, the sheriff was hesitating, Max was defiant, and Mr. Middleton was uneasy, when a young man, who had elbowed his way from the door, and whom nobody had observed in the prevailing excitement, walked up to the magistrate's table and addressed Mr. Purcell.

"You have the wrong man in custody, sir," he said. "I know all the circumstances and the cause of Mr. Tyndale's death."

## CHAPTER XXXV.

"I was too proud the truth to show,  
You were too blind the truth to know,  
And so we parted long ago."

IT would be difficult to describe the pause of absolute astonishment which fell over the excited crowd at those words. Every eye in the room turned at once on the new-comer, while Mr.

Middleton, wheeling round upon him, uttered an exclamation of mingled amazement and incredulity, so violent that it startled every one present.

"Great Heaven!" he said, "*Carl!*—is it you?"

"It is I, sir—all right!" answered Carl, extending his hand. He spoke mechanically, and looked so jaded, pale, and grim, that it was not surprising that very few persons had recognized him as he made his way up the room. "I did not mean to spring the thing on you like this," he said, as his uncle took the extended hand, half doubtfully, and looked at him with a score at least of interrogation-points in his eyes. "I thought I would go to Rosland, talk it over quietly, and take your advice about the best course to pursue; but when I got off the train ten minutes ago, I heard that Tyndale had been taken up and was being examined, so I thought the best thing I could do would be to come in at once, state exactly how it all occurred, and take the consequences, whatever they may be."

"But, are you mad?" said Mr. Middleton. "It can't be possible that you know any thing of Arthur Tyndale's death, for you were not even in the county."

"You are mistaken," said the young man, quietly. "I know every thing—every thing about it." Then he turned abruptly to Norah. A change which it is hard to analyze came over his face, a quick shiver of passion crept into his voice. "Forgive me," he said, "that I have to drag your name forward. If it were possible to avoid it, I would do so, at any risk or cost to myself!"

"My name!" said Norah. "What has my name to do with it?"

But even as she asked the question, she felt what her name had to do with it, and a sudden sense of faintness came over her. It must all be told, then—there was no help for it! The faces around suddenly seemed to swim before her. She turned to Max with a blind instinct that in another moment she would make a scene. "Let me sit down!" she said, faintly.

But, after he had taken her to a seat, she detained him and would not allow him to open a window or ask for water. "Don't!" she said. "People will think that I have something to dread, and it is not of myself that I am thinking. You know that."

"But you should think of yourself," he said, angrily. What does this mean? What can this hot-headed young fool have to say about you?"

"Only the old story seen from his point of view. Hush! what is he saying? Let me hear!"

He had taken the oath and was giving his evidence to the magistrate with the manner of one who wishes to tell his story and be done with it. His quick, nervous voice—for it was evident that his coolness was only the result of supreme excitement—rang through the room so clearly that everybody heard distinctly all that was said. The silence was profound. Men pressed nearer, but no one spoke. Mr. Purcell listened with the air of a man who has reached the last point of possible astonishment, Mr. Colville eyed the speaker sternly with an air of mingled suspicion and incredulity; Mr. Middleton sat down with an audible groan. This was a terrible blow to him.

Meanwhile, Carl was speaking:

"In saying that I am acquainted with the circumstances of Mr. Tyndale's death, I must add that I was unfortunately the cause of that death," he said, with his head upheld, his face white and set, his brown eyes steadily meeting the magistrates'. "The death itself was purely accidental; but he was struggling with me when it occurred—when, stepping back incautiously, he lost his balance—so it is possible that the law will hold me accountable for it. However that may be, I am here now to speak the truth and clear suspicion from a man who has been unjustly accused."

"You are rather late in coming to speak the truth," said Mr. Colville, abruptly. "May I ask where you have been ever since the murder was discovered?"

"I will explain that point presently," said Carl, with a motion of the hand which could scarcely have been more carelessly contemptuous if he had been brushing a fly aside. Then he went on, addressing himself to Mr. Purcell with pointed directness:

"In order that you may understand the cause of the struggle which resulted in Mr. Tyndale's death, it is necessary that I should tax your patience far enough to enter into a detail of some personal circumstances which preceded it. On last Saturday I decided to leave my uncle's

house for a short visit to some relatives in a lower county. Chancing to drive into Wexford on business during the earlier part of the day, I thought that I might save time, in case I was late at night, by buying my ticket then; so I went to the ticket-office, where I was informed of the change of schedule, which threw the trains several hours later than the time on which they had been running, and where I also heard that Mr. Tyndale was intending to leave Wexford that night. This intelligence struck me, for I"—he paused, hesitated, a glow of color came into his face, then paled again "I at once connected such an intention with some words which I had overheard by chance that morning—words exchanged between Miss Desmond and Mr. Tyndale. They were talking in a summer-house in my uncle's grounds, under the window of which I *passed*"—he emphasized this word for Norah, as she felt, though he did not turn his glance on her "and, in so passing, caught a reference to the ten-o'clock train at night which puzzled me. When I learned the news of Mr. Tyndale's proposed departure, however, all seemed plain enough. I saw then that the man who was engaged to one woman, had asked another woman to elope with him, and, furthermore, I believed that she had consented to do so."

There was a slight stir as these emphatic words rang out. People were disposed to be a little indignant. "He won't clear himself by slandering a dead man!" more than one of them muttered. Others had been shrewd enough to suspect some family scandal before this. Max's reticence, and Norah's extraordinary beauty, had been very significant of something of the kind. Interest began to increase. Even Mr. Colville listened more attentively. Max, who was overcome with rage, bent down to Norah. "Why do you not go forward and contradict such an assertion?" he said.

"There is time enough for that," she answered. "Let him finish his story. It is not in my character, but in Arthur Tyndale's death, that the magistrates are concerned."

"I returned to Rosland," Carl meanwhile went on, "where there was a dinner-party that evening. After dinner I left, without telling my friends of the change of schedule, of which none of them were aware. They were all under the impression that I had taken the down-express, due here by the old schedule at 9.40 P. M. As soon as I reached Wexford, I sent the dog-cart back to Rosland, and soon afterward set forth in that direction myself. I was determined to see if my suspicions with regard to Miss Desmond and Mr. Tyndale were correct, and I was also determined that the elopement should not take place if I could prevent it."

"Excuse me if I interrupt you for a minute," said Mr. Purcell just here, "but why should you have wished to prevent it?"

"Is it remarkable that I should have wished to prevent a dishonorable scoundrel from playing fast-and-loose with the cousin in the first instance, and the woman whom I hoped to marry, in the second?" demanded the young man, haughtily.

"But since Mr. Middleton is the head of your family and Miss Grahame's guardian," said the irrepressible Mr. Colville, "may I ask why you did not go to him, if you wished the elopement prevented?"

"I am here to state that my conduct was, not to render an account of the motives which actuated me," answered Carl, waxing more haughty still. "Why I did not apply to my uncle has nothing whatever to do with the circumstances I am detailing." Then he took up the thread of his story again—a story to which Max and Norah listened as eagerly as any one else: "I entered the Rosland grounds unobserved, and took my way to the bridge. I had an instinct that I should meet Arthur Tyndale there, and I was not mistaken. As I crossed the bridge, I saw him advancing from the opposite side toward me. I"—he stopped and hesitated for a minute "I have scarcely a clear recollection of what followed. I met him just beyond the bridge, and asked him where he was going. He answered with an insolent refusal to tell me. I charged him, then, with his intention. Upon this, he grew very violent, accused me of insulting interference, and finally drew a pistol on me. I was unarmed; but I was the cooler man of the two—besides which, I saw that he had been drinking—and, as he was in the act of firing, I knocked the pistol out of his hand. Then he sprang at me like a tiger, and we closed. It was a hand-to-hand struggle for a minute or two—how long,

exactly, I can't tell. I think he would have got the best of me, if I had not pressed him—almost unconsciously—toward the edge of the ravine. It was there his foot slipped, and—with my weight telling against him—he was hurled over. I should have gone too, if I had not saved myself by catching a small tree. *He went down.*"

Again the speaker's voice ceased abruptly. It was evidently only by a strong effort that he had forced himself to utter the last words. These words were simple enough, yet there was something in them—an unspoken power, an expression of reality—which thrilled every one present. They all felt that they had listened to the truth. The magnetism of the young man's tones seemed to bring before them, like a vivid picture, the midnight struggle, with its awful ending. As for him, he laid one hand on the table to steady himself, while with the other he took up and drank off a glass of water. He had not finished. There was something still to tell and he must do it. No one spoke. Even Mr. Colville for once was silent. They waited eagerly, breathlessly, until he went on:

"I was horribly startled when Tyndale fell—for I knew the height of the bank just there—and I waited for a minute that seemed to me an hour, to see if he would move or speak. Since he did neither, I spoke to him. He gave no answer. Then I struggled down the bank as well as I could in the dim light, and went to where he was lying. *He*"—a short pause—"he breathed once or twice after I reached him, but he neither spoke nor groaned. That is all."

"Not quite all," said Mr. Purcell, in a grave voice, after a moment's pause. To him, no more than to any one else, did any doubt of the statement come. Sometimes there is an irresistible power in truth to make itself felt, and this was one of those occasions. No sane man could possibly have suspected that any thing like falsehood lurked behind Carl Middleton's white face, and simple, straightforward story. "There is one thing yet," said the magistrate. "If the death occurred as you have described, why did you not at once summon witnesses and acknowledge the share you had borne in it?"

"Because I was too horror-stricken and excited to take time for rational thought," the young man answered. "The first impulse which came to me when I realized what had happened, was to leave the spot. This I did at once. I retraced my steps to Wexford so rapidly, that I reached there in time for the Alton train, which I took. My undefined intention was to leave the country as soon as possible—not so much because I dreaded any consequences of what had occurred, as because I wished to fling it and all association with it behind me. But, yesterday, cooler thoughts came to me. I began to realize that the right thing to do was to come back and tell the truth, especially since I feared that some innocent person—I did not think of Captain Tyndale, however—might fall under suspicion. The result proves that this instinct was a right one."

"I am sorry—extremely sorry that Captain Tyndale should have suffered so much annoyance," said Mr. Purcell—it was worthy of note that even such meagre expression of regret as this stuck in Mr. Colville's throat, as "*amen*" did in that of Macbeth—"I hope he will remember that I only did my duty according to the evidence given before me. Such disagreeable mistakes will occur sometimes, but it gives me sincere pleasure to release him from custody now, with—with an apology for his detention."

"I think you are proceeding rather fast, Purcell," said his colleague, stiffly. "The law receives with reluctance—great reluctance—the evidence of a man against himself. There are one or two points yet to be considered in Mr.—ahem!—Middleton's testimony. He does not assert, but he leads us to suppose," proceeded this benign minister of justice, "that the ruling motive of the conduct which he describes—very ungentlemanly and insulting conduct, in my opinion—was a violent passion for Miss Desmond, united with jealousy of Mr. Tyndale. But it is a well-known fact that Mr. Tyndale was engaged to Miss Grahame, and it is scarcely likely, therefore, that he should have been contemplating" (Mr. Colville was fond of long words which had an imposing effect) "an elopement with a young lady who is—as I understand—related to Miss Grahame."

Before Carl could reply—though the quick lightning which leaped into his eyes replied for him—Norah rose and came forward. "Now is my opportunity!" she said, in a nervous whisper

to Max, and Max did not try to detain her. He went forward with her, however, and stood by her side while she addressed the magistrate.

"If you will excuse me," she said—and her clear, sweet voice thrilled like music on all the listening ears, after the harsh, masculine tones to which they had been hearkening—"I should like to answer now the question which was addressed to me before Mr. Middleton came in the question relating to the business which took Captain Tyndale to Strafford, and in which I have already said that I was concerned. It will serve to explain and in a measure substantiate the statement which Mr. Middleton has made."

"I am quite ready to hear any evidence that you have to offer," said Mr. Purcell, courteously. Elopement or no elopement, he could not resist the charm which Norah's lovely countenance had for him. In fact, he credited nothing in her disfavor, and would not have minded breaking a lance for her in his old-fashioned way.

"I must ask you to believe, then, that it is with deep regret, and only to explain things which are misunderstood, and which may be misrepresented, that I speak," she said. "I am more than sorry—oh, much more than sorry—to utter any thing which may reflect discredit on the dead, or which can pain the living; but I have no alternative. In justice to myself I must state the truth in which Captain Tyndale will bear me witness."

She then began, and, with a clear, unfaltering voice, told the history of all that had occurred between Arthur and herself, together with the part which Max and Carl had played therein; a history which has already been given in detail, and need not again be given in general outline. Mr. Middleton writhed in his chair: but what could he say? Even if objection would have done any good, how could he object? He had sense enough to know that this, which was important to Norah, was essential to Carl. Without her evidence, the cause of his quarrel with Arthur Tyndale would have rested on his single, unsupported assertion. Now it was proved beyond question by her testimony and that of Max, corroborating all that she said.

After the last words were uttered, she drew down her veil and turned away. "That is all!" she said. Then she walked up to Mr. Middleton, who sat with one hand over his eyes, the other resting on the top of his gold-headed cane. "Will you take me to the carriage?" she said to him, in a low, deprecating voice. "I suppose I may go now—may I not?"

"I suppose these gentlemen will kindly allow you to do so, since they have gratified their curiosity by ferreting out all that they wanted to know," he answered, bitterly. He rose as he spoke and offered her his arm. Keenly as he resented her conduct, "from first to last," as he said to himself, he would not for any consideration have seemed lacking in the most minute punctilio of respect—especially before all the curious eyes that were bent upon them. Leaning on his arm, she passed down the aisle which the curious crowd, falling back on either side, made—and so out of the justice-room.

Mr. Middleton placed her in the carriage, which was waiting on the outside, and then closed the door. "After you have taken Miss Desmond to Rosland, bring the carriage back," he said to the coachman. "I must trouble you to explain my absence to my wife, Miss Desmond," he added—very coldly—to Norah. "Tell her that I will come as soon as possible—as soon as I get through with those men in yonder, and am able to bring Carl with me."

"Had you not better write a line to Mrs. Middleton?" said Norah. "I—how can I tell her all that has occurred? It is not that I would shrink from the pain on my own account," she added, eagerly, "but it would make it much worse to her if she heard it from me."

He knew this was true. "Wait a minute, then," he said, and, opening his pocket-book, he began to scribble a few lines on a blank page. While he was so engaged, Max Tyndale (who had taken immediate advantage of his newly-acquired freedom) came up to the door of the carriage. His face was still very pale, but his dark eyes were glowing.

"Are you going away without even giving me an opportunity to thank you for all that you have done for me?" he said, in a low voice—a voice that seemed full of emotion.

"What is there to thank me for?" she asked, almost brusquely. "I merely came forward and told the truth. It was you who were enduring suspicion and imprisonment sooner than—than call on me for this evidence, as you should have done at once."

"As I would have endured a thousand times more, sooner than have done!" said he. "You cannot tell what I felt when I came in and saw you!—you cannot tell what I have endured during this last hour!"

"It has been something very hard, even to me—something which I am not likely ever to forget," she said. "But you see that, under any circumstances, it must have come to pass. There was no help for it. If I had not offered myself as a witness for you, I should, no doubt, have been summoned as a witness for Carl Middleton."

"Have you suspected him at all?" asked he, looking at her intently.

"Not at all—never for a moment. But I feared from the first that you might be suspected."

"And Leslie—Miss Grahame! What has she thought?—surely she has not believed that I was guilty?"

"No; Leslie did not believe it," answered Norah. She spoke quietly, almost indifferently; but there was a pang at her heart. It was of Leslie he thought; not of her. She had periled her good name in his defense; but all that he cared to learn was whether Leslie, in the midst of her sorrow and in the safe seclusion of her home, had thought him guilty! At least this was what Norah thought. She would not look at him to read her mistake—if mistake it were—in his eyes. She was buttoning her glove, with fingers much more quick and nervous than her voice, when she said, "What will be the result of all this, as far as that mad boy is concerned?"

"Nothing very serious, I hope," Captain Tyndale answered. "I left the magistrates deciding at what amount they will fix his bail. He will be at liberty until the grand jury has taken cognizance of his case."

"And then?"

"Then they may find a bill against him, and he may have to stand a trial, but the result can only be final acquittal. I have no doubt but that every thing occurred exactly as he states."

"Nor I," said she, in a low voice.

As she spoke, he saw that she was trembling, and it suddenly occurred to him to wonder what Carl Middleton was to her. What right had he possessed to take upon himself the part of defender, which he had played with such woful results? Not that of an accepted suitor, certainly. His own avowal had made that much clear. Indeed, it was very evident that he had quitted Rosland as a hopeless or rejected suitor. But many a hopeless or rejected suitor has possessed the heart of the woman who rejected him, and that Max knew. He also knew enough of Norah Desmond by this time, to be aware that she had sufficient pride to hold aloof even from the man she loved, if she thought that his family would be unwilling to receive her and of the unwillingness of the Middletons there could be no question. These thoughts went through Max's mind like a flash.

"I don't think you need be uneasy about Mr. Middleton," he said. "Your testimony supported his own so well that—"

"Here is the note, Miss Desmond," said Mr. Middleton, coming between them. "I am very sorry to have detained you so long. Bring the carriage back as quickly as possible," he added to the coachman.

At this hint Max felt that he must fall back. Not one straight look into Norah's eyes had he gained yet. "She is thinking too much of Middleton to care for me!" he thought, with that exquisite discernment and reason which distinguishes a man to whom love begins to come as enlightener and mystifier both at once. Still he leaned forward quickly, and took the hand which was absently holding Mr. Middleton's note.

"God bless you!" he said, in a voice which rang in Norah's ears for many a long day afterward. "If I were to try forever I could never thank you for all that you have endured for me—

for the revelation of yourself you have made to me to-day! There is much yet to be done—at Stratford—which claims my attention now, but I will see you very soon."

The words were little—the tone was every thing. If Norah had looked up, a single glance might have settled every thing between them; but Norah did not look up. She dared not. Instinct warned her that tears—or a suggestion of tears—were in her eyes, and she would have sooner died (at least so she thought) than show those tears to Max Tyndale. He was only meaning to thank her—of that she felt sure—and what were his thanks to her? She steadied her voice until it was almost cold, as she said "Good-by!"

Only that. The next moment her hand lay in her lap—a poor, little crushed hand, if she had taken time or thought to feel its pain—and the carriage was driving rapidly away.

#### CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Man cannot make, but may enoble fate,  
By nobly bearing it. So let us trust  
Not to ourselves, but God, and calmly wait  
Love's orient out of darkness and of dust.

"Farewell, and yet again farewell, and yet  
Never farewell—if farewell mean to fare  
Alone and disunited. Love hath set  
Our days, in music, to the self-same air."

WHEN Norah reached Rosland, her first act—after having sent the note of which she was the bearer, up to Mrs. Middleton—was to go to Leslie. She found her alone. From exhaustion and weariness, she had fallen into a light sleep, but the sound of the opening door, and the rustle of Norah's dress, as she crossed the room, wakened her. She came back to consciousness with a start, but the sense of sorrow had not left her even in sleep, and she was spared that keen pang which usually comes with waking to those in grief.

"Are you back, Norah?" she said, springing to a sitting posture. "Has Captain Tyndale been discharged? Is it all over?"

"It is all over," said Norah, coming to her side. "He has been discharged. I knew you would be glad to hear it, so I came to you at once."

"Yes, I am very glad to hear it," said Leslie. "But what a terrible charge to have been made against *him*, of all people! Arthur's cousin—I almost feel as if he were Arthur's brother—Norah, were they mad to say such a thing of him?"

"They had some show of reason for their suspicions," said Norah, hesitatingly. The truth must be told, and yet she scarcely knew how to tell it. "You know that he was in the grounds with me at midnight. We heard a shot—I did not tell you this before, dear—and it was then that Mr. Tyndale was killed. We thought very little of it at the time, but you can imagine that such a fact might have thrown suspicion on Captain Tyndale, especially since he would not account for his absence by summoning me as a witness, or, indeed, by mentioning me at all."

"Aunt Mildred told me that," said Leslie, simply. "It was not more than I should have expected of him."

"It was more than I should have expected," said Norah. "But that does not matter. Of course it was not likely that I should expect any thing more than common courtesy and respect. My testimony went very far toward clearing him," she added. "Indeed, I suppose it would have cleared him entirely, but—"

"But what?" asked Leslie, anxiously, as she paused. "Is he not cleared?"

"Yes—for the real circumstances of Mr. Tyndale's death are now known."

"Known? Are they known?" said Leslie. She started violently, her eyes expanded, her face blanched even whiter than it had been before, her lips unclosed. "Norah!" she gasped. "How was it? Tell me! I can bear any thing!"

"There is nothing worse than you know already to bear," said Norah; but as she spoke her heart was beating at a suffocating rate. "Indeed, there may be something better. It will be better to think that he died by accident, than that he was murdered, will it not? That is what is now known."

"But, how is it known?" demanded Leslie, feverishly. "Norah, you are keeping something from me. I see it—I know it! But you need not be afraid—I can endure any thing! Have you not learned yet how strong I am?"

"There is nothing to test your strength in this," said Norah, gently. "Mr. Tyndale's death was purely accidental. You must appreciate that, Leslie—you must put all thought of violence away from you—for it was—it was some one whom you know very well who was the unfortunate cause of his death."

"Some one whom I know very well!" repeated Leslie. As she spoke, a whirl of conjectures passed through her mind. Then a ray of intuition came to her, and just as Norah, who did not mean to keep her in suspense, was on the point of speaking, she uttered a cry. "Carl!" she said, catching her sister's hands, in a quick, nervous grasp. "Norah!" Was it was it Carl?"

Her eyes were bent on Norah's face to detect any thing like evasion or subterfuge ; but Norah had no intention of employing either. "Yes, it was Carl," she answered, quietly—so quietly that her words had more of a soothing than an exciting effect. "But, Leslie, you must listen to me, and you must believe me. He had no more intention of killing Arthur Tyndale than I had."

"How did he do it?" asked Leslie. Her lips seemed parched. A sudden shivering sense of horror came over her. Carl! It had been Carl! Out of her own household had come the slayer of the man she loved! Norah saw that she was thinking this, and her voice sounded almost peremptory. "You must listen to me!" she repeated. "It is only justice to do so."

And then she told Carl's story better than Carl had told it himself—that is, she brought it even more forcibly and clearly to the comprehension of her listener. She dwelt strongly, yet with infinite gentleness and consideration, upon the state in which Max had left his cousin, thus making it apparent that Carl must have spoken truth when he said that Tyndale had been the aggressor in the struggle which ended so fatally. Leslie heard her without word or sign. She sank back on the pillows, and covered her face as she listened. When Norah finished, a low, shuddering sigh was her only comment on all that she had heard. After waiting vainly for a minute or two, the former bent over her.

"Leslie," she said, "Do you not believe me?—do you not believe Carl? Do you not see that it was accident; and that he was not to blame, further than that he should not have interfered in what did not concern him?"

"I see it all!" said Leslie and the words were an absolute groan. "You were the beginning and end of the whole, Norah !"

The words sounded so much like a reproach, that Norah drew back. She had not meant to do ill, but just then her conscience stubbed her like a sword. It was true! She had been the beginning and the end of the whole! If she had not come to America, Leslie might have been happy still, no more deceived than many another woman has lived and died. But Leslie had not meant her words for a reproach, and, feeling that retreating motion, she looked up, holding out her hand.

"Don't misunderstand me," she said; "I did not mean to blame you for what was no fault of yours. It is well that I should realize it. I was nothing; you were every thing. And it all came from his deception. But Carl—what will be done to Carl?"

"Nothing—Captain Tyndale thinks. I have not spoken to your uncle about it. I can see that he feels very bitterly toward me."

"Why should he?"

"Because, as you say, it has been through me that it has all come to pass. O Leslie, Leslie, can you forgive me? I shall never forgive myself—never, never!"

Then all the over-wrought calm in which she had been holding herself for so long, gave way and a great passion of tears burst forth—a passion that fairly startled Leslie, and yet did her good, for it drew her away from herself. All the inherent gentleness and nobleness of her character came out then. She put her arms around Norah's shaking form and uttered words of kindness, which the other never forgot. In that hour they became sisters in heart as well as in fact. To the tie of blood which had hitherto united them, was added the deeper and rarer tie of sympathy and affection. The shock which would have divided forever two ordinary natures, bound these together, showed these one to the other more plainly and more clearly than years of surface intercourse could have done.

Yet, when Norah recovered her self-control, she announced a resolution which took Leslie by surprise—which amazed her, indeed. "I have come to tell you that I must leave you," she said. "Surely you are not surprised! Surely you know why I must go? It does not require either words or looks to tell me how unwelcome my presence is to your uncle and aunt."

"Why should you think such a thing?" said Leslie. "They are too just to visit on you all that has occurred! Norah, you must not think of such a thing! It would be doing yourself a grave injustice in the eyes of the world. People would say—what would they not say if you left us now?"

"What people say is a matter of very small importance to me," answered Norah. "I think very little—too little, perhaps—of that! Besides which, they are likely to say all that you fear, as it is. No, I cannot stay, Leslie—you must not press me to do so. I was wrong ever to come. This world is not my world. I must go back to Bohemia. You have been very good—very kind and very generous—to me, my dear. I shall never forget that. But still I must go."

"Norah, it is impossible! Not now—not at once!"

"At once!" said Norah, firmly. "I am told that a train for Alton leaves Wexford at four o'clock this afternoon. I must take that. Nay, Leslie, my dear Leslie, don't look at me so imploringly! You cannot tell how many reasons there are which force me to go. If it seem terrible to you that I should start on such a voyage alone, remember that I have had a different training from any you can ever imagine. Nobody has ever shielded me from the world. I have gone everywhere and done every thing. It would be rather late, therefore, to begin to hesitate about doing this. Even if it seemed as terrible to me as it does to you, I must still do it—I must go."

And this was the final end of all arguments, all pleadings. She must still do it—she must go! Leslie at last saw that it was hopeless to oppose or attempt to dissuade her. But, when Mrs. Middleton heard of the intended departure, she was outraged. This seemed the crowning stroke of all Norah's enormity. "What will people say?" was the thought. "For Leslie's sake, she must be stopped. I wish to Heaven she had never come, but since she has come, it would be the source of endless scandal for her to leave like this!" Yet even Mrs. Middleton remonstrated in vain. Norah was decided. She would go.

Mr. Middleton, meanwhile, having settled with the magistrates about Carl's bail, was anxious to take the latter back to Rosland with him. But Carl, naturally enough, shrank from that. "It is impossible, sir," he said. "I must go away. I feel like Cain. It is true I did not kill the poor fellow but I cannot forget that if I had not interfered in what was no affair of mine, if I had not lost my senses, he might be alive now! I cannot go back to Rosland. I cannot face Leslie and—and Miss Desmond, with that thought between us. It is impossible!"

"Very well," said Mr. Middleton, with a sigh of resignation. "Where are you going? Back to Alton?"

"Where everybody will be reading this in the morning papers and canvassing it tomorrow? No! I could stand Rosland better than that! I shall go in the other direction—where, I don't know. The farther away, the better."

"Go, if you wish to do so," said his uncle. "But don't carry any morbid ideas with you; to lead you into fresh trouble, perhaps. Remember that an accident is only an accident in the sight of man and God. After all," said he, shaking his head, "it may be as well for Leslie. I never had any liking for the match, though I did not suspect Tyndale of such dishonorable conduct as he was plainly guilty of."

So it happened that Mr. Middleton came back alone to Rosland—a fact which was a relief to every one concerned. "It is as well that Carl has gone," Mrs. Middleton said, "though it is hard that he should be forced to go." Then she added, bitterly: "Having given as much trouble as possible in every other way, Miss Desmond is determined to cause any amount of unpleasant talk by leaving us immediately after—after all that has taken place to-day."

"Is she going away?" said Mr. Middleton. Men usually think less of "unpleasant talk," than women do, and he was honestly relieved by this news. "She has brought trouble enough in her train," he said. "Perhaps she may leave us a little peace when she goes. I think it is a sensible resolution, Mildred."

"It is a resolution which shows that she holds her name very lightly—but then, her whole conduct has proved that," said Mrs. Middleton. "One could expect nothing else from her rearing, I suppose; but it is hard on Leslie very hard."

"My dear," said her husband, with unwonted gravity, "does it occur to you to remember that her coming, and every thing connected with it, has been Leslie's fault? Do you recollect that morning—last May, was it?—when we tried to dissuade her from such a step, and warned her of the ill consequences that might result? I cannot forget that, if she had listened to reason and advice, none of all this would have occurred."

"I am sure it was very natural and very generous of her to desire such a thing," said Mrs. Middleton, who was in arms for her darling instantly. "Though I tried to dissuade her, I knew that, and felt that it was natural, at the time. But there was no excuse for Arthur Tyndale—none! Not any more than for this Bohemian girl!"

"I am half afraid that this Bohemian girl, as you call her, may end by marrying Carl at last," said Mr. Middleton, uneasily. "It would be an awful blow if she did, and for that reason I am glad to hear of her intended departure. The sooner she goes the better, Mildred—you may be sure of that! What does a little gossip, more or less, matter in comparison with serious mischief; and I tell you that woman is made to work mischief wherever she goes!"

In view of this emphatic opinion, Mrs. Middleton made little further effort to detain Norah. Not that any effort would have mattered, or changed the girl's resolution. She felt too plainly the coldness and suspicion which surrounded her, to be able to endure such an atmosphere any longer. Besides which, there was a reason of her own—a private reason in the background—which impelled her to go. More than ever she congratulated herself upon having insisted upon being supplied with money enough for such an emergency. "I may not be able to endure these people for a day," she had said to her father. "I will not go unless you give me the means to return immediately, if I choose to do so." And he, after much demur, was obliged to comply with this demand, though he cherished a warm hope that, instead of coming back immediately, Norah might be going to make or win her fortune. Norah thought rather grimly of those hopes and anticipations, as she packed her trunk. They would have a downfall indeed, when she walked, penniless, in upon her father and Kate, in the shabby Dublin lodgings, which she knew so well.

She was nervously anxious to be off, however; and insisted upon leaving as soon as luncheon was over, though Mr. Middleton assured her that the train was not due in Wexford until four o'clock. "It is better to be too early than too late!" she said; and, when the carriage came to the door, she went at once to Leslie's room to say farewell. This had been something from which she shrank with reason. It was bitterly painful on both sides—so painful, that it was short and almost speechless. "This is not the end, Norah," Leslie whispered, with pale, quivering lips. "It cannot be the end of all I hoped—wished—planned. Some day we must meet again. Promise me that."

"I see no hope of it now," Norah answered. "But if ever there is hope, dear, I promise!"

And so they parted,

When Norah came down-stairs, she found Mrs. Sandford in the hall with Mrs. Middleton. The costume of the former was a work of art, expressing chastened regret in the most charming and becoming manner. She was not one of the class of people who wear black dresses to weddings, or gay ribbons at a funeral; it was a point of pride with her to be always dressed according to the occasion, and, since she was in a house of mourning, she dressed, if not exactly in mourning, at least in sympathy with mourning. It must have been a very dull person who would not have appreciated at a glance the exquisite sentiment displayed in her attire. Her dress of black grenadine was relieved by soft white frills of illusion, and, instead of a jeweled pendant with a chain like a cable, a plain gold cross on a band of black velvet showed to great advantage the white roundness of her throat. She came forward after Mrs. Middleton had taken leave of Norah—with an heroic effort to appear cordial—and held out her pretty, white hands, bound with jet bands (also for sympathy) at the wrists.

"I am so sorry that you are going, Miss Desmond," she said—her blue eyes wide open, her dark (penciled) eyebrows arched—"but we must part good friends—I insist upon that! You must forgive all the unlucky mistakes I have made, one way or another, and, if you ever come back to America, I shall be so glad to see you at my house in Alton."

"You are very good," said Norah, in a tone compounded equally of coldness and scorn, "but it is not at all likely that I shall ever come back to America" (this was what Mrs. Sandford had specially desired to learn), "I am willing to shake hands, however, and wish you much health and happiness, if that is what you mean by parting good friends."

"Oh, I mean more, much more than that," said Mrs. Sandford, with effusion; and before the girl could draw back, she had leaned forward and kissed her. "Have you no message for Captain Tyndale?" she asked then, with the pleasure which she felt springing, whether she would or no, into her eyes. "Surely you are not going away without leaving a word for him after your bravery in his behalf, too! I assure you that I shall be very glad to deliver any message."

"I have nothing with which to trouble you," said Norah, even more coldly than before. She drew down her veil abruptly, and turned to Mr. Middleton. "I am ready," she said.

He put her into the carriage, and followed himself. To do him justice, he would willingly have gone with her to Alton, or even to the seaboard, if Arthur Tyndale's funeral had not interfered. But his first duty, as he said to his wife, was there. He had told Miss Desmond that, if she would defer her departure for twenty-four hours, he would accompany her; but this offer Miss Desmond declined. There was nothing for him to do, therefore, but to take her to Wexford, see her safely on the train, and telegraph to a friend in Alton to meet her at that point and see that she was safely started with a through-ticket for New York.

Not more than half an hour after the carriage had rolled away, Mrs. Sandford was sitting on the veranda alone—feeling very much depressed, exceedingly bored, and a little inclined to regret that she had not borne Miss Desmond company as far as Alton. The only thing which kept her at Rosland now was the consideration of Max. She was not likely to forget that his cousin's death made him owner of Strafford, and much more besides—elevating him from a fair subject for flirtation to a very good *parti*. The fancy which she had entertained for him all the time, she now felt could very readily become more than a fancy, in the light of this great good fortune. He was one of the few men whom she had ever met who was thoroughly indifferent to her, and for that reason, more than any other, perhaps, she had bent, and was prepared yet to bend, all her energies to his subjugation. She was thinking of him as she sat under the green shade of the vines, in a low, luxurious chair—as bewitching a picture, taken all in all (stained eyebrows and powdered complexion thrown in!) as a man could ask to see even on that golden summer afternoon.

But Mas Tyndale was not thinking of bewitching pictures, or caring to see them, as he crossed the lawn where he had last been on the night of the dinner-party, and ascended the

veranda-steps on which he had parted with Leslie when he went in search of Arthur. These things haunted him, together with the dead face he had left behind at Strafford, and, though it was impossible for him not to desire to meet Norah, he was able to say honestly that he had not come to Rosland for that purpose. He wanted to see Mr. Middleton with regard to some of the final arrangements which had been left undecided, and he also wanted to escape from Strafford and the intolerable gossips who filled it. Nothing was further from his wishes, however, than to meet Mrs. Sandford, and so he started, and did not look particularly pleased, when that fair widow rose out of the green nook and waylaid him, with extended hands.

"Ah," she said, with a faltering voice, "how can I tell you how glad, how very glad I am to see you!"

"Thanks—you are very kind," said Max, taking one of the hands—he could not have conveniently taken the other also, unless he had dropped his hat on the floor—and giving it a nonchalant, indifferent shake which irritated its owner very much. Then it occurred to him that he ought to say that he was glad to see her, but, since this would have been stretching the truth to a really alarming extent, he asked, instead, how she was.

"Oh, thank you, quite well," she said—for she was very much piqued—"I have *not* been well," she added, on second thought, "but I am better to-day—at least this afternoon. Captain Tyndale!"—a delicately worked and scented handkerchief went to her eyes—"when I think of all that has occurred since I saw you last, I—oh, I wonder how we have all *lived* through it!"

"We can live through a great deal," said Max, knitting his straight, dark brows a little. It is hard to say how this woman's artificial words and tones jarred on him—how he shrank from hearing her touch with any shallow, ready-made platitudes the subject of that tragedy which had been so awfully real. "How is Miss Grahame?" he asked. "It must have been a terrible ordeal to her."

"Leslie bears it better than might have been expected," said Mrs. Sandford; "much better, I am sure, than *I* could have done. She seems almost like herself to-day—though her sister's departure was quite a shock to *her*."

"I suppose you mean her going to Wexford this morning," said he. "It was a shock to me—that is, I deeply regretted it—but it was so bravely and unconsciously done—"

"Excuse me," interrupted his listener, rather sharply, "I meant what I said—her *departure*! I see that you are not aware that she has left Rosland."

He started, and looked at her keenly. "Do you mean that Miss Desmond has left Rosland?" he said. "Where is she going?"

"She left half an hour ago. I think, as well as I understood, that she is going to Ireland. Of course it is very natural that she cannot stay here after the *exposé* which has—Good Gracious, Captain Tyndale! What is the matter? What are you going to do?"

"I am going to Wexford in order to see Miss Desmond before she leaves," he answered, turning quickly away. "It is"—glancing at his watch—"only half-past three. The Alton train is not due, I think I was told, until four. That gives me time enough to reach there."

"You are really very devoted," said Mrs. Sandford, sarcastically. "But you must pardon me if I say that I doubt whether Miss Desmond will be very glad to see you. At least, I asked her *expressly* if she would not leave a word or a message for you, and she answered as coldly and curtly as possible that she had nothing to say."

"I am unlike her, then," said he, quietly, "for I have a great deal to say, and I am sure you will excuse me if I go at once, in order to be able to say it."

He then made no further apology, but went with all haste to the stable where, much to the ostler's astonishment, he ordered out the best saddle-horse. Five minutes later, he was galloping out of the gates of Rosland.

Mrs. Sandford watched him, with bitter, angry eyes, from the veranda. She knew now that all was over, and the realization cost her a very sharp pang. It was a pang in which wounded vanity played a greater part than wounded feeling; but it was none the less hard to bear on that

account. A lacerated amour-propre is almost as painful as a lacerated heart, though it is a very strong point in its favor that it can be cured more readily. She went into the house after the rider disappeared from sight, and told her maid to pack her trunk. "This time to-morrow I shall go back to Alton," she said—which was her way of beginning a cure.

Max, the while, galloped, without drawing rein, into Wexford, and, disregarding the many curious glances cast on him, did not pause until he found himself before the railroad-station. The train was already there, had been there for some minutes, a lounging told him. It was evident that he would not have time for more than a word with Norah, but even a word was worth much, and his eagerness for it increased with the apparent hopelessness of gaining it. He sprang off his horse, and, throwing the rein with a quick, "Pray, oblige me!" to the man who had given the information, hurried along the platform to the cars. As he came in sight of them, the engine suddenly gave its warning shriek of departure—at the same moment he saw Mr. Middleton shake hands quickly with a veiled lady who sat by one of the open windows—the next instant, with a rumble and clang of machinery the long train started into motion and sped swiftly out of sight.

#### CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Fair, and kind, and gentle one!  
Do not morn and stars and flowers,  
Pay that homage to their sun,  
That we pay to ours?

"Sun of mine, that art so dear—  
Sun that art above all sorrow!  
Shine, I pray thee, on me here  
Till the eternal morrow!"

ON the deck of the Cunard steamer, outward bound from New York on the Saturday following Miss Desmond's departure from Rosland, there was all the hurry, bustle, and confusion, the shaking hands of friends, the kisses of relations, the tears and laughter, the good wishes, the waving handkerchiefs, the brass-bound trunks and general *boulevardement* common to such occasions. In the midst of it, a young lady who had come unattended on board, walked across the deck, and, taking her position on the side which overlooked the water, not the wharf, quietly turned her back upon all the commotion. There is nothing in the world, perhaps, more forlorn than to be alone in such a scene, to have no farewells to give or receive, no friends to hope that you may have a pleasant voyage, no hand to clasp, no good wishes to exchange. But to such a feeling of isolation, Norah Desmond had long since grown accustomed. If she felt it a little now—if she was drearily conscious of her loneliness amid all the eager, chattering crowd—no one would ever have thought so, as she stood by the taffrail in all the grace of her self-possessed bearing, with her beautiful, clear-cut face turned seaward, as if she drank in the salt breeze coming so freshly from the wide, liquid plain which lay far off. The attention of every one else being turned toward the city they were leaving, she was almost alone on this side of the deck; and, as she watched with wistful eyes the distant horizon line, her mind left her present surroundings to go back upon all that had occurred—the events which had followed each other so fast since she landed here so short a time before. How short a time it had been!—and yet how much had happened! Norah could scarcely realize how much. "Yet the end of it all is that I am going back to the old, weary life of *vagabondage*!" she thought, with something between a sigh and a sob. It was a quick, nervous sound in her throat, more significant of emotion than a hundred undisguised sobs could have been.

But Bohemia teaches her children a better philosophy than that of mourning over any milk, spilt or otherwise. The old defiant light came back to Norah's eyes in a minute, the old defiant compression to her lips. "It is the life to which I was born," she thought. "What right have I to expect any other? What is the sense of regretting that which is past?—what is the sense of repining about that which is to come? The day is bright, and the sea is smooth, and I—well, I am young. When one has youth, one has or ought to have hope. The great world of the Possible is all before me; and yet—and yet—"

Her head drooped a little. Was it a tear that dropped into the briny, discolored water below? Just then Bohemia might have hesitated to own her child; and just then a tall man, with long, dark mustaches and keen dark eyes, who had been making his way in a very inquisitive manner among the thronging crowd on the other side of the deck, hurried over to this side and looked around. He had been the last passenger to come up the ship's side, and as he stood there now, with a wrap hanging carelessly across his arm, there was a jaded look on his face, as if he had traveled long and far. It was only a second that he hesitated. The next instant he caught sight of the stately, graceful figure which he knew so well, and a few quick steps took him to Norah's side.

"How glad I am to find you!" he said, breathlessly. "I was almost afraid that there might be some mistake!—that you might not be on board!"

"Captain Tyndale!" exclaimed Norah. She turned upon him—pale, astonished, quivering from head to foot. "How is this? How did you come here?"

"By rail most of the way," he answered, smiling. It was such a pleasure to see her again—to meet her frank eyes, to hear her sweet voice that it is likely he would have smiled if he had been going to execution the next minute. "Did you not know that I was going to cross in this steamer?" he asked, with an admirable assumption of nonchalance. "If I had not been just one minute too late in reaching Wexford the day you left—thanks to Mrs. Sandford, who detained me to hear that you had refused to leave me even a message of common farewell—I should have told you so."

"You—is it possible you are going to cross?" said Norah, incredulously. "I did not think that you would go abroad again—that is, so soon."

"May I ask, why not?"

"Because"—she blushed and hesitated—"because you have inherited your cousin's fortune, have you not?"

"I believe people suppose that I have," he answered, carelessly, "but I have not taken time to ascertain whether they are right or wrong. There was something nearer my heart, and of much more importance to me than a hundred inheritances could be," he added, quickly. "Norah—can you not guess what that was?"

"You have become very familiar since we parted, Captain Tyndale," said Norah, who was herself again by this time. "No, I cannot guess in the least what it was, unless you mean to resign your commission in the French army. But, you should have taken a French steamer, should you not? This will land you at Liverpool, unless you land *en passant*, as I shall do, at Queenstown."

"I should have taken no other steamer than the one on which you sailed," he answered. "As for my commission, I have not thought of it any more than of my probable inheritance. You know as well as I do," he said, breaking off suddenly, in a quick, short, passionate voice, "that I have thought only of you!"

"Of me!" ejaculated Norah, scarcely knowing what she said. Her heart was beating and thrilling as it had not beat or thrilled on that summer evening at Baden, when Arthur Tyndale told his love, or on that autumn evening at Coblenz, when he said good-by. What she felt then had been flattered fancy, girlish romance, any thing but this strange feeling, which seemed to take away all her graceful readiness of speech, and leave her as silent and abashed as any convent-bred girl.

"Yes, of you," said Max, growing bolder, as he saw the white lids sink over her eyes, and the clear carmine come into her cheeks as he had fancied one day at Rosland that he should like to make it come. "Did I not tell you when we parted in Wexford, after you had borne so much for me, that I should see you very soon again and did you think that I would let such trifles as time and space stand between you and the expression of my gratitude?"

"Spare me the expression of your gratitude, Captain Tyndale," said she, almost impatiently. "I have no claim on it—no desire for it. I did a very plain and simple act of duty—nothing more! If there is any gratitude necessary in the matter, it is *I* who owe it to you. It was you who were willing to endure more than I like to remember for me!"

"And did you not think—did no instinct tell you—what a happiness it was to me to endure any thing for you?" said he. "Did you not guess *that* much at least of the truth?"

"No," said she and her voice trembled. "How could I guess it? How could I think that I was any thing to you but a girl whom your cousin had narrowly escaped making a fool of himself by marrying?"

"If you were even that to me," said he, "it was so long ago, that it seems swept into the dimness of memory. What you have been to me of late, I scarcely know how to tell you without making you think that I have gone wild with the extravagance of passion."

"I can scarcely fancy that," said she, turning her face seaward again. The steamer was out of the docks by this time, and a fresh breeze met them—a breeze to make the heart leap up with the spirit of its gladness. It deepened the flush on Norah's cheek, and waved back the short fringe of her chestnut hair, showing the fair, candid brow which it has been the policy of fashion to conceal as much as possible for some time past. She looked more like a beautiful princess than ever, Max thought, and the doubts and fears which had borne him company on all the long journey from Alton, came back upon him now with sudden force. After all, would his heart prove any thing more than a new plaything to this fair Bohemian, this woman who had jarred upon and disgusted him, and yet whom he could no more help loving than the earth could refuse to put forth bud and leaf and flower at the bidding of the sun? He could not tell—it was likely enough; and yet, for good or ill, his heart was hers. He knew that now. Standing beside her, trying vainly to read the riddle of her averted face, he felt that he would freely sign away every other good gift of life, if only he might claim and possess this one for his own. At last, out of very impatience, he broke the silence which had lasted between them for some time.

"We are off!" he said. "We are on the sea together, you and I! Norah, you have not told me yet are you glad or sorry that I came?"

"Is it necessary for me to be either?" asked she, with a slight cadence of laughter in her tone. After all, a man is deaf as well as blind when he is in love, or Max would have known every thing from that tone.

"You must be one or the other," said he. "I am your only acquaintance on board, am I not? In that case you will have to see so much of me that you must be either glad or sorry that I came."

"In that case, I suppose I am not sorry," said she, smiling. "It is rather dull being quite alone, though I ought to be used to it by this time, and then I always manage to make acquaintance, or, to put it more correctly, people manage to make my acquaintance."

"I hope you will not let any of these people make your acquaintance, for I am selfish enough to want your society all to myself until we reach Queenstown."

"But can you not imagine that *I* might like a little variety?" asked she, laughing again. "I might not want your society all the time until we reach Queenstown!"

"That is very true. I should have thought of that, perhaps. Will you promise, then, to take as much of me as you want, and to dismiss me without ceremony when you do not want me?"

"I am not sure that I should not dismiss you at once," said she, turning her bright, fearless eyes upon him. "I have had more than enough of 'blarney' in my life—you can imagine that, perhaps—and my head ought to be steady enough to stand any amount of it by this time; but I am

really afraid of the effect of your blarney for nine days at sea. Now, that is a compliment for you," she ended, with a smile that was rather forced.

"I shall go back with the pilot if you say so," he answered, quietly but his face grew paler as he spoke. "You know why I have come," he went on, after a short pause. "I only waited at Strafford, as I was in duty bound to do, until poor Arthur's funeral was over. Then I followed you, without pause or rest, as fast as steam could bring me, in order to say, face to face, that I love you: in order to ask you to be my wife. Norah"—with a passionate cadence in his voice—"you cannot imagine half how well I love you! Norah, will you not be my wife?"

Only the simple words as they rose out of his heart to his lips. No eloquence no attempt at eloquence. Indeed, men rarely use fine phrases when they are in such deep earnest as Max Tyndale was then; and he on his part felt the suspense too sharply not to desire to end it at once. But it was not ended as far as any word from Norah Desmond was concerned. She turned her face from him quickly almost abruptly and gazed seaward again. Yet, as she gazed, a mist came over her sight, obscuring all the green beauty of the waves, and her heart seemed beating in her throat. It was not altogether her fault that she was silent; she tried to speak, and failed to utter a word. So, after a minute, Max went on:

"Norah, is there no hope for me? I suppose I am mad to come to you like this—mad to think that you, who have known so many men, could learn to love me but I could not bear to leave any chance untried. I could not bear to burden my life with the haunting regret of thinking that I might, perhaps, have won you if I had only spoken in time. I thought it better to risk every thing on a single stake, and rise up winner or loser for life. Norah—which is it to be?"

"How can you speak to me like this?" said she, turning upon him passionately. "You know you do not love me or, if you do, it is merely after a fashion, for my pretty face! You do not care for me as—as you care for Leslie! You are enough of a gentleman to have showed me more respect than any one ever did before for which, to my dying day, I shall never, never forget you! But, in your heart you hold me in the colors Arthur Tyndale painted me. You think me fast—Bohemian, *bizarre*—"

She paused abruptly, or, to speak more correctly, he interrupted her by taking into his possession the hand lying on the taffrail.

"Do not wrong yourself and me by such words as these!" he said. "I think of you as I think of the sun which is giving life to the world. You are my sun—the only one thing which can give light and fragrance to my life. Not care for you as I care for Leslie Grahame! My darling, are you blind? Leslie Grahame is nothing to me, and you are every thing—every thing, Norah! What I may once have thought of you in what colors poor Arthur may once have painted you has passed from me as absolutely as if it had never been. I can neither ask nor desire any change in you as I know you and love you now!"

She looked up at him with tears, which she did not try to conceal, shining in her eyes. A new beauty—a beauty full of the most exquisite softness came over her face. It was the happy content of the child mingled with the tender joy of the woman.

"Are you in earnest?" she said. "Do you really think all this of me? It is very good of you, but you are wrong—quite wrong. I am full of faults which will shock you and jar upon you. Think what my life has been! You cannot tell—you cannot even guess—half that I have gone through!"

"You shall never go through any more—never so long as God gives me power to shield you!" he said. Then he covered her hand eagerly in both his own. "You have not told me yet whether I must go back with the pilot or not," he said. "Norah, my darling, must I go or stay?"

And Norah's eyes as well as Norah's lips answered

"Stay!"

THE END.

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