

Question of Honor.

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## A Question of Honor

BOOK I.

In Which the Threads Are Joined Together.

Chapter I.

A Fight with Fortune.

The elms look like burnished gold in the dreamy October sunlight, as their arching boughs meet over the quiet street in the town of Stansbury, on which stands the house that for several generations has been the home of the Severns. It is a solid, stately, old-fashioned house, set in the midst of a grove of oaks, the youngest of which cannot possibly "circle in the grain" less than seventy years. In the depths of these oaks a red glory seems to be kindled as the sinking sun sends his level rays among their boughs, giving an effect beyond description to the heavily-massed foliage. A feast of color meets the eye, turn where one will. Every tint of russet and bronze, of scarlet and gold and purple, is to be seen, mingled as only Nature, chiefest and most daring of artists, knows how to mingle her colors. In the morning the trees seem hung with jewels, the air sparkles, the sunshine streams like molten gold, the soft blue haze hangs over every thing like a glamour of enchantment. But the afternoon which is more mellow, is also less joyous. As the elms throw their long shadows across the street, as the great oaks begin to wear their crowns of fire, as the crimson evening light streams on the moss-grown palings and tall cedar-hedge of the Severn place — lighting up, as if with an illumination, the windows of the house — the subtle sadness which dwells in all autumnal beauty deepens almost to a sense of pain.

There is something in the place itself which is suggestive of melancholy, some people think; though there are others who like nothing better than these old houses which are full of the dignity of age. The Severn house is one of them. It is of brick, substantially built after the manner of a past generation, though there is nothing inconveniently ancient about it, owing to its having been remodeled once or twice according to modern ideas of comfort. Its dark tone gives it a somewhat sombre look, as it stands among the large brown trunks and green, overhanging boughs of its noble oaks, but this aspect pleases the eye which is able to appreciate the exquisite repose that dwells in subdued coloring. There is a stone-flagged portico in front, and many quaint, pleasant nooks both within and without, while a growth of English ivy spreads like a green wall over its western side, climbing to the very attic-window, and almost closing up one or two of the chamber-casements. The grounds surrounding the house are very spacious. On one side is a stretch of close-shorn turf, over which a few beautiful evergreens are set, while on the other a hedge divides the lawn from one of the most attractive of old-fashioned gardens, where cedar and box, roses and mignonette flourish, and there is always fragrance and repose. Strangers are invariably struck by the air of space and comfort which pervades every thing. "How much room you have!" they say. Of late years Basil Severn has begun to find that there is almost too much room for a poor man; the Severns, as a family, being among the number of those who, at the close of the war, found it necessary to take that downward step in the scale of fortune which is agreeable to none of us.

Root and branch they have always been "good people," these Severns — by which it is not meant to be implied that they have ever been particularly remarkable for piety, but that they have held an assured financial and social position in their native place, that they come of good blood, that they have possessed good-breeding, and that it has never been possible to question their integrity. With regard to the last point, in especial, they have always held their heads very high. No one could say that they had ever wronged others in little or great, no fraudulent transaction was ever laid to their charge, no creditor ever repented having trusted them, no security ever paid their debts. They were none of them — even in the palmy days of their prosperity — very rich men, but they were all of them, at all times and under all circumstances, unfailingly honest men.

Better than gold or silver is the inheritance of such a name; yet, goodly as the tree was, it did not bear an exceeding amount of fruit — and of that fruit not a little perished in the blossoming. This happened so often, that people in general spoke of the Severns as being "not a long-lived family;" and when Francis Severn girded on his sword and went to the war, taking his two young sons with him, the men who staid comfortably behind shook their heads in foreboding prophecy. "He will never come back," they said. "There seems a bad luck about these Severns.

None of them ever get beyond middle age; and they are the last people in the world to come safely out of the army, for they are all so remarkably hot-headed and rash." The value and accuracy of amateur prophecy may as a general rule be rated at a cipher, but this was an instance in which events verified all that was predicted. Too soon for the cause he loved, and for his own fame, came the bullet which ended Francis Severn's life; yet not too soon for it to be written of him that he had done good service to his country, and that when, at the close of a hard-fought day, he was found with a placid smile on his pale face, in the front ranks of the slain, dead on the field of honor, no man durst say that his death had been less stainless than his life, or that a braver soldier ever

"Surrendered his fair soul unto his captain — Christ."

A year later, his youngest son — a boy with the face of a girl, and the soft brown Severn eyes — fell in a cavalry-skirmish; and so, in the silence and sadness of that terrible spring of Sixty-five, it was Basil, the eldest son, who alone returned to the home from which the proud father and his gallant boys had passed with the May roses four long years before.

Sitting there in the shadow of grief — as women have no choice but to sit — he found his step-mother, his sister Madeleine, and his half-sister Rosalind. The two latter had been children when the whirlwind of war first broke over the land. They came to meet him now, tall women in their close mourning garb. His furloughs had been short and far between — for Basil was too good a soldier to ask for many — and so he felt bewildered as he looked around. "Was that pale woman, in her widow's cap, his father's beautiful second wife, whom the Stansbury people in a body had admired, envied, and copied five years before, who had led whatever fashion there was in Stansbury to lead, and had made the house so gay and attractive when the boys came home from college to flirt and dance? Was that stately young lady, with the sweet smile and the soft eyes — eyes like those of the young soldier who was dead — the Madeleine whom he had left an unformed school-girl? And — crowning miracle of transformations — was this Hebe, whose bloom startled him like a burst of sunshine when she entered the room, the little Rosalind who had been his plaything in the old time? It was with something of a pang that the realization of these changes came to the young man. They seemed to imply so much. They seemed to mark almost as clearly as the officer's sword hanging beneath his father's portrait, and crossed with poor Frank's cavalry-sabre, the great gulf which yawned between the life which had been and the life which was.

But he soon found that many other changes had been wrought, more vital than these. Times had changed, and men had changed with them. Political anarchy engendered social anarchy, and demoralization swept like an epidemic over the land. There came a renunciation of integrity and an absolute denial of honor which appalled all those who were strong enough to withstand the contagion. Men seemed to fling principles to the winds, and no obligation to the living or dead was strong enough to bind them. They were terrible and evil days — days such as always follow in the wake of a revolution — and among the fortunes which went down in the great wreck was that of the Severns.

With common honesty and fair dealing, there would have been no necessity for this, but many with whom Francis Severn had been intimately connected in business relations — men whom he had trusted and obliged, men for whom he had died while they sat in comfort and security at home — repaid the debt by defrauding his children. It was a mode of paying debts very common in those days. Basil, who had gone straight from the class-room to the field, naturally found himself at a loss when opposed to men who had grown old in the intricacies of business. His father's estate was large and very complicated. Of claims against it, he found an amount that astonished him — certain as he was that many of them were palpably unjust. Of its claims against others he found scarcely one which his friend and kinsman, Mr. Carlisle — the

only man in Stansbury on whom he could rely for a word of honest advice — told him was worth more than waste-paper.

"Not one man in a thousand stands by his obligations in these days," that gentleman said. "It is the carnival of rogues, and we are able to see how many there are who have hitherto worn the sheep's-clothing of honest men. It almost tempts me to turn cynic in my old age, and think that, after all, opportunity is alone necessary to make a thief, or a swindler."

"It shall not make either of me," said Basil. "I shall pay my father's debts to the last farthing, if it takes every acre of his land and every dollar of his property to do so."

"And while you are making a ruinous sacrifice of your father's property," said the old man, knitting his bushy white eyebrows above his small, piercing gray eyes, "what steps do you mean to take with regard to the men who owe *him* so heavily?"

"I shall institute legal proceedings against them," said Basil, in his simplicity.

The other raised his eyebrows and his shoulders together. "Legal proceedings — legal fiddlesticks!" he said. "Such swindlers laugh at the law. Their property is secured out of reach — you cannot touch it."

"Well," said the young man, with a brave smile on his lip, though his eyes were sad enough, "I can only say that it is better to be swindled than to swindle, better to be robbed than to rob. I envy none of these men their ill-gotten prosperity, and I am sure that, if my father could speak from his grave, he would bid me think first of his name and last of his property."

"But you must also think of your step-mother and sisters. What is to become of them?"

"It would not be possible for me to hesitate with regard to what is honest if the alternative was that of throwing them on the world homeless," said Basil. "But I trust it is not so bad as that. We may be able to save the house in town, and I can work for them. I have my right arm, you know. Many a poor fellow came out of the army without his."

"Your right arm!" growled Mr. Carlisle. "And what can your right arm do for you?"

He was pleased by the young man's resolute bravery, however, his straightforward honesty and determination to face the worst, and, though accounted by the world in general a very cold and selfish man, he went out of his way to assist him in the storm of financial trouble which came on his inexperienced shoulders. Out of the wreck of a large estate, Basil would not have succeeded in saving any thing but for Mr. Carlisle's advice and assistance.

"The plantations must go," the latter said; "there is no help for it. You know nothing of planting, and, face to face with the labor-question, which is making the most experienced planters tremble, you would find yourself involved in an endless amount of difficulty. The thing to do will be to buy the town-house. It will be a home for your mother and sisters, at least. Of course," he added, abruptly, "I mean that I will assist you to do so."

Severn was not expecting such an offer as this, and it surprised him; but he felt that, for the sake of those who were more helpless than himself, he could not refuse it — even if his pride had been averse to accepting the obligation. But in truth this was not so. His pride was of finer temper than that, and he accepted, as in other circumstances he would have given — frankly, gratefully, and without awkwardness or servility. Only he said something about disliking to begin his life with a weight of debt.

"How can you help it?" asked his practical friend. "I know it is bad; but show me a remedy? I would not propose such a plan if there was one. But I can easily spare the money; and if you should never repay me, I do not think poor Mary would miss it."

"If I live, I will certainly repay you," said Basil, wringing his hand. "But, all the same, God bless you, sir!"

People — to wit, some pious "church-members," who found no difficulty in combining a lively interest in things to come with a keen knowledge of how, when, and whom to cheat in things present — often said that Archibald Carlisle acted as if he did not believe in a God; but it is certain that the above simple benediction remained with the old man, who, if he had lived like a heathen all the days of his life, had at least the advantage over some of his professedly Christian

critics, that he had lived like an upright one. And when, not long afterward, Basil gave him a note for the amount he had advanced — he absolutely refused a mortgage on the purchased house — the first thing which he did after taking it home, was to burn it. Then he sat down and addressed a letter to the young man — to be delivered after his death:

"I have burned your note," he wrote, "because I do not wish any repayment of the money which I have advanced to you. It is a small sum taken from the fortune which I shall leave poor Mary, and she would be heartily glad if she knew the manner in which it has been bestowed. I beg you to accept it freely—taking it, if you prefer to do so, in the light of a legacy which I might have left you in my will if I had not desired to give you the benefit of it at an earlier date. People do not feel the weight of obligations to dead men — indeed, it is but a poor form of generosity to give what we can no longer use — neither do they refuse their bequests. I shall wait, therefore, until you cannot refuse this my bequest, and I should be truly sorry if you felt any sense of obligation to me, for I liked your father sincerely, and I like yourself. I have been glad, therefore, to serve you."

The hand which wrote these kind words was lying in the stiff coldness of death — its life-work over and done — when Basil read them; and it was not strange that they should have brought a choking into his throat and a mist before his eyes. Those who have known only prosperity — and who, therefore, have had the gratification of meeting generous and obliging friends at every step in life — can form little idea of the mighty throb of grateful affection which the young man paid to the memory of the single friend who had stretched out a hand to him in the hour of his extremity.

But this came afterward. At the time of that extremity, affairs, even despite Mr. Carlisle's generous assistance, looked very dark for the Severns. Two large plantations were sold for a quarter of their real value; so, also, a great deal of property in Stansbury — Basil contenting himself with buying the house in which they lived. Every thing realized from these sales was swallowed up by the claims of the creditors. Nothing whatever was left from which the family of the dead soldier could derive an income; and when every thing was at last clear, Basil was confronted by the absolute necessity of finding some means of making bread for himself, and the delicately-nurtured women who were dependent on him.

Again he went to Mr. Carlisle. "What can I do?" he said. "A house and garden will not support us, nor even pay their own taxes. I must do something. The question is — what? I have no profession, as you are aware, neither have I the time and means to acquire one. The idea of trade is intensely distasteful to me, but I could very easily conquer my distaste if I did not feel sure that I should make an utter failure if I attempted any thing of the kind. Besides, I have no capital. Now, do you know any thing short of ditch-digging which a man without money and without talents can do?"

"A man does not always know where his talents lie," said Mr. Carlisle. "You have a very good head," he went on, glancing with his quick eyes at the head in question. "There must be something in it. Don't you like any thing in particular? A sensible man can seldom do better than to follow his inclination with regard to his occupation."

The young man shook the head in which, his friend felt convinced, there was something. "I am not aware that I like any thing at all — that is, any thing in particular," he answered. "I have always been fond of study — especially of the higher branches of philosophy and mathematics — but I do not clearly see how it is possible to evolve bread-and-cheese out of metaphysics and calculus."

"It is not possible," said Mr. Carlisle, "unless you become —"

Basil took the words out of his mouth. "A teacher?" he said, "As a preference, I should take ditch-digging. Don't understand that I mean any reflection on those who are teachers. I only mean that I could not willingly endure such a life for an hour."

"Then the best thing you can do is to turn your attention to business," said the other: and it may be worth while to explain that this word in the South is rarely, if ever, in its broad

application, taken to signify trade, but is used almost exclusively with regard to the management of land and money. "The largest fortunes that I have known made in this part of the country," Mr. Carlisle went on, "were made by men without either profession or trade — men who simply knew how to handle capital and make its investments pay. I am one of those men. If you think my example worth any thing, I advise you to accept a position which I thought yesterday of offering you, in connection with my mills. I need some one to overlook the whole business. If you don't like the offer, say so frankly. It is not what you were reared to expect, certainly; but if you mean to take the world as it comes —"

"I mean to take it in just that manner," said Severn, "and I accept the offer — gratefully. At present, I am aware, I can be of very little service to you, but I have lived long enough to know that an intelligent man who is willing to learn and anxious to do his duty, is not long useless."

"He is never useless," said the other, emphatically.

And truly Basil was not long, if ever, useless to his old friend. The chief income of the latter was derived from several valuable mills and factories which had been a source of immense wealth to him during the war, though he had scrupulously held aloof from the reproach of having waxed fat on his country's necessities. He had been wise enough to invest the larger part of the wealth so realized in broad and solid lands which could not fly away when the final collapse of funded property occurred. So it happened that he had been able to unite the ability with the desire to help his kinsman — for in those days there were some who had the desire to help others, without the ability.

He planted his good seed in fruitful ground. He understood that when he found what a capable right hand the young man made in the management of his large business, what quick perceptive faculties, what good judgment, and what thorough integrity, he displayed. For two years they worked harmoniously together; the people of Stansbury looking on suspiciously the while, and waiting for the hour when "the break" which they prophesied would occur. But they waited vainly. The only break which occurred was the one which must come sooner or later to all human friendships — that of death. Very unexpectedly Archibald Carlisle died, leaving Basil Severn sole executor of the large estate to which his only surviving child — a daughter — was heir.

This daughter, of whom Stansbury knew very little, had been blind from her birth. Her health was frail besides, and she rarely left the country-house which her father had built within a short distance of the town, and a still shorter one of his factories. Her mother had been a cousin of the Severns; therefore she was related to Basil, and her trust in him seemed as great as that of her father had been. The entire business rested absolutely in his hands, and for another two years he administered it as if it had been his own, without incurring a suspicion or a complaint from any one concerned.

Five years had passed since the young soldier came home to face his ruined fortunes, when the mellow October sunshine already mentioned was pouring its hazy glory on the golden elms and russet oaks of Stansbury. Basil was now approaching thirty; Madeleine and Rosalind were women in more than garb and stature. Both had the reputation of more than ordinary beauty; but reputation is an uncertain thing at best, and any one passing the old house that afternoon might have seen both faces, and so formed his own opinion with regard to them.

## Chapter II.

### Two Faces.

It chanced that some one did see them. A tall, fair man, with that look of cities which makes a man so marked in a country place, was strolling aimlessly along the side-street next the

dwelling — thinking, as he strolled, how well the gables of the house showed among the wide-spreading oaks which surrounded it — when the sound of an opening casement on the second story attracted his attention, and made him glance carelessly in the direction of the noise. The action was purely involuntary, but so charming a picture met his gaze that he could scarcely restrain the exclamation of admiration which rose to his lips, and he certainly did not remove the eyes which expressed that admiration almost as plainly as the lips could have done.

If he had been an artist, Arnold Devereux would have liked to paint that picture. As it was, he never forgot it. The sun was shining low and red, the ivy-leaves were twinkling in the wonderful glow, and in the midst of these leaves, framed by their beautiful shapes and tendrils, a girl's blooming face looked out toward the sunset glory. She was in the midst of color, for the great oaks arched their depths of foliage over her head. On one side of the casement a golden maple stood; on the other, a tall crape-myrtle reared its crest like a scarlet flame; all around the deep-green ivy seemed rustling in the light. A more perfect or more glowing autumn scene could scarcely have been conceived; and the brilliancy of all these tints, with the sun streaming full upon them, might have dazzled the man who was looking, if he had not already been dazzled by that fair, unconscious face. A fairer he thought that he had never seen. He absolutely paused — forgetful of his rudeness — amazed, incredulous. It could not be that the girl was really so lovely as she appeared. The delicate features, the complexion of indescribable fairness and bloom, the unbound, curling hair of warmest brown, which the sun was kindling into gold, the beautiful mystical eyes, made up a face so remarkable that its presence in this quiet country town astonished him. Men of the world are inclined to think that every thing, beauty included, is only to be found in the world; and that places like Stansbury form no part of the world we are well aware.

After a moment, Mr. Devereux remembered himself sufficiently to move on, and as he did so his step on the pavement attracted the girl's attention. She looked down, and their eyes met. For a second there was only surprise and frank observation in her glance; then she remembered suddenly what he had not observed — that she wore only a dressing-sacque over her arms and shoulders. It was of soft, blue cashmere, and very becoming; but she drew back, blushing deeply. As she did so the thought presented itself to her admirer that it is not in any part of the world esteemed a proof of good-breeding to stare a woman out of countenance. He turned his eyes back to the earth, therefore — in time to avoid a collision with an absent-minded cow — and walked on, wondering if his sight had been bewitched, or if such a lovely creature really existed under the mossy old roof, at which he now looked with more active interest.

Desiring to know something more of the house and its inhabitants, he turned when he reached the end of the square and followed the street which passed in front of it. He saw very clearly now the air of well-preserved antiquity which distinguished the place, and he was conscious of an increased sentiment of respect for its possessors. He began to feel sure that they were people whom it would be well to know. Now and then a crimson or yellow leaf floated down lazily on the white walk which led up to the house; the air seemed dissolved into gold, the cedar-hedge was tipped with fire. Devereux took in the whole picture. It was at once full of sweetness and sadness. A large dog of the St.-Bernard species walked down to the gate and sniffed at him. Under pretense of admiring the animal's noble, sagacious head, he paused a minute. In fact, he saw a lady on the portico, and he wanted an excuse to look at her.

It was not his peri of the window. He recognized that at a glance — even if common-sense had not told him that a half-dressed woman, with her hair about her shoulders, was not likely to become a wholly-dressed woman, with her hair properly coifed, within ten minutes. Besides which, even at the distance of fifty yards, he could see that this was an entirely different-looking person — an attractive-looking person, however, and one at whom he might have glanced twice, independent of her association with the beauty who had fascinated him. A graceful figure; a fair, harmonious face; eyes the softness of which he felt rather than saw; the delicate, arched brows to which Lavater gives such exquisite significance; and the gentle, sensitive lips, the

significance of which we need no Lavater to tell us — these things could never, under any circumstances, have failed to receive their due meed of appreciation from Arnold Devereux, worshiper of beauty in all its forms as he had been from his boyhood, and critical judge of beauty as he esteemed himself. He saw and marked them all. "Decidedly, these people are worth knowing!" he thought. Then, feeling that he had paused long enough, he walked slowly away.

The lady whom he had scrutinized so closely had, meanwhile, paid no attention to him. This was not remarkable, since nobody has two pairs of eyes, and hers were just then gazing anxiously at a man who stood before her, leaning his shoulder against one of the pillars of the portico. He was a young man with a slender figure, slightly undersized; a thoughtful face with a well-shaped forehead, round which the brown hair curled crisply; straight brows with a line or two between them, showing habitual contraction; eyes of a light hazel, rather small, but remarkably piercing; a delicate, irregular nose; and a mouth the expression of which could only be a matter of conjecture, since it was altogether covered by a heavy mustache.

This was Gordon Lacy, the declared lover and betrothed husband of Madeleine Severn. He had been in love with her for years, he had been engaged to her for six months, and they were, or at least they hoped, to be married before very long. Only one difficulty stood in the way, but that was the most insurmountable difficulty known to civilization — the want of any thing like an assured income on which two people could afford to begin the world. It will be seen that Miss Severn's choice was not as wise as that of a young lady in the nineteenth century should be; though it may be said, in her justification, that Lacy had been a very devoted lover, one of those who know with how much faithfulness, gallantry, and tenderness, a man should woo the woman whom he hopes to make his wife. Perhaps the inspiration of this "loyal gravity," as Mrs. Browning calls it, was in Madeleine herself, but, be that as it may, the fact remains, that she was won at last; and Lacy often told her, with a lover-like enthusiasm, yet with truth too, that she was the anchor which held his life — the one steady thing in a chaos of indeterminate hopes, fears, desires, intentions, fancies.

Yet, with all his errors, he was a very charming person — when he chose to be, as his friends always added. His manner was at times singularly winning, though again irritable, and often supercilious. For the irritability, perhaps he was not greatly to blame, since it arose from temperament; but, for the superciliousness, his historian is not inclined to make any excuse. People in general also said of him that he was conceited, and very likely the charge was in a measure just. It is at least certain that Nature had bestowed on him a more than ordinary share of intellectual cleverness, a refined taste, a poetic fancy, and a remarkable gift of facile expression. It may readily be imagined that, in a not very intellectual country town, these things made their possessor a man of note, and, if Lacy had been inclined, he might have been a provincial lion and oracle of great weight and celebrity. So far from feeling inclined, however, he marked his disdain of such reputation rather too plainly. The good people of Stansbury felt that he looked down upon them from the height of superior culture, and his unpopularity consequently waxed as great as his popularity in other circumstances might have done.

In family, he, like the Severns, belonged to the best of the old aristocracy of the South — the class which, as a class, have little left now save good blood and fine breeding. Assuredly, Lacy had little else. He was a lawyer, admitted to practise at the bar, but as yet his practice had amounted to very little, nor did it seem likely that it would ever amount to much. His very cleverness stood in the way of his professional advancement. It was known in Stansbury that he had a literary bias, and people were inclined to doubt the legal ability of a novel-and-poem-writing lawyer. Lacy, whose desire was all toward letters, paid scant regard to their opinion. His father admonished him, but the young man turned a deaf ear to these admonitions. He was making money by his pen; he had begun to taste the sweets of reputation, and no man could have persuaded him to draw back from a labor he loved, to encounter a drudgery which he detested. For a while he had been almost intoxicated with the sense of success; and it was at this time, with

a dazzling glamour of future wealth and fame before his eyes, that he asked Madeleine to marry him.

But, by the present October evening, he had discovered some of the thorns in his new career. He had learned that it takes time to realize the fairest prospects, and that wealth does not follow so immediately in the wake of reputation as the world in general is prone to imagine. Then a wave of terrible despondency swept over him. His was a temperament peculiarly subject to depression, to doubt, suspicion, distrust. These were his household fiends — his tormentors in the dark hours which come to all of us. They gathered like furies about him now, making his work seem unutterably paltry, and of little value; taunting him with having sacrificed his professional prospects to a phantasm which he would never realize. In this mood, with a curtain of gloom drawn over the whole world, he had come to Madeleine; and Madeleine, with all her heart in her tender eyes, was listening to him when Arnold Devereux paused at the gate. Seen thus, she was certainly very fair to look upon — a woman with a charm deeper and subtler than the graceful beauty of her face. A caressing smile, a voice of rare sweetness, and the gracious courtesy of a young princess — these things made her different from other women; but there was something even more than these in which the essence of what people called "Madeleine Severn's attraction" lay. This was her perfect unselfishness — at once the rarest and the noblest groundwork which character can possess — of which was born a charity, consideration, and sympathy, that made her the most invaluable of counselors, the most faithful of friends.

"I have been almost ready to blow out my brains," Lacy was saying. "You can't imagine how hopeless and miserable I have felt. Every thing has seemed ebbing away from me — life, hope, independence, *you!* I have seen myself in the mirror of my own mind as a presumptuous fool. A thousand wild plans and fancies have come to me."

"Sit down," said Madeleine, putting up a hand as tender as her eyes — a slender, delicate hand, with a magnetic thrill in its clasp. She drew him down to a chair by her side. "Your mind is overwrought," she said. "You see nothing in its true proportions. A little while ago you hoped too much, now you have gone to the other extreme of despondency."

"Why did you not tell me if you knew I hoped too much?" demanded Lacy, in an injured tone. "You encouraged me in my folly, my vanity, my —"

"I encouraged you in your work," she interposed. "In that I encourage you still; but I told you then — did I not? — that you expected your hopes to be realized too immediately. Nothing comes in a day — at least, nothing worth having. That is a truism, but sometimes truisms are the best things we can hear. You must have patience, Gordon — dear Gordon."

When Madeleine said "dear Gordon," the tone of her voice, the look in her eyes, was more than another woman's most passionate term of endearment. At least her lover thought so, as he raised the hand which still rested in his with a quick motion to his lips. There was no one to see. Devereux had walked away. Only Lance, the great dog, was in sight, and he looked on benignantly — slowly sauntering toward them with his plummy tail drooping.

"You are an angel, Madeleine," said Lacy; "but, when you tell me to have patience, you forget that all this is keeping us apart — that I am losing precious time — that we have already been engaged six months, and that I swore long ago never to ask any woman to waste the bloom of her youth in waiting for me."

"Foolish oaths are best forsworn," said Madeleine, with her sweet smile. "Suppose a woman whom you loved — you *do* love her, do you not? — had no other use for the bloom of her youth but to give it to you, would you refuse to take it?"

"Refuse! my darling, my own darling!"

"Well, that is settled, then. When I said, 'You must have patience,' I did not dissociate you from myself for a moment. I thought, 'We must have patience.' You will conquer fortune in the end; I am sure of that, and, meanwhile — O Gordon, is all lost while we love each other, trust each other, and see each other?"

"Nothing is lost!" said Gordon, "nothing! O Madeleine, what a comforter you are! You must think me an ungrateful coward, but if you could only know how wretched and despairing I have felt —"

"My poor boy!" said she, softly, "I fancy I know it all. When one loves very much, one feels a great many things through the sheer magnetism of love. I felt your trouble just that way. I know every pang you have suffered." She looked at him with her eyes shining through a mist of tears. "I, too, have suffered them," she said; "but I am resolved to be brave. I believe in you, Gordon; will you not believe in yourself?"

What could Gordon say? What could any man have said, adjured to faith in himself by such tones as those? It is not a hard lesson to learn — that of belief in one's self — and it was one which Lacy had never at any time needed to learn. His present self-distrust was only the reaction from the overweening self-confidence which had preceded it. He was a man who felt failure and rebuff acutely — felt them in every fibre of his mind and body, and he was writhing under them just now. But, when Madeleine spoke, his eyes lighted, the sun shone over the world again. This was the ideal comforter! This was one of the women formed by Heaven for the especial aid and encouragement of flagging genius! Believe in himself! For her sake he would not have hesitated to believe himself an intellectual giant.

"And now, what is the matter?" asked Madeleine. "Has any thing occurred? — any thing new — to dishearten you so much?"

"Nothing but the old doubts," he answered; "doubts whether I am acting wisely to neglect a profession in which I might attain a fair measure of success, for the hope of a career in literature. Sometimes I think my father is right and I am a fool; again I feel an assured conviction that I shall never do any thing except in the line in which my fancy — and such talent as I have — lies."

"And you are right when you yield to that conviction," said Madeleine. "Gordon, do you think my judgment is worth any thing?"

Gordon's answer was prompt. He had never known any one whose judgment could compare to hers.

"Then," she said, "you may trust me when I say that I am sure you are in the right path. I am sure you are a born writer. I do not think you are a great genius — I have never told you that, you know."

"No, certainly not," said Lacy, conscious, however, that there was a decided falling off from the ideal comforter in this.

"But you are very clever," said she, "and there is this difference between cleverness and genius: the former always succeeds, the latter often fails." Then, seeing that the lines between her companion's brows began to deepen a little, she went on, quickly: "You must not think that I undervalue your talents because I speak like this. I know that they are rare and great. You have an exquisite fancy, you have imagination and discernment, and I am sure that, as a writer of pure and delicate English, you will some day stand without a rival in our literature. Feeling this, I cannot bear for you to let your powers rust; I want you to use them so that all the world may know and admire you, as I do."

Madeleine was not usually enthusiastic, and this little burst amused, even while it touched Lacy.

"*Mignonne*," he said, tenderly, "you would spoil anybody! Soft little hands, sweet, sensitive lips — how true and strong you are! Ah, Madeleine, what should I do without you?"

"Honestly, I think you would do very badly," replied Madeleine, with the caressing smile which those who loved her saw often on her face.

"What is it that he would do very badly?" asked a voice behind them. — "Good-evening, Gordon. What a charming day it has been, has it not?"

"Good-evening, Rosalind," answered Gordon as he rose, and, turning, faced a girl who stood in the open hall-door. "Yes, it has been very charming — a day of which to dream, or in

which to dream, as you please. I confess I have done a great deal of the last. But, are you shod with magic, that you come upon one so noiselessly?"

"No, I am shod with silence," answered Rosalind, extending a foot clad in a velvet slipper. She lifted her long lashes and looked at him with her lovely blue-gray eyes as she did so. He was her future brother-in-law, but, all the same, she had no objection to his admiring the perfect lines of her instep and ankle. He, on his part, thought that she was, if possible, prettier than usual. There was the softest and clearest flush on her rounded cheeks, her eyes had a dazzled brightness, as if the sunset was lingering in them, her lips had that dewy freshness which we sometimes see on those of a little child when it has just wakened from sleep. A divine aroma of youth seemed breathed over her. Psyche herself could not have been fairer. "What is to become of the girl?" Lacy thought. "She grows lovelier every day."

"What have you been doing to yourself that you look so well this evening?" he asked, with the frankness of life-long intimacy. "If you keep on at this rate, I fear we shall have a Trojan War about you, sooner or later."

"Who would fight?" Rosalind asked, with a soft laugh. She had no diseased appetite for compliments, but when she knew that she was looking particularly pretty, she liked well enough to receive that assurance from others. "James Champion and — and — who else? I am deplorably short of admirers just now."

"Short of admirers?" repeated Lacy, arching his brows. "That is the last complaint I should have expected to hear. Are women never satisfied, I wonder? How many Orlandos would you like, to carve your name on trees and hang their boughs with verses in your honor? Is not every man in Stansbury — with a few trifling exceptions — your admirer, more or less?"

"That last clause is equivocal," said she. "How do you define 'more or less'? Not that it matters, for I am tired of Stansbury admirers, and, like Alexander, I sigh for new worlds to conquer. Unlike Alexander, I know that there are new worlds, which makes my inability to conquer them very — well, very hard to bear."

"It must be hard," said Lacy, looking with a smile at the winsome fairness of her blooming face.

"I should like to be an heiress," pursued Rosalind, with an air of mature deliberation. "I should like to be as rich as Mary Carlisle. There would be no trouble then about finding the new worlds — or conquering them either."

"I imagine there are few of us who would object to the gift of fortune," said Lacy, a little gloomily.

"I should be very happy myself," said Rosalind, decidedly, "and I would make everybody else happy. Here is Madeleine — I would settle a fortune on her at once. But if you did not marry her off-hand and take care of it, Gordon, she would give it all away within three weeks."

"Thanks for your kind intention," said Madeleine. "But when you are wishing for Mary Carlisle's fortune, does it never occur to you to consider" — here she stepped behind the other and laid her hand over the beautiful eyes — "whether you would take it at that price?"

"No!" answered Rosalind, sharply, as she drew down the hand. "Why should it? Are rich people always blind? That is absurd, Madeleine!"

"I did not mean to be absurd," said Madeleine. "Certainly rich people are not always blind; but when I hear you envying poor Mary, how can I help thinking with what gladness she would give all her wealth for health and sight."

"Do you think so?" asked Rosalind, in a tone of strong skepticism. "It always strikes me that Mary is very well satisfied as she is."

Madeleine's lips unclosed for a reply, but closed again without uttering it. Plainly Miss Severn had learned the uselessness of combating some opinions. So, for a minute there was silence. The sun sank behind the red and yellow foliage into a sea of translucent gold, the glowing colors seemed to die out, the oaks looked dark, the elms melancholy, the blue haze deepened into mist; all in a minute the scene, lately so brilliant, was sad and autumn-like. Yet it had still its own

tender beauty, for the air was soft, and the draping mist and russet tints were lovely even in their sadness. A spell seemed to hold the little group in stillness. But it was only for a minute. A horseman came at a quick canter down the quiet street. Lance dashed eagerly toward the gate. Rosalind moved forward across a flood of golden sunset light. "Basil is coming," she said.

### Chapter III.

#### Basil's Vexation

The gate swung open and shut, and Basil's lithe figure with its square shoulders and the military step he had never lost, was seen advancing up the walk, with Lance curveting round him.

"Something is the matter," said Rosalind, glancing back at the others. "I know exactly how Basil walks when he is vexed."

And, indeed, when Basil drew nearer and lifted his hat from his brow, it was evident that something was the matter. Whether he was vexed, as Rosalind said, or whether he was worried, as Madeleine thought, it was at least certain that he did not look at all like his usual self, for it was not his usual custom to bring an overcast brow home with him. It was not according to his nature to brood over trouble, and business vexations rarely ruffled his manner even in business-hours. Out of business-hours, he left them absolutely behind him. Those whom he was advancing to meet knew this so well, that their surprise was great and their inquiries immediate. What was the matter? they asked. Why should they imagine that any thing was the matter? he answered, sitting down on the steps as he spoke, and pulling Lance's silken ears.

"If I had a mirror, I would show you why we think so," Madeleine replied. "There is no good in attempting to deceive one, Basil; your face is too transparent."

"Is it?" said Basil, passing his hand over the face in question. "I flattered myself that it was rather impassive than otherwise."

"What accurate opinions we have of ourselves!" said Rosalind. "But tell us what is the matter? Has any thing unpleasant happened? Don't you know there is nothing more trying than suspense?"

Lacy alone asked no questions, and at him Basil glanced. "Gordon knows what has occurred," he said. Then he frowned slightly. — "You have heard that Devereux is in town, have you not?" he asked.

The other nodded. "His appearance has created quite a stir," he said. "People are wondering why he has come. Have you seen him?"

"Not I," answered Basil, shortly.

"Devereux!" repeated Rosalind, in a tone of great interest. "Do you mean the man of the lawsuit — the man who claims so much of the Carlisle property?"

"The same," replied Lacy. "If I had known that you were in ignorance of his arrival, I should have mentioned the interesting fact earlier."

"I suppose you mean that for sarcasm," said she; "but it *is* an interesting fact — any thing is interesting that stirs the stagnant quiet of Stansbury life. And, pray, when did Mr. Devereux arrive, and how long does he mean to stay, and what has he come for? Basil, you must know something about him, so tell us at once!"

"I know very little," said Basil. "The first I heard of the matter was from Mary Carlisle. She sent a message to the mills this afternoon, asking me to come over to the Lodge. Of course I went at once, and I found her quite nervous and excited. She had received a note from Mr. Devereux announcing his arrival in Stansbury, and begging to see her. She was surprised, and so was I. 'Why should he wish to see me?' she asked. That I was unable to tell, but I strongly advised her to refer him to her lawyer. But women" — with a shrug — "are so impracticable! It is a great

misfortune that they should ever be connected with business. Some fine phrases in Devereux's note had pleased her. I could see that she wanted to grant the interview for which he asked."

"But why did he ask it?" inquired Madeleine. "Surely he gave some reason for making such a request."

Basil frowned again. "He gave no reason that amounted to any thing. He talked of their conflicting interests, and of desiring, if possible, to find some way of reconciling them — all of which is nonsense, as I told Mary. If it is a compromise at which he is hinting, Champion is the proper person to see him, and tell him that we will not surrender an inch."

"But it may not be a compromise that he means," said Rosalind. "It may be quite a different mode of reconciling their opposing interests. Basil, I am confident that he wants to marry her!"

"Good Heavens, Rosalind!" said her brother, starting. "What do you mean by such a suggestion?"

"Is it not reasonable?" asked the girl. "It seems so to me. — Madeleine, what do you think?"

"I think Mary's great affliction ought to shield her from such remarks," answered Madeleine, reproachfully.

"Really, I cannot see why Mary's affliction should put her out of the pale of women who can marry," said Rosalind, coolly.

"The Stansbury people decided long ago that Basil will end by marrying her," said Lacy.

The blood mounted to Basil's brow in a tide. Few women are as sensitive as he was about reports of this kind — especially with regard to Mary Carlisle. He held, like Madeleine, that her great affliction should have exempted her from such shafts of gossip.

"The Stansbury people are a set of insufferable meddlers!" said he, curtly. "It is strange that they cannot let Mary Carlisle and myself alone. Neither of us takes the least interest in their marryings or givings in marriage."

"You cannot offend people more than by taking no interest in their affairs," said Lacy. "They would forgive you sooner if you accused them of every crime in the Decalogue."

"Yes," said Madeleine, "a gossip is a sociable being at least; while those who don't gossip are held to be supercilious, and to consider themselves better than their neighbors."

"Perhaps I have a depraved taste," said Rosalind; "but it seems to me that a little gossip now and then is relished by the best of us. For example, this Mr. Devereux — don't you feel an interest in knowing something about him? Hasn't he quite a society reputation? I think I have heard so."

"You have heard correctly," said Lacy. "He has quite a society reputation. By all accounts, he is one of the men who are preeminently fitted for society — and for nothing else."

"I fancy I must have seen him this afternoon," pursued the young lady. "As I opened my window a little before sunset, I noticed a man on the street who was — well, who was staring at me in the most undisguised manner. Is Mr. Devereux tall and blond, does he wear an English hat, and his beard in the fashion of the Emperor Maximilian?"

"I am sorry that I cannot satisfy you with regard to any of those important particulars," said Basil, dryly; "but I think you must have been guilty of some undisguised staring to discover so much."

"I can satisfy you," said Lacy. "That is the man. I saw him this morning. His appearance is calculated to make a sensation in a quiet place like Stansbury."

"He looked interesting," said Rosalind, meditatively. "I was wishing a little while ago that I was in Mary Carlisle's place — as rich as she is, I mean. If I were, I should certainly see Mr. Devereux, and judge of him myself."

"I suppose you think that you would be quite capable of judging of him," said Basil, with the nearest approach to a brotherly sneer which he ever permitted himself.

The girl laughed — an indolent, musical sound, which rang out sweetly on the soft air. "Why not?" she asked. "Women are born readers of character. At all events, I would see him and — hear him! I am sure he talks well."

"Because he is tall and blond, and wears his beard according to the fashion of the Emperor Maximilian, I presume!" said Basil, who was very much chafed.

Before Rosalind could reply, a bell suddenly rang in the hall.

"Tea is ready," said Madeleine, with an air of relief. "Now, suppose we defer any further discussion of Mr. Devereux until it is over?"

Five minutes later, they were all gathered round one of the pretty, old-fashioned tea-tables — a table polished until it shone like a mirror, with crotched mats, delicate egg-shell china, rich silver, and sparkling glass. At the head of it was a lady in a widow's cap. The resemblance between herself and Rosalind was apparent at a glance, though the daughter's face was probably more beautiful than the mother's had ever been. The room in which they were sitting was furnished in the fashion of twenty years back, for the whole house had been refitted when Francis Severn brought his second bride home. The sideboard and curtains had been new and fresh when that face, now worn with suffering and faded with tears, had been almost as young and fair as Rosalind's. The sideboard and curtains, as Mrs. Severn often remarked with pardonable pride in her good house-keeping, looked as well as ever; but the face — alas! for this poor humanity of which we are so proud, for these brief roses of youth and beauty which perish so utterly!

Despite Madeleine's recommendation, it was not long before the Devereux subject came on the *tapis* again. Both Basil and Rosalind were too much interested to let it rest. Scarcely were they all served with their respective cups of tea and coffee, when the latter began:

"Mamma, we have some news for you. Do you not see that Basil is dreadfully vexed? Why, it is the most evident thing in the world! Look at him, and you will see it. Now, what do you suppose has happened?"

"How can I tell?" said Mrs. Severn, glancing at her stepson with an air of anxiety. "There is no bad news, I hope. Basil, what is it?"

"Nothing of importance to any one present except myself, mother," answered Basil. "And nothing to me, personally. It is only that I am afraid Mary Carlisle intends to act in a very foolish manner."

"Is she going to be married?" asked Mrs. Severn, quickly, and somewhat dismayed — for she had her own secret hopes with regard to Mary Carlisle.

"Heaven and earth — no!" said Basil. "How women's minds do seem to run on marriage!"

"You see that somebody besides myself thinks that Mary Carlisle might marry, if she chose," said Rosalind.

"What is she going to do, then?" asked Mrs. Severn. "I thought Mary never was foolish."

At this, the gentleman in an English hat, who wore his beard according to the fashion of the Emperor Maximilian, came forth again, and walked up and down the supper-table for the next ten minutes, at the end of which time a peal of the door-bell arrested the discussion.

"That is James Champion," said Rosalind, whose quick ear caught the cadence of the voice asking for Basil. "He wants to see you," she went on, turning to her brother, "so I suppose he has come on business; but there is no objection to asking him in, and giving him some tea."

Nobody offering any objection, Mr. Champion was accordingly asked in, and, although he had probably risen from his own tea-table not long before, he made no demur about accepting the invitation. A minute later Rosalind had the satisfaction of seeing his strong, dark face opposite her own. A very strong and very dark face it was, a face looking older than its years on account of the mental and moral force which characterized it, and which impressed every one so deeply with its intelligence and resolution, that few people thought whether or not it was handsome.

If Rosalind had found any enduring attraction in this face, nobody knew — herself, perhaps, as little as any. People said that James Champion had been in love with her ever since he came back from the army, and found a blooming maiden in the first flush of her girlhood. If this were so, it is certain that he had never followed the example of her other admirers and "made a fool of himself" about her. He left that amusement to men with less serious business in life, and less steady self-control than he possessed. When Rosalind tried him too far, he quietly absented himself from her society — if necessary, for months. But he had never been known to pay more than the merest attention of civility to any other woman, even at these times. "Women in the abstract seemed to possess no attraction for him — indeed, he freely confessed that, as a general rule, their society wearied him — and those who knew him best said that, if he failed to win the bright prize which he had coveted so long, it was not likely that he would ever marry at all, or at least not for love.

It had been several weeks since Rosalind had seen him last, and they had parted then in any thing but an amicable manner. Hence, perhaps, her anxiety that he might be invited in to tea; hence, certainly, her silence after he came.

Mr. Champion made no secret of his business with Basil. He had come to know what the arrival of "that Devereux" meant. Having fought the Devereux claim for two years with every weapon which the legal armory could furnish, and with the most unflinching spirit and determination, he was naturally dismayed at the idea of a single advantage being yielded to the adversary whom he felt so confident of overthrowing in the end.

"Why does not Miss Carlisle refer him at once to you or to me?" he asked, when Basil had explained all he knew of the matter. "Does she not know that it is the right thing for her — a woman, and an inexperienced one — to do?"

"I advised her to do so," Basil answered; "but she is inclined to see him herself — his note has excited her interest and her curiosity."

Champion's dark brows knitted. "In that case there is no telling what may be the result," he said. "When a woman's interest and curiosity are excited, any degree of folly may be looked for. But I expected better things of Miss Carlisle."

Here Rosalind glanced up and joined in the conversation for the first time since his entrance. Her eyes were dazzling under their long lashes, her cheeks aglow like the heart of a pomegranate. Not having had the advantage of seeing her before he came in, Champion, of course, could not know that this access of brightness was in honor of his appearance.

"You talk as if Mary had not a right to do as she pleases," she said. "Is not her property her own if she has a mind to sacrifice it — by a compromise, or in any other way?"

"Her property is undoubtedly her own," Champion answered, with the sternness on his face and in his tone deepening. "But Basil and myself — who have both of us worked hard in her interest — are certainly entitled to more consideration than this Devereux."

"If I was in her place, I should insist upon seeing 'this Devereux,' as you call him," said the young lady, decidedly.

"Nobody doubts it," said Lacy, laughing. "What woman can resist a blond beard and a *je ne sais quoi* air of fashion?"

Hearing this, Champion's face grew, if possible, darker, and certainly sterner, than before. He turned to Basil and began talking business. Not once again, while they remained at table, did his eyes glance toward Rosalind's lovely face.

Out of that face the brilliant color began to ebb by slow degrees. Men often ask why women like so well to torment them — like to torment even those whom they love. It would be wiser to ask — if there were any voice able to answer — why they like so well to torment themselves. In nine cases out of ten, the pang which they inflict returns upon their own hearts with ten-fold bitterness and keenness; but this only makes the matter more absolutely incomprehensible.

"Basil is going after tea to see Mr. Devereux," said Madeleine presently to Champion. "Do you think of going with him?"

"That is as Basil says," the young lawyer answered. "I will go if he thinks it worth while."

"I don't think so," Basil said. "I am simply going, by Mary's request, to see Mr. Devereux and tell him that she will receive him to-morrow. The visit will have no business significance — unless he chooses to give it one."

"Do you think it likely he will choose to do so?" Lacy asked.

"I have not the least idea that he will," the other replied.

This ended the Devereux subject for the time, and soon after the party rose from table. When they reached the hall, there was a slight pause of irresolution. On one side was the drawing-room, from which a glow of shaded gas-light came. In front the hall-door stood open to the autumn night. A moon in her second quarter was shining through the trees, the air was still full of softness, and the blue haze had turned to silver mist. "It is too lovely to stay in the house," said Rosalind, as she walked out on the portico. Basil, on his part, turned to go up-stairs. "I will change my dress and be back in a minute," he said to Champion. "If you are going, wait for me."

Now, Champion had not said that he was going, as Madeleine reflected, with a comment on masculine stupidity. "Why should you think that Mr. Champion is going to leave us?" she asked. "He has come so seldom of late, that I hope he means to remain, now that he is here."

"Thanks, you are very kind," Champion answered for himself, "but I have business which calls me away. — I'll wait till you come back, however," he added, nodding to Basil.

At this, Madeleine, turning, passed into the drawing-room, whither Lacy immediately followed her. Champion hesitated for a moment. He did not usually hesitate even over so slight a thing as entering a room; his actions, like his tones, were generally decided and resolute to a fault. But just now he paused — inclination drawing him in one direction, pride in another. He glanced into the drawing-room. By a table covered with a litter of books, papers, and work, Madeleine and Lacy sat down, and the pretty, suggestive picture which they made, seemed to decide him. He drew his brows slightly together and his lips braced themselves as he walked out on the portico where Rosalind stood in the faint moonlight.

## Chapter IV.

### Unconditional Surrender.

A THRILL, half of pleasure, half of triumph, shot through her when she heard his step. As she stood, during that brief colloquy in the hall, looking at the dark, motionless trees, the tender, vaguely-defined shadows, she felt as if she could not bear it if Champion did not come. But when he came, he found the visor closed, the armor tightened, the combatant ready, lance in hand.

"Is it not a beautiful night?" she said, turning to him as he reached her side. "But I forget — I believe you do not admire Nature very much. Gordon should have come in your place."

"Shall I go and send him?" Champion asked in his cold voice — it was a voice which Rosalind knew well, and against which she had often rebelled, yet which possessed a singular fascination for her.

"He would thank neither of us for calling him just now," she answered, with her soft laugh. "I don't think the moonlight has any great attraction for him; at least no such attraction as Madeleine, who is afraid of the night air."

"Do you think that it is prudent for you to be here?" the gentleman asked, with a recollection of health which lovers do not always display. "Let me get you a wrap. Shall I find one in the hall?"

"My shawl is there, I think," answered Rosalind, with more docility than she usually showed. She had an object in view which this docility was intended to secure. That object was to keep Champion from going away with Basil, whom she expected to see every minute. When he brought the shawl — light, white, soft, and very effective as drapery — she made him wrap it round her, then she sat down in the chair which Madeleine had occupied in the afternoon, and made a gracious motion of invitation toward the other one standing near.

This, however, Champion declined. "It is not worth while," he said. "Basil will be down in a minute, and I must go. I only came out to ask how you have been since I saw you last?"

"That was so long ago that I have had time to enjoy a great many different states of health in the interval," she answered; "to be well, and ill, and well again, to be in good spirits, bad spirits, and indifferent spirits — all without any sign of interest in my condition from you.""

Thus abruptly arraigned — for a woman can generally be trusted to know when and how to carry the war into Africa with most advantage to herself and confusion to her adversary — Champion could not forbear a smile. As he looked at the winsome face upturned in the moonlight, he felt that all the fairness and sweetness of life lay for him in it; but he had no intention of saying so. On the contrary, he answered quite coolly:

"I thought you showed me very plainly, when I saw you last, that any interest which I might express was more likely to annoy than to please you."

"Did I?" said Rosalind, naively. "But that was so long ago — six weeks at least. You ought to know me better than to fancy that I would be of one mind for such a length of time. Then, you should not bear malice; and what is it but bearing malice to have staid away for six weeks?"

"Perhaps it was prudence," said her companion. "I never had any sympathy with moths — especially with one that, having been singed, deliberately went back to the flame."

"But you are not a moth, and I am not a flame," said Rosalind. "You are only a person who has behaved very badly, and borne malice in the most inexcusable manner."

"What an excellent character you give me!" said he, smiling again. But the smile left his face as he went on — surprising her by quoting two lines of verse, for poetry was not much in his way

" 'You throw off your friends like a huntsman his pack,  
For you know when you will you can whistle them back,' "

he said, gravely. "But you may throw one of them off once too often. I don't know that you would care if you did so — I don't know that you might not consider it a happy relief — but, all the same, the day may come before long when you will find that even your whistle can fall on deaf ears."

"I am stupid, I suppose," said Rosalind, "but I don't understand in the least what you mean, probably because your metaphors are rather mixed."

"I mean," he answered, "that if I have little of the moth, I have still less of the dog in my disposition. You have whistled me back into your service several times already, but I am fully resolved that, if I allow you to do so again, it shall be for the last time."

"The last time!" repeated she, and, although there was a tightening at her heart, she smiled with bright defiance. "One hears of so many 'last times,' that the words have come to possess very little significance. Indeed, I have grown to doubt whether there really is such a thing as an undoubted 'last time.' "

"Yes, there is such a thing," said Champion, the gravity of his voice making a great contrast to her light, flippant tones. "Have you never stood by the coffin of one who was dead, and, looking at the face before the lid was closed, thought to yourself, 'It is for the last time?' Yes" — his voice softening as he saw her lip suddenly quiver — "I know that you have done so. There may be doubt about other partings of earth, but we know that is the last. Well, if I saw you dead before me, I could not know more certainly than I do that we shall part forever if we need to part again. I have tested my resolution too often not to feel that I can rely upon it."

"Why do you talk to me like this?" said she. "What have I done?" Her voice was low, and trembled slightly; her weapons of coquetry seemed suddenly stricken from her command. She felt bewildered. Did he mean that this inexorable parting was to take place now? If so, she knew him too well to hope that he could be moved by any words of hers. An instinct came to her that she had gone too far. It was not a pleasant realization, for she liked this self-controlled lover of hers, she liked to see resolution deepening on his face, and to hear the thrill of repressed passion in his voice. But it was very much as a child likes to play with fire, or as almost any woman likes the sense of power, in the first instance; and of possible (not accomplished) subjection, in the second.

"What have you done?" repeated Champion. "Nothing for which I blame you; nothing that it was not the instinct of your nature to do. I am sure you do not blame Muff when she plays with a mouse in its death-agony. Neither do I blame you that you should have amused yourself by making a fool of me. The man who fills such a position," said he, with a chord of contempt in his voice, "deserves no sympathy from himself or others."

"You are very unjust, and — and unkind!" said Rosalind, divided between indignation and an inclination to cry. "I never knew you so unkind before. One would think that I had done you some great injury, and yet you control yourself so well" — a note of sarcasm came in here — "that it would have been difficult to compass if I had ever so much of a mind that way."

"Thank God that I can control myself," said he, almost passionately, "else what you would have made of me by this time I cannot tell."

"What should I have made of you?" asked she. "You seem in a mood for reproaches; but I think that, in common justice, you might tell me what they are about."

"I beg your pardon if I have seemed to reproach you," said he. "I have no right to do so. I did not intend to speak of the matter at all to-night, but since I have begun" — he paused for a moment, then went on abruptly: "I am resolved that my folly shall end, one way or another. This has gone on long enough. No woman shall make a wreck of my life; nor, if I can help it, of my happiness. You have whistled me back again, Rosalind, but, as I told you a minute ago, it is for the last time. You must decide now what you mean to do with me."

"I have no desire to do any thing at all with you," said Rosalind, thinking that perhaps the best thing would be to yield to her inclination to cry. "Upon my word, I think you are very unreasonable."

"I am sorry for it," said he, finding it impossible not to smile at the reproachful face uplifted to him. "But I fear that I must remain unreasonable, for on this point my decision is taken. I would not force you to marry me, if I could; but you must tell me, once for all, whether or not you intend to do so. You know how I love you. It would be late in the day to assure you of that. No man on God's earth ever loved a woman better. It seems to me that this love is the very essence of my life. But it is not my master," said he, with the resolute look deepening on his strong face; "and if you have no need for it, Rosalind — if you do not intend ever to accept it — I am determined that it shall trouble you no longer."

The clear, decided tones ceased, and silence followed them. Rosalind turned away from him and looked at the lawn dappled with faint shadows, and the trees darkly drooping over the street beyond. Yet it is safe to say that she saw not a feature of the scene. Her mind was distracted, her heart seemed beating in her throat. What was she to do? what should she say? If her life had depended on it, she could not have told whether or not she loved James Champion, and she was neither old enough nor experienced enough to argue to the contrary from her very doubt. She only felt that just then she did not want to give him up, and the danger was imminent that she might be obliged to do so whether she would or not. Nobody who knew Champion ever doubted that, as far as rested with himself, his resolutions were always inflexibly carried into execution; and the words still rang in her ears: "If I saw you dead before me, I could not know more certainly than I do that we shall part forever if we need to part again."

The pause lasted for some time. Neither seemed inclined to speak. Champion was too proud to do so, Rosalind's conflicting doubts made her more and more uncertain what to say.

With the odd sensation which comes at such times, both were distinctly conscious of all that was going on around, even while they were absorbed in the issue between them. A katydid — the last of the season — was chirping a melancholy farewell to summer sweetness and summer warmth in one of the tall oak-trees; Madeleine's laugh floated out from the drawing-room; Mrs. Severn spoke to a servant in the hall; Lance walked lazily across the portico, turned round half a dozen times, and finally lay down on his large mat; Basil's step suddenly sounded on the staircase.

This last sound effectually roused them. They started and looked at each other.

"Have you no word for me?" Champion asked, quickly. "Basil is coming, I must go."

"What can I say to you?" answered Rosalind, in a low voice. "How can you expect one to decide in a moment when it is for one's life?"

"Have you not had years in which to know me?" demanded Champion, who, being perfectly well acquainted with his own mind, was not able to conceive how Rosalind could fail to know hers. "If you need to hesitate now, it must be that there is no hope for me. It is fortunate for me that I made up my mind to that fact some time ago."

"Champion! — are you here?" said Basil, emerging from the house. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long. But I thought it might be worth while to pay Mr. Devereux the compliment of looking like a gentleman. Are you ready now?"

"Don't go!" said Rosalind, in a whisper so low that it was remarkable how her listener heard it. The breath scarcely issued from her lips. Basil had no suspicion that she had spoken.

"Well, are you coming?" he said, a little surprised that Champion had not answered him.

"If you'll excuse me, I believe not," that gentleman replied, quietly, out of the shadow where he stood. "You have waited too long. If you had come ten minutes earlier, I should have felt inclined to go with you. Now I feel inclined to stay here."

"Just as you please," said Severn, obligingly. "Since you think of staying, you had better wait till I come back, and I'll be able to tell you what Mr. Devereux has to say for himself."

"Very well," answered the other, briefly.

Nothing more was said. Basil passed down the steps, along the walk, and out of the gate. It was not until the last echo of his footsteps died away, that Champion spoke. No one who had heard him speak ten minutes before would have recognized his voice now, so much had it softened, so entirely had it changed.

"Rosalind," he said, "do you mean that there is hope for me?"

"I don't know," answered Rosalind, who had regained her usual manner. "This is too important a matter to be settled all in a moment. Sit down: let us discuss it."

She pointed again to the vacant chair beside her, and this time Champion did not refuse to obey the gesture. He sat down, though he had a vague sense of surrendering an advantage as he did so, and the young lady went on without giving him time to speak:

"Do you know that marriage is a very serious thing?"

"I believe nobody doubts it," he answered. "Least of all those who have tried it."

"Such a very serious thing that it would not be well to be frightened into it," she continued, gravely. "I do not mean that you have any intention of frightening me," she added, quickly, as even in the moonlight she saw his lips compress themselves in a fashion she knew well, "but that I must be quite sure I do not consent to marry you because I am afraid of you."

"Are you afraid of me?" asked he, not angrily, but wistfully.

"Yes," answered she, frankly. "Who is not? Everybody stands more or less in awe of you; and yet," added she, with a sudden, upward look, "everybody likes you."

"Do *you*?" said he, stung and yet soothed, hurt and yet pleased, in a manner which was not new to him.

"I!" answered she, smiling. "Do you not know that I do? I like you very much: I have liked you always."

"But that is little," said he, with a strain of sudden passion in his voice. "In comparison with what I want, indeed, it is nothing at all. Do you love me, Rosalind?"

His tone thrilled her, but still she hesitated. Did she love him? That was the point; that was the question which, try as she would, Rosalind could not answer to herself. How, then, was it possible for her to answer it to him? Again she looked away, undecided, in doubt, yet impatient with herself and her own irresolution. As was natural enough, Champion misunderstood her silence. He rose abruptly, pushing back his chair on the stone flags with a grating sound which made her start.

"I see that I must end this," he said. "It is asking too much to expect you to do so. Muff never yet released a mouse of her own accord, but it sometimes rests with the mouse himself to escape. Good-night."

He stood before her with his hand extended, tall, stern, stately. As she looked up at him, her heart gave a bound. Did she love him? She did not ask the question then. She only felt that this was her last chance; that if he left her now, he would never come back, and that she could not bear to lose him. Vanity, liking, the desire of conquest, the subtle thrill of half-awakened sentiment — who can say in what degree all these were mingled when she spoke, low but quickly:

"Why are you so impatient? Do you not see that I hesitate only because I want to be sure of myself? That is not as easy as you think; but if — if you insist upon an answer now, and if you will take me just as I am, with all my faults —"

The rest of the sentence was not uttered — at least not audibly. The next instant Champion had drawn the slender figure to his heart, and kissed passionately the sweet lips. Often during his long wooing, even when hope had most nearly failed him, he had dreamed of this hour, yet, now that it had come, he was scarcely able to realize it. He only felt that she was his at last, and that, let her cost him what she would, he could never be sorry for the victory.

## Chapter V

### "The Claimant."

As Basil walked down the street, enjoying the balmy air, smoking the good cigar, which was one of the few personal luxuries he allowed himself, and leaving Rosalind and Champion to finish their flirtation at their leisure, his mind was busy with thoughts of the man whom he was going to meet, and of the annoyance which for two years that man's name had embodied to every one connected with Mr. Carlisle's estate.

It was an annoyance which had not seemed decreasing when this unexpected visitor arrived in Stansbury. From court to court the suit had been carried, which was instituted in Devereux's name soon after Mr. Carlisle's death; but, according to the tedious processes of the law, its end did not seem much nearer than it had done in the beginning. Only Champion appeared to see daylight ahead; only he held out firmly against such an idea as compromise, and advised Basil to fight the claim to the last extremity. To this advice Basil was ready enough to hearken, and Mary Carlisle left the matter entirely to her two advisers — advisers whom she knew to be thoroughly honest, and doggedly faithful to her interests.

How much her interests were imperiled, these advisers did not like to acknowledge; but everybody in Stansbury knew that the Devereux claim was a very heavy one. The most valuable property of the Carlisle estate — broad acres and flourishing mills — was involved in the litigation. Mr. Carlisle had bought this property in good faith, and paid its full value; yet it now appeared, or was alleged, that the title made to him was not good, inasmuch as the property had been held, not in fee-simple, but under a lease. This announcement had burst like a bomb shell upon his executor after his death. The lease, however, was old, had never been registered, and afforded every loop-hole for dispute. The result was a lawsuit — James Champion on one side,

the lawyer who had ferreted out the matter on the other; Arnold Devereux and Mary Carlisle the persons interested.

Of Arnold Devereux, the Stansbury people knew little. He came from another State, though his mother had been a Stansbury belle and beauty in her day. It was through this mother that he laid claim to the property, leased by her father fifty years before. Why he had come to Stansbury now, no one could say; but conjecture was rife. Did he think of compromise? was he simply curious to see the blind young heiress? or had that idea of uniting their interests occurred to him which Rosalind Severn suggested? Though he had never been in Stansbury before, the people of that flourishing town occasionally went abroad, and his fame had preceded him — the fame of one who had achieved an unusual social reputation, who was a sybarite, a lady-killer, and a thorough man of the world.

Basil knew all this, and in his own mind added the epithet "fortune-hunter" to those more complimentary ones recorded above. He was not usually guilty of such rash judgment; but he could not help feeling sorely disturbed by this man's appearance. He was scarcely conscious of a greater sense of responsibility with regard to his own sisters than he felt for Mary Carlisle. Her blindness, her helplessness, the trust which had been placed in his hands by her father, all conspired to make such a feeling unusually strong. She was to him hedged round with sacredness, and her cause was nearer his heart than if it had been his own. To entertain such an idea as that which Rosalind had hinted, seemed to him monstrous; yet, despite himself, he found it intruding on his mind.

Pondering these things, he walked into the hotel in a far from charitable frame of mind, and sent up his card to Mr. Devereux. The messenger returned immediately, charged to show him to that gentleman's presence, and a minute later ushered him into the room where he sat.

It was a large, comfortable room, filled with an odor of cigar smoke. From the edge of the mantel-piece the red eye of a half consumed Havana glowed. Basil noted these things, as a fair, handsome man, with remarkable distinction of manner and grace of bearing, rose, and, pushing back a table on which lay newspapers and writing-materials, came forward.

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Severn," he said, in a frank, musical voice, "and I am obliged to you for giving me the opportunity of making it in this manner. Pray sit down."

"Thanks," said Basil, with a stiffness of manner in marked contrast to the other's ease, but declining, by a motion of his hand, the proffered civility. "I have called, Mr. Devereux," he went on, in a tone of cold formality, standing straight and soldier-like with his hat in his hand, "merely to deliver a message from Miss Carlisle. In reply to your note of this morning, she requests me to say that she will receive your visit, if she is well enough to do so, to-morrow; but, her health being very frail, it is always a matter of uncertainty whether she will be able to exert herself at any particular time, and for this reason she cannot make a positive engagement to see you. If she finds herself strong enough for the exertion to-morrow, she will let you know."

He bowed as coldly as he had spoken, and turned at once to go, without waiting for a reply; but Devereux, who had of course remained standing after the example of his guest, made a quick step forward.

"One moment, Mr. Severn, if you please," he said. "May I beg you to sit down? I should like, if you have no objection, to discuss the business which interests us both, and I have no doubt we can do so in a friendly spirit."

"I am unable to perceive any good end which can be gained by such a discussion," said Basil, pausing. Nevertheless, he sat down. The judicial spirit with which he had entered, was not disarmed, but he could not fail to acknowledge the courtesy of the other's manner. It was a manner such as can only be acquired by a long and intimate association with the world — easy, graceful, Basil might almost have thought winning, if he had not been too deeply prejudiced to apply such a term. As he sat down, he looked at the face before him more critically than he had done yet, A broad white brow, a clear decided nose, indolent gray eyes, and an abundance of

blond beard and mustache — these points principally made up Mr. Devereux's countenance. The expression was somewhat defective; sensible, but not intellectual, with a certain *d'bonnaire* carelessness which the grave young critic did not much approve.

After Basil sat down, Devereux followed his example, and then, glancing again at the card on the table, he said. "Your name is very familiar to me, Mr. Severn; you are, I believe, the executor of the late Mr. Carlisle."

"And the business agent of Miss Carlisle," said Basil, quietly, yet more conscious, perhaps, at that moment than he had ever been before of the gentle blood in his veins.

"I was sure I had not mistaken the name," said Devereux, attaching very little importance to the latter statement. He knew a gentleman when he saw him, and he also knew the social revolution which the war had wrought in the South, the wide-spread ruin that had overtaken the class to which Basil Severn plainly belonged. "My name, no doubt, is familiar to you," he went on. "I am afraid it must be synonymous with a great deal of trouble and annoyance."

"A lawsuit is certainly not particularly agreeable," said Basil. "Sometimes, however, it is unavoidable."

"Do you think that the lawsuit in which we are at present engaged was unavoidable?" asked Devereux.

Basil threw his head back. There was a good deal of unconscious defiance in the action. "It was unavoidable on our side," he replied, with emphasis.

"You mean that it might have been avoided on mine?" said the other.

"That is your own affair altogether," returned the young man, coldly. "Of course it follows that we should not have needed to defend our interests if they had not been assailed."

"And do you believe that they were unjustly assailed?" asked Devereux, in a tone which was chiefly remarkable for the entire absence of any thing like heat in it.

Basil looked at him doubtfully — the surprise which he felt evident in his glance. "That is a question which you can scarcely expect me to answer, Mr. Devereux," he said. "That we have contested your claim is sufficient proof that we do not believe in its justice. But I have no doubt that you believe in it."

"Then you do me the honor to think that I may be an honest man?" said Devereux, with a slight smile.

The smile was not satirical — only amused — and Basil answered: "I should be very prejudiced if I did not think so. I have no right to pass judgment on your conduct, and an argument with regard to the justice of your claim would be of little benefit to either of us. I have done my best for the interests committed to me. You have probably done your best for your own interest. It would not be fair to blame you for that."

"Yes, I have done what seemed to me best for my own interest," said Devereux, "and I certainly feel sure that my claim is just — else it would not have been made. Nevertheless, it has lately occurred to me several times that, if judgment is finally given in my favor, it will be hard on Miss Carlisle."

It was now Severn's turn to smile — a little grimly.

"Allow me to suggest," said he, "that it might be wise to reserve your compassion for Miss Carlisle until judgment is given in your favor."

"You mean that you think it will not be?"

"I mean that I am sure it will not be."

"You are not a lawyer, Mr. Severn," said the other, quietly. "I am — at least, I ought to be. I studied the profession once, and I tell you frankly that my claim will triumph in the end. Believe me or not, as you like. No doubt, you do not believe me. Very likely you think me a scheming intriguer, bent on compromise. That I am bent on compromise, I confess; but it is not on my own account, but on Miss Carlisle's. Probably" — with a slight shrug — "I am Quixotic; but the idea of ousting a woman from an inheritance which she considers rightfully her own, is very distasteful to me."

"Miss Carlisle would be indebted to you for your consideration, if she was aware of it," said Basil, haughtily. The calm conviction and cool superiority of the other might have irked one who felt the matter less deeply than himself. As it was, he could scarcely tell whether he was most scornful or indignant. That this stranger — this claimant with his trumped-up story of an old lease — should express such condescending consideration for Mary Carlisle, who was like a princess in her own right, seemed to Mary's loyal knight an absurdity scarcely short of insolence.

Devereux caught the inflection of the tone, and understood it thoroughly. He did not resent it, which spoke well for the reasonableness of his disposition. "I hope that when Miss Carlisle understands my motives, as I trust to make them clear to her, she will at least not be offended," he said, gravely. "It was on this account that I took the liberty of asking for a personal interview with her."

"Do not misunderstand me when I say that I think your having done so was a mistake," said Basil, stiffly. "Women generally know little of business, and Miss Carlisle knows, if possible, less than most women. Her infirmity and her ill-health have made her unusually dependent on those around her."

"I hope she will make no effort to see me until she is quite able to do so," said Devereux. "I have no intention of leaving Stansbury soon, and I shall await her convenience with pleasure."

"Will you pardon me, if I ask what you anticipate from seeing her?" said Basil, feeling that, since this discussion had been thrust upon him, he would try to gain some idea of the motive which influenced the other.

"I have no objection to tell you," replied Devereux, "that I hope to induce her to agree to a compromise of the claim at issue between us. I have every reasonable certainty of gaining the lawsuit— for, although the memorandum of lease which I hold is unregistered, I can produce a witness of undoubted veracity, who, besides personal knowledge of the matter, will swear positively to the signatures of both the lessor and lessee; therefore, she can scarcely think that my motives are not honest. Any disinterested lawyer would say that my chance of success is as good as hers. I think it much better."

"We altogether deny the authenticity of your lease," said Basil, bluntly; "and, if Miss Carlisle listens to my advice, and the advice of her lawyer, she will not entertain the idea of compromise for a moment."

"Very likely she will listen to you," said Devereux, "and so I am sorry that I cannot induce you to think of what I propose."

"You will never induce me to do so," said Basil. "I tell you frankly that your words are wasted."

"Time sometimes works wonders," replied the other, smiling again — a frank, careless smile which puzzled and irritated Basil. He felt that all this was very useless; and he rose with a good deal of defiant haughtiness in his manner.

"Whatever wonders time may work in other respects, it is not likely to change my opinion on this point," he said. "Meanwhile, if you should desire to see Mr. Champion or myself while you remain in Stansbury, we are easily to be found."

"Mr. Champion is your lawyer, I believe?"

"Yes," responded Basil. "Now, let me thank you for your courteous reception, Mr. Devereux, and bid you good-night. If I can be of any service to you, I hope you will not hesitate to call upon me."

"You are very kind," said Devereux. "If there is any need to do so, I shall not hesitate to accept your good offices."

With this, they shook hands and parted, Basil carrying away with him an uncomfortable sense of having been worsted in a fair game of skill.

This sensation bore him company as he passed along the moonlit streets in the direction of his home. What knowledge had he gained by his visit? Devereux had avowed that it was out of consideration for Mary Carlisle, and because he desired to make a compromise, that he was in

Stansbury; but beyond this, Basil felt that all was enveloped in doubt. A disagreeable sense of misgiving weighed upon him. "I distrust the man utterly!" he said, more than once, half-aloud. Just then, he would have staked his life that Devereux was a schemer and a fortune-hunter. "He think of Mary Carlisle, indeed!" reflected the young man, scornfully. "It is of himself that he is thinking, though he hopes, no doubt, to blind her by an assumption of Quixotic generosity so transparent that a child might see through it. He may succeed — Heaven only knows! Women are easily influenced by a plausible tongue. But there is nothing that I would not do to save Mary. The question is, what to do? Perhaps Madeleine may be able to tell."

By the time his thoughts had reached this point, he found himself at his own gate and face to face with Miss Severn, who was standing there alone.

"Madeleine! — is it you?" said the young man, starting. "What are you doing here, all by yourself?"

"I walked down with Gordon, who left a few minutes ago," she answered, "and it seemed a pity to go back and disturb Rosalind and Mr. Champion's *tête-à-tête*. I fancy they have settled matters at last."

"Do you think so?" asked Basil, indifferently. Champion's suit had been on the *tapis* so long, that it had ceased to excite a great deal of interest in the family mind. "There is no telling; Rosalind is an arrant coquette. But I am glad to find you here, for I have something to say to you of importance."

"Let us walk toward the garden, then," said she, slipping her hand in his arm.

Toward the garden they walked, therefore, and, after a minute had passed in silence, Madeleine spoke again. "It is about Mr. Devereux, is it not?" she said. "I am sorry to see you so worried."

"Yes, it is about Mr. Devereux," he answered, "and if I am worried, it is only because I think of Mary, and because I fear she may let this man influence her; that is, if she receives him. But I rely upon you, Madeleine, to keep her from receiving him. Your opinion has more weight with her than that of any one else."

"I am not sure of that," said Madeleine; "but, even if it were so, I should scarcely like to urge it upon her in a matter of this kind. Mary has a great deal of sense — so much, that even a clever man of the world might find it difficult to influence her."

Basil shook his head. "You don't know how easily even the most sensible woman is hoodwinked by a clever man of the world," he said. "I thoroughly distrust this Devereux," he added, feeling reluctant to express more clearly why he distrusted him.

But Madeleine was one of those rare people with whom instinct might almost be said to do away with all need of language, besides which, she knew Basil thoroughly, and she understood at once what he meant. "Take care!" said she, pressing her hand lightly on his arm, as she looked up at him. "Don't judge rashly. Prejudice is foolish as well as wrong. Mr. Devereux may have no such idea as this which you fear — but, if he has, Mary is not the woman to fall into the snare of a fortune-hunter."

"Not of an ordinary fortune-hunter, perhaps," said Basil, in a tone which showed how much he chafed against the discussion of such a subject. "But this man is not ordinary. In the first place, he is very good-looking —"

"But if he were an Apollo, his looks could not affect poor Mary," interposed Madeleine, smiling.

"I am not certain of that," said Basil, with rather an obstinate air, "but I was going on to add that he has an exceedingly plausible manner — that appearance of frankness and ease which is so attractive and deceptive. Altogether," said the young man, with an accent of disgust, "I find myself thinking more than I like of Rosalind's apparently foolish suggestion."

"Do you think so badly of the man as to suppose that he has deliberately come here for that?" asked Madeleine.

"I don't want to do him injustice," answered Basil. "As you say, prejudice is foolish as well as wrong — but his own manner inclined me to think so. Now, Madeleine, thank God, I am not afraid of any misconstruction from you; that there is no danger of your suspecting for a moment that I have any thought of self-interest in desiring to keep him away from Mary. But you see how the matter stands: her isolated life and her affliction make her peculiarly likely to be attracted by a man of this description, a man who professes to be thinking chiefly of her, and I — who can never forget either her own or her father's kindness to me — would rather see her dead than married to an adventurer who thought only of her money."

"I understand," said Madeleine. "Of course, I cannot pretend to decide whether or not your fears are well-grounded — and I am inclined to think we might trust Mary even with the most plausible adventurer in the world — but you cannot fear any misconception from me, Basil. Only I warn you, dear, that if it should be said that you and I made any effort to keep this man from Mary Carlisle, there are many people who would be ready to believe that we did so from self-interest."

"Let them believe it!" said Basil. "What is one's sense of duty worth if one does not act up to it in spite of the world's opinion? I have never yet stopped to consider what men would say of me if it was right to do a thing, and I shall not hesitate now. Neither will you, I am sure."

"No," said Madeleine. She spoke quietly, but about the delicate lips there was a resolute look, in the soft eyes a light steady enough to face martyrdom. "Only tell me what you want done," she added, "and I will try to help you."

"I want you to keep Mary from receiving this man," said Basil, with emphasis. "I think she will heed your advice, and you must advise her strongly to refer him to Champion or to me."

"And if she does not heed my advice?"

"Then matters must take their course. I am resolved upon one thing, however — if she plays into his hand and makes a compromise of her interest, in absolute disregard of my opinion and Champion's opinion, I shall give up the business!"

"Basil, that is not like you," said Madeleine. "You have cause to be vexed, but you do not mean what you say when you talk of giving up the business. What would become of it without you, and what would have become of you but for Mr. Carlisle?"

She looked up at him as she spoke, and the young man met her eyes with a grateful glance in his own. It was charming and — to those who had only known very different fraternal relations — it was remarkable to see the confidence and sympathy which existed between these two. Their opinions never by any chance clashed or jarred. Especially on any point where honor or principle was involved, they always seemed to feel alike, and one never failed to receive ready support and encouragement from the other. Those who like to trace every effect to its cause, might have accounted for this on the ground that they were much alike in what psychologists call the moral qualities. With regard to conscientiousness, sincerity, and fortitude, their mental constitutions were exactly similar. All these qualities they possessed in more than ordinary degree. Both were sensitive, yet both owned a certain sweet and stately pride which veiled this sensitiveness from others. Both were more tender than passionate where they loved; both had that gift of constancy in affection which we are sometimes tempted to think one of the most perilous and unfortunate of characteristics; both were singularly courageous, and neither had one drop of that bitterness which can bear malice, even where malice has been deserved. Here the similarity between them ended. In intellectual qualities they differed widely. Basil was thoroughly sensible, his mind was clear and his judgment excellent; but he had none of that mental brightness which, without dazzling, lends grace to whatever it touches; that was one of Madeleine's chief charms.

"You are right," he said, after a minute, with a frankness peculiarly his own. "So long as I can be of service to Mary, I shall not give up the business, for I can never forget what a friend her father was to me. But I certainly think that I shall have just ground for complaint if — if she acts as I fear she may."

"But she has not acted so yet," said Madeleine, with a smile. "What has come over you, that you take the worst so entirely for granted? I thought you were a better philosopher. Is Mr. Devereux so terrible or so irresistible that you think he has only to see and conquer? For my part, I have a strong confidence in Mary's common-sense."

"I hope your confidence may be justified," said Basil, a little gloomily; "but I can't help fearing the worst. Somehow, I have a presentiment of mischief ahead."

Madeleine shook her head. "I don't believe in presentiments," she said.

"Ah!" returned Basil, "neither do I — when they don't come to pass! Now, suppose we go in, and hear what Champion has to say about the matter?"

## Chapter VI.

### Mary Carlisle.

"Madeleine," said Rosalind, entering the breakfast-room the next morning, where the family were assembled, and she was, as usual, the last comer, "Mary Carlisle's pony-phaeton is at the door, and here is a note. I suppose, of course, she has sent for you," the young lady added, as she sat down to table.

"Yes, she has sent for me," Madeleine answered, reading the line or two which the note contained. "Jessie is always brief," she went on, with a laugh. Then she looked at Basil. "You can drive me out to the Lodge," she said. "It would be a pity not to use the carriage since Mary has sent it; but I should have enjoyed a walk this bright morning."

"What a singular taste!" said Rosalind. "I cannot imagine how anybody can like to walk. It may be a matter of necessity; but as for pleasure — I really wish Mary would make me a present of her phaeton! She uses it very little, and Mrs. Ingram always takes the carriage when she goes out."

"What will you wish for next?" asked Mrs. Severn. She spoke a little wistfully. Nothing could have been too good or too bright for this young beauty, and it went to the mother's heart to hear her wishing for luxuries which she had no power to give — luxuries that she would have thought the most common necessities of life in her own young days.

"Champion will be able to afford a phaeton for you, I have no doubt, Rosalind," said Basil. — "Mamma, you have heard, I suppose, that she has put Champion out of his agony at last?"

"Yes, I have heard," said Mrs. Severn. She smiled, and yet, as she smiled, she sighed. James Champion was well enough in his way, and she had not uttered a word of objection when Rosalind announced her engagement, but it was impossible not to think what a different match the girl might have made with a few advantages of wealth and social intercourse.

"If James Champion has ever been in agony," said Rosalind, "he has certainly managed to endure it with a great deal of philosophy. But there is no good in keeping him waiting any longer," she ended, with a sigh absurdly like her mother's, which was not remarkable since they both proceeded from the same cause. No one was more keenly alive than Rosalind to the deplorable manner in which her possible chances were being thrown away.

"Now that you are safely engaged," said Madeleine, "I hope you will accept my sincere condolences. You have offered me yours so often, that I am glad to be able to return the compliment."

"It is a great bore," said Rosalind, who was quite of her day and generation with regard to forms of expression. "James says he sees no reason why we should not be married at once, and I am rather inclined to agree with him; engaged people are so exceedingly tiresome. There are

Gordon and yourself, for example, Madeleine. How very stupid you have been during these last six months!"

"Thanks for Gordon and myself," said Madeleine.

"Now, I don't like rehearsing Darby and Joan beforehand," said Rosalind, whose usual healthy appetite did not seem at all diminished by the fact of her engagement, and who was buttering her toast as she spoke. "Besides, Basil, if you honestly think there is a chance of the pony-phaeton, it cannot be a day too soon."

"What cannot be a day too soon?" asked Basil; "the pony-phaeton, or the prospective marriage? Felicity has mounted to your brain, and, in consequence, you confuse your meaning and your pronouns."

"The phaeton, I meant," said Rosalind. "As for the marriage, there is no reason for haste about that, except on the score of engagements being tiresome. But James is not likely to be jealous — especially since there is nobody for him to be jealous of; so, I suppose I shall have leave to amuse myself as well as I can for a year or two yet."

"That will depend upon yourself," remarked Basil. "Champion is lucky enough to be able to afford to marry whenever he likes, and he is never inclined to delay the accomplishment of any thing upon which he has set his fancy or his head."

"That is very true," said Rosalind, devoting herself to her toast with a sober air, for she knew Champion as well as Basil did — too well to indulge in any triumphant flourish about his being obliged to submit to whatever she should set her fancy or head upon.

But here Mrs. Severn interposed — the color heightening a little in her pale cheeks: "Mr. Champion must submit to what I decide," she said, "and I shall not think of allowing Rosalind to marry for a year at least."

"A year, mamma!" said Rosalind, opening her eyes "What will James say?"

"It does not matter what he says," Mrs. Severn answered, with dignity. "He has no right to say any thing. The lady and her friends always settle this point. You are too young — you do not know your own mind; I will not have your life irrevocably settled without giving you time for consideration. — Basil, am I not right?"

"Quite so, mother," responded Basil, cordially.

"But a year!" said Rosalind. Then she leaned back and laughed. "I shall enjoy the expression of James's face when I tell him. But what a household of engaged people we shall be! Basil, if you would only follow our example, it would be really harmonious and delightful."

"Hum!" said Basil. "You are like the fox in the fable: having been caught in a trap yourself, you are anxious to draw everybody else in, to keep you in countenance. But how about the other party to the engagement? There is another needed, you know. Where shall I go to find her?"

"Would the Champion house do?" asked Rosalind. "Did I tell you that Helen returned yesterday?"

"No," answered he, while the ready color came into his face; for he had a fair complexion, and blushed like a girl. "I suppose she has had a very gay summer?" he added, after a minute, with rather too great an assumption of carelessness.

"I have not seen her," Rosalind answered, "but James said that she did not talk as if she had enjoyed it a great deal. Strange, that, for Helen, isn't it?"

"So strange that she must have had a disappointment of some kind," said Madeleine. "Perhaps she was not as much of a belle as she expected to be."

"Madeleine, I am astonished at you!" cried Rosalind. "That is very ill-natured."

"I am not like the fox in the fable," said Madeleine. "Because I have fallen into the trap of engagement myself, I am not, therefore, anxious to draw others into it. But the day is wearing on, and I must go," she added, rising. — "Basil, if you will wait for me, I will be ready in a minute."

Rosalind looked after her as she left the room, with a significant smile. Then she turned to Basil. "One needs to be reminded now and then that Madeleine is mortal, like the rest of us," said she, "but I never knew before that she was jealous."

"Jealous!" repeated Basil, incredulously. "Of whom?"

"Did you not hear what she said of Helen Champion? She has not forgotten that Gordon Lacy paid her a great deal of attention last winter."

Basil laughed, half amused, half scornful.

"Is it possible you know her no better than that?" he asked. "I gave you credit for being a better judge of character. You are right in thinking she does not fancy Miss Champion; but you are altogether wrong about the cause. I should think the stars about to fall if I saw Madeleine jealous after any such fashion as that."

"I believe you think that she is without a fault," said Rosalind, half-offended.

"No," said he; and then he added, with a smile:

"Faults has she, child of Adam's stem,  
But only Heaven knows of them.' "

Rosalind thought that she knew of some of them, but, since Madeleine appeared in the door at that moment, she had not time to put her thought into words.

"I am ready, Basil," the former said. "Good-morning, mamma — good-morning, Rosalind. Don't be surprised if I do not come back until this evening. Mary will probably keep me."

There were several messages to Mary from both ladies. Rosalind said, "Perhaps I may walk out for you this evening;" and Madeleine answered, "Do!"

Then the brother and sister went to the gate, where the pony -phaeton, which Rosalind envied, was standing with a groom in attendance. Basil's horse was also waiting — a beautiful, spirited animal, which he had named Roland<sup>1</sup> after the famous steed who bore the good news from Aix to Ghent. "Can I trust you to ride him out to the Lodge, Joe?" said his master, a little doubtfully. Joe (the groom) grinned, and touched his cap. "I reckon you kin, Mass Basil," he answered. "On with you, then," said Basil, as he stepped into the phaeton after Madeleine and gathered up the reins. But, like most horses, Roland knew with whom to be foolish, and it was only after curvetting across the road for some time that he graciously allowed Joe to mount, after which he carried him off at a rush.

"He will probably reach the Lodge some time before us, said Madeleine. "How dusty it is — and yet what a lovely day!"

It was lovely, exceedingly. The air was like an elixir in its buoyancy, yet more balmy than that of June; the sunshine was dazzling gold; the blue haze was faint and delicate as a bridal veil, softening into tender beauty the rolling hills and glowing woods around Stansbury. A little later, the day would be mellow and golden, as if it had dropped from the courts of heaven; but now it was only supremely joyous, crisp, glowing, exulting. As the Severns drove through the town at a sharp pace, color, radiance, an infinite variety of jewel-like tints, and of light flowing upon and waking the whole to glittering life, seemed to encompass them. But it was when they emerged into the open country that the splendor was fairly spread before them. Stansbury was built on a ridge, from which on almost every side the surrounding country sloped away with many a swell and undulation, affording, from any point of observation, a widely-extended prospect. In this prospect there was nothing grandly picturesque, but it was very fair to look upon, especially from the road along which Basil and Madeleine were driving — fertile breadths of fields, green and level meadows shut in by woods aflame with brilliant colors, purple valleys and hills, which seemed to sparkle in the distance. . Houses were dotted here and there, while a little to the right rose the tall chimneys of the Carlisle mills, curling forth clouds of trailing smoke.

"Is not every thing beautiful?" said Madeleine. She looked at the fringe of soft blue forest afar off, with her eyes quickening, her lips parted, a flush like the lining of a sea-shell on her cheeks. At that moment no other words came to her but those supreme ones of the Church's homage: "Pleni sunt caeli et terra, majestatis gloriae tuae." She uttered them half aloud, and as she did so Basil exchanged a salutation with some one on the side of the road.

Her glance followed the direction of his bow, and she saw a tall, blond gentleman, who she knew at once could only be that much-discussed person, Mr. Devereux. Their eyes met, but it was only for an instant. Basil touched the ponies, and the phaeton bowled on, leaving the figure of the stranger enveloped in a cloud of yellow dust. Madeleine was the first to speak.

"So that is 'the claimant?'" said she. "Rosalind was right in saying that he has rather a distinguished appearance. A gentleman, Basil, at least."

"Oh, certainly," said Basil. "Nobody ever doubted that; but gentlemen — or men who ought to be gentlemen, as far as blood and rearing go — are guilty of shabby conduct sometimes."

"I wonder if we should call them gentlemen, then?" said Madeleine; "but one is very apt to use the term solely with regard to birth and breeding."

She spoke a little absently. The magical blaze of color about their path, the transparent mist draping the distant hills, interested her more than the question of what should or should not constitute a gentleman. She had an artist's soul, though she never suspected the fact, and just then every fibre was thrilling with the consciousness that earth was fair, and life was sweet, and God, above all, very good.

Devereux, meanwhile, was walking along the road, thinking of that face so full of a "light that never was on land or sea," which had shone upon him for a moment. He wondered if it belonged to Basil Severn's wife, and tried vainly to imagine why it seemed familiar to him, until he remembered the house where he had paused the evening before, the beautiful face framed in the ivy-encircled window, the great dog he had patted over the gate, and the little scene so full of significance on the portico, the dark-eyed girl putting up her hand, the man who tenderly took it. "She is scarcely Severn's wife," he said to himself, remembering that bit of expressive pantomime. "Perhaps she is his sister. Now that I think of it, there is some resemblance in the faces."

Basil at this moment was flicking the ponies, and saying: "I hope you will remember what I urged on you last night, Madeleine. I hope you will strongly advise Mary not to receive that man. You know the old proverb about an ounce of prevention. I am inclined to think that it is worth many pounds of possible cure."

"I will do all that I can," said Madeleine; "but why do not you speak to Mary, and advise her strongly?"

"I did advise her yesterday — to no effect; but I shall speak to her again. I have little hope of influencing her, however; I trust you to do that."

"Don't trust too much. I rely principally on Mary's good sense."

"I hope she will show her good sense by referring the fellow to Champion."

"I hope so," said Madeleine, but again she spoke absently. Champion's name suggested another train of thought. "Basil," she said, abruptly, "what do you think of this engagement of Rosalind's?"

"I have not decided exactly what to think of it," answered Basil; "but I suppose Rosalind and Champion know their own minds, and there is no ground for objection on my part. Why do you ask? Do you dislike it?"

"No — I only distrust it," she answered. "I would not say so to any one but yourself, but I am afraid it may end badly. You know how arbitrary James Champion is, and, as far as I can judge, I do not think Rosalind knows her own mind very well, or that she has accepted him for any other reason than that she does not want to let him go."

"That might be as good a reason as any," said Basil, laughing; "but," he added, more gravely, "Champion may be as arbitrary as he likes, he shall not curb Rosalind's liberty of choice."

I will see to that."

"You will see to it?" repeated Madeleine. She made a slight gesture of amused disdain. "And pray how would you see to it? There is nothing to be done but to let them work out their problem themselves; but, if it ends in something unpleasant, do me the justice to remember that I prophesied it."

"But you are not entitled to much gratitude if you prophesy an evil without showing a remedy."

"I see no remedy," said she, gazing at the distant hills, as if an answer might come from them. "Even in the struggles of those who are nearest and dearest to us, we have often no alternative but to look on as mere spectators. Nothing is harder, and yet it must be endured. Rosalind's life is in her own hands. We can do little for her."

"And what of your life?" asked Basil, with a certain tender softness in his voice. He seldom used an endearing term, but that cadence expressed more than many endearments, and it often came when he spoke to Madeleine.

"My life?" repeated she. "My life belongs to Gordon. You know that."

"But what does Gordon mean to do with it? That is a question which has occurred to me more than once lately, when I have noticed how entirely he seems to have lost all interest in his profession, all apparent desire to win the position on which his marriage depends. Madeleine, you must not expect me to stand by and see your youth spent in waiting on any man's whims and caprices."

"Gordon and I have settled that," said Madeleine. "Would not my youth belong to him if I were married to him? Well, it belongs to him all the same, though we are not married. He feels the waiting — he feels asking me to wait — as much as you can," said she, with a half-appealing tone in her voice; "but I agree with him that it is better he should attempt to do something in literature than to continue at the law, which he detests."

"My dear," said Basil, gently, "do you think Gordon is a genius?"

"No," answered she, coloring vividly — for it was one thing to acknowledge this to herself, and quite another thing to have it said to her even by her brother's kind lips — "but you know as well as I do that many people succeed in literature who are not geniuses."

"Yes," said Basil, "I suppose they do — after a fashion. But would you care very much for your husband to be simply one of the moderately clever men who do the drudgery of the profession? Fancy him worked to death, as the man who depends upon his pen for the means to live must be, oppressed by care, soured by disappointment and that failure to achieve great results which men in such cases always call the non-appreciation of the public. Would this be better than steadfast labor in the profession for which he has been educated, and in which he has the ability requisite for success, if he chose to exert himself? Forgive me, dear, if I wound you," he ended, a little wistfully, "but it has been in my mind to say this for some time."

"You do not wound me," said Madeleine, in a voice which was a trifle unsteady — "at least, I mean that I don't blame you for saying what you think. But you must not blame me if I say that I believe you are wrong. I know as well as you do that Gordon is not a genius; but I think that you underrate his powers, and we must not ignore the great fact that all his enthusiasm, all his desire, is toward letters."

"And how many another man's desire is toward some thing different from the profession which he is forced by necessity to adopt!" said Basil, determined to go through unflinchingly with the disagreeable task which he had set himself. "Of course, if Gordon had sufficient fortune, there would be no objection to his amusing himself with writing poems and essays — or, if he had no connection with you, I should take no interest in his affairs. But as it is, Madeleine, I think you ought to insist on his devoting the chief labor of his life to his profession."

"I cannot do that," said Madeleine. "It is I who have encouraged him with regard to the other — I cannot, Basil! You must not ask it of me."

"It would be for his good as well as for yours," said Basil.

"I do not think so," answered she, quickly. "You do not know him as well as I do; you do not know how this ambition has become part of his life. You are perfectly right in saying that many men have to give up ambitions which are equally dear to them; but what is sadder than such a thwarted career? You must not ask me, for any thought of myself, to thwart that on which Gordon has set his heart."

"You must judge for yourself, of course," said her brother, gravely. "I only thought I would discharge my duty by telling you how the matter strikes me. Here we are at the Lodge."

It was a short drive from the gate to the door of the house, visible through the foliage which made a glory of color all about it. A pleasant, picturesque dwelling, well kept, and meriting its unpretentious name, was what appeared, as the carriage crashed along the gravel-drive to the steps of the piazza, which ran the whole length of the building, and terminated in a large conservatory at one end.

Joe and Roland were waiting. "Keep him till I come," Basil said to the former, as he assisted Madeleine from the phaeton, and followed her into the house.

As they entered the hall, the doors of which stood open to the soft air and bright floods of sunshine, a comely-looking woman, with a short, thick-set figure and ruddy face, full of intelligence, met them. She had a key-basket on her arm, and her whole appearance seemed significant of honesty and shrewdness. This was Jessie Holme — the house-keeper, amanuensis, accountant — in fact, as Basil often said, eyes and hands of the blind heiress. Those who think that there is no such thing as gratitude in the lower orders should have known this faithful servant of Mary Carlisle. She had been an uncouth, uneducated child, whose parents had died leaving her absolutely friendless, when Mrs. Carlisle, out of charity, received her into her household. "I shall train her for a house-keeper," she had said, when asked what she expected to make of such an unpromising specimen of humanity; "she seems to possess the virtue of honesty, and an honest servant is what poor Mary will need above all things." Never were truer words spoken; never was a human soul more incorruptibly honest, more gratefully faithful, more warmly attached to the gentle and considerate mistress who had given her a home and an education, than Jessie Holme proved. And, next to this mistress, she loved the blind child who had grown up under her wing, and whom the mother's dying words committed to her care. "Never leave her, Jessie: promise me that you will never leave her!" she had said; and Jessie had promised, and passionately begged God to deal with her as she dealt with the trust thus given. She had been Mr. Carlisle's house-keeper as long as he lived, and afterward the entire charge and responsibility of the Lodge establishment rested in her hands. Mary Carlisle trusted her implicitly, and people who had never taken the trouble to sow those seeds of kindness which are likely to bring forth such fruits of gratitude often remarked that it seemed a "providential mercy" that she should have found one so capable and honest to relieve her of all care.

"Good-morning, Jessie," said Madeleine, as they met. "How is Mary?"

"Good-morning, Miss Madeleine — good-morning, Mr. Basil," said Jessie, with a smile that seemed to broaden her face two inches. "Miss Mary wasn't well last night, but she's better this morning, ma'am."

"Where is she?" said Madeleine. "In the library?"

Without waiting for Jessie's answer — who, indeed, had turned to speak to Basil — she crossed the hall, and opened the door. With the exception of two large, well-filled bookcases, the room she entered had very little claim to the name of library. It was, rather, a luxurious sitting-room, furnished with every thing that could possibly contribute to the comfort of the person inhabiting it. A soft warmth of atmosphere and a fragrance of roses greeted Miss Severn: the first came from a fire which burned on the hearth, notwithstanding the mildness of the morning; the second from several large vases full of those royal flowers which seem to bloom with greater profusion in October than in any other month of the year. There were broad couches and deep chairs; the sunlight was lying in bars of gold on the carpet; a mocking-bird, whose cage hung in

the window, was uttering the sweetest of his full-throated notes; and in the midst of this brightness and grace sat the blind girl who was the mistress.

She was near the fire — leaning back in a chair that was a sort of round, luxurious shell, with her slippered feet extended on the marble hearth. They were dainty, well-shaped feet, and matched the small white hands which lay, with such pathetic idleness, lightly clasped in her lap. The chair in which she sat almost engulfed her fragile figure, while on her face the signs of illness were visible to the most careless eye, in the transparency of her colorless skin, and the attenuation of the delicate features. But even with the disadvantage of habitual ill-health, Mary Carlisle was not a plain woman; indeed, she possessed several points of undeniable beauty. Her hair was one of them. It was unusually fine and unusually abundant — two things which are seldom found united — and in color a soft, pale brown. Parted simply, without ripple or wave, it made a Saxon arch over the pure, white brow, beneath which were eyes of that clear, limpid blue which one sees but rarely — the tint of a summer sky, a mountain-lake, or a blossom of the myosotis. Lovely as these eyes were, however, it was only necessary to glance at them in order to recognize that they were sightless. No ray of light, no suggestion of color, had ever come to them, and that introspective expression peculiar to the eyes of the blind lent an interest as well as a sadness to the charming face in which they were set.

That face turned as Madeleine entered, and a faint, sweet smile broke over it. "So you have come at last!" she said. "Is it I who have been impatient, or is it you who have been long?"

"I fear it is I who have been long," answered Madeleine, as she came forward. "But you must scold Basil; it was his fault."

"I thought I heard Basil's voice. Where is he?"

"In the hall with Jessie — here he comes now!"

Basil came as she spoke, with a quick, firm step, which would have been unmistakable to duller ears than Mary Carlisle's. After he had shaken hands and asked how she felt, he plunged at once into the business which had brought him.

"According to your request, I saw Mr. Devereux last night, Mary," he said, "but the interview was very unsatisfactory. He allowed me to understand that he has come here for the purpose of compromising his claim, but he still professes himself anxious to see you."

"Why should he be anxious to see me?" asked Mary, a look of interest coming into her face, a slight flush of color into her wan cheeks.

"I imagine because he thinks that you may be easily worked upon — being a woman," replied Basil, dryly.

"Are women supposed to have no sense?" asked she, smiling. "If that is Mr. Devereux's object, he will find himself mistaken. I should take no step whatever without your advice — you cannot for a moment think that I would!"

"I don't know," said Basil, doubtfully. "If you receive him, you will take that step against my advice."

"But that is a mere matter of courtesy; nothing of importance is involved."

Basil looked at Madeleine; then back at the sightless eyes turned toward him. "I am not sure that it is a matter of no importance," said he. "Frankly, Mary, I distrust the man, and I should exceedingly like you to decline to see him. I do not wish him to come in contact with you. Promise me that you will write and refer him to Champion or to me."

Mary hesitated. Plainly she was not ready to promise this. "I am afraid you think me obstinate," she said, after a minute, "but I cannot rid myself of a feeling that, since he has applied so directly to me, it would seem like rudeness — like a repulse of what he appears to mean with good intention — to refer him to some one else."

"You must follow your own judgment, of course," said Basil, with a slight chord of irritation in his voice. "I have only offered my advice. Now I must go. You'll excuse my haste, I know. Good-morning."

"Tell me, will you be vexed with me if — if I should see him?" she asked, almost entreatingly, as she detained his sun-burned hand for a moment in the clasp of her small white ones.

"Vexed with you!" repeated he, touched and melted all in a moment. "Good Heavens, no! Do what you think best, by all means. As for being vexed with you — I couldn't be that possibly, if I were to try. God bless you! — Good-by."

He wrung her hand hard, dropped it into her lap, and, motioning Madeleine to follow him, left the room.

"I see that she has made up her mind to receive him," he said, when they paused on the piazza. "Of course, if she insists upon doing so, it is impossible to hinder her; but your influence may do a great deal, even yet."

"But it is her own affair," said Madeleine, hesitatingly, "and perhaps, after all, Basil, it would be better to let her follow her own judgment —"

"Follow her own fiddlesticks!" said Basil, impatiently. "The plain English of her judgment is her inclination. She is interested in the idea of receiving him simply because he appealed to her feelings; and if he succeeds in gaining a personal interview and works upon her with that plausible manner of his, there — well, really, there is no telling what may ensue!"

"I think you are mistaken," said Madeleine. "I am confident Mary is not so easily worked upon as you think; but I will do my best. I cannot promise more than that."

"Be sure that it is your best!" said her brother. Then he turned, and motioned Joe to bring up Roland.

## Chapter VII.

### Mr. Devereux's Interview.

While Basil rode away with rather an overcast brow, Madeleine returned to the library, where Miss Carlisle was waiting for her.

"Come and sit by me," the blind girl said, eagerly, as soon as she heard the welcome footstep. "I have so much to say to you — so much to ask you. Let me feel your hand. Ah! how cool and pleasant it is!"

"While yours is dry and feverish," said Madeleine, clasping it. "I am afraid you are not well. You confine yourself too much in these warm rooms. Dr. Arthur told me, the other day, that you ought to spend more time in the open air. What do you say? — shall we take a drive?"

"Not this morning," answered Mary, shrinking deeper into the soft depths of her chair. "I am not strong enough. I was very unwell last night. Did not Jessie tell you so?"

"Basil told me yesterday evening that you were not well, and, if you had not sent for me, I meant to come this morning to see how you were."

"You are always kind!" said the heiress, as gratefully as if she had been a pensioner on the charity of her visitor; and she stroked softly the hand that rested between both her own.

"I am afraid Basil is accountable for your fever," said Madeleine. "Is it not so? Did he not worry you yesterday?"

"No," replied Mary, quietly. "He did not worry me at all; but I worried myself trying to decide what I should do. It would seem a small matter, I suppose, to most people," said she, with a slight accent of apology, "but I am so unused to any responsibility that even such as this weighs heavily upon me. Therefore I mean to put it on your shoulders," she ended, with a smile.

"On my shoulders?" repeated Madeleine. "Oh, I hope not. I don't like responsibilities." Then, remembering how strongly Basil had urged her to use her influence, and what a good opening this was for influence, she paused and hesitated.

"But it is not like you to shrink from them," said Mary, "and it is unkind besides, when you consider how many advantages you have over me for forming a correct judgment."

"I am not sure of that," said Madeleine. "You should not underrate your own powers."

"I do not underrate them. I have brains here" — she touched her brow with one slender finger — "but I am isolated by ill-health, and, most of all, I am blind. How, then, can I have the faculty of judgment?"

"God gave it to you, dear," said Madeleine, simply. "Believe me, you are as well able to decide for yourself as I am able to decide for you."

"No," said the other, shaking her head, "I am not able. You must tell me what to do. Shall I, or shall I not, receive Mr. Devereux?"

"On the whole, I think that, if I were in your place, I should decline to do so," answered Madeleine, uttering loyally the sentiment with which Basil had prompted her.

"But why?" asked Mary. "If you were in my place, you would certainly have a reason for declining."

"Yes, I think I should have a reason: I think I should feel that such an interview would be quite useless, unless I meant to interfere in business-matters which women rarely comprehend."

"I have not the least intention of interfering in business-matters, which Basil understands far better than I do," said Miss Carlisle, "and yet I cannot decide to refuse Mr. Devereux the interview which he asks. I have forgotten one thing, however; in order to form an opinion, you must read his note. Go to my writing-desk yonder, and you will find it."

She pointed as she spoke — pointed as directly as if sight had dwelt in her eyes — to a small table on which stood an inlaid writing-desk. Madeleine rose, crossed the floor, and opened it. The first thing that met her glance within was a white envelope, directed, in black, legible writing, to "Miss Carlisle."

She drew forth the inclosure, conscious the while of that respect for the writer which a thoroughly well-appointed letter always communicates. It was a thoroughly well-written letter, also, she found — and Madeleine was a fastidious judge of style and expression. Nothing could possibly have been in more admirable taste, respectful, terse, and with a ring of apparent sincerity in every word. As Miss Severn's eye traveled down the clearly-written page, she found herself going over from Basil's side to Mary's, in a manner which would have disgusted the former. It was impossible not to be prepossessed toward a man who was able to express a difficult request in such graceful and courteous terms; while far beyond the grace and the courtesy, Madeleine considered the honesty which seemed underlying these things. There was not the smallest trace of presumption or vanity in the quiet simplicity which characterized the epistle, and when she had replaced it in the desk, she came thoughtfully back to her friend.

"Well," said the latter, after a pause of considerable duration, "what do you think? Have you nothing to say?"

"Nothing," answered Madeleine, candidly. "You must decide for yourself. I cannot advise you."

"But you must!" said Mary. "What is the matter? Do you not like the note?"

"Yes, I like it — that is, it bears criticism very well. It seems frank and sincere; it is certainly courteous and respectful."

"What is it, then? Are you afraid of Basil?"

"No," answered Madeleine, laughing. "What an inquisitor you are! I told you that I do not like responsibilities."

"And I told you that you must accept this one."

"Why not do as you wish, then?" asked the other, feeling as if she were a traitor to Basil's trust. "After all, it cannot be a matter of very great importance." This was said more to herself than to her companion, and was, it may be added, a salve to her conscience.

"I don't know," said Mary. "I feel as if it was a matter of importance — at least, as if it might prove so. But, then, I suppose instincts are not to be relied upon."

"No, they are not to be relied upon," said Madeleine, suddenly roused to a sense of duty. "If you will have my advice," she went on, "it is the same which I gave before I read the note. I think it would be best for you to decline to see Mr. Devereux. He can have nothing to say which it is important for you to hear — nothing which could not be said to greater advantage to your lawyer or your agent. There will be no rudeness in declining his visit if you tell him — which is quite true — that you are very unwell."

"Do you think not?" asked Mary. Her face fell a little. Evidently this was not the advice she had desired, for when we ask advice, most of us have our preference with regard to the form it shall take.

"I am sure not," said Madeleine, with decision.

Then for a short time there was silence. The fire crackled softly, the bird sang loudly, the sunshine streamed in with dazzling brightness, and Madeleine watched her companion's face anxiously.

"It is strange that I don't agree with you," Mary said at length. "I never failed to agree with you before. But my instinct on this point is unconquerable — the instinct that I ought to see him and hear what he has to say."

"In short," said Madeleine, with a smile, "you have asked my advice in order to follow your own opinion."

"I am afraid I have. Pray forgive me if I seem ungracious or obstinate —"

"How can you talk such nonsense!" interrupted Miss Severn. "Is it not your affair altogether? I am half glad to be rid of the responsibility of your following my advice; and now, when do you think of receiving the formidable gentleman who has given rise to so much discussion?"

"I might as well receive him to-day: I think I am well enough."

"There may be two opinions on that point; but shall I write and tell him so?"

"If you will be so kind," said Mary, gratefully.

So, Madeleine — who possessed the rare art of yielding gracefully — went to the desk, and having presented Miss Carlisle's compliments to Mr. Devereux, on a sheet of pale-lavender paper, paused with suspended pen, and glanced at her companion.

"You have not told me what hour to name," she suggested. "Shall I say one o'clock? You are always better in the morning."

"Not always. I fancy I shall feel better this afternoon. Say four, instead."

Since it did not occur to Madeleine that there was any objection to this, she went on writing the note, and, while she was so engaged, the door opened and a lady entered.

A lady made up of negatives, if it be possible to use such an expression — a lady neither young nor old, neither handsome nor plain, neither attractive nor disagreeable, a passive-looking, neutral-colored person, of whom the most positive thing which could be said was that she seemed to be a gentlewoman. This was Mary Carlisle's aunt — a sister of her father — who had not been averse to taking charge of the orphan heiress when propriety and the opinion of the world demanded that some one should do so. Mary herself had been opposed to so useless an appendage as a chaperon; but finally yielded to the advice of others, and this lady — a widow of independent means and apparently harmless character — was installed in the position. She had filled it for two years with passive ability — in other words, she had placidly existed, walked, talked, driven, crocheted, without troubling any one — except the servants, who one and all voted her "meddlesome." Unhappily, this verdict was a just one. Mrs. Ingram was greatly inclined to meddle in what did not concern her, and her most active and disagreeable characteristic was excessive curiosity. At the Lodge her position was altogether a sinecure — for Miss Carlisle made it definitely understood that she was mistress of her own establishment — and for this very reason, perhaps, she had the greater temptation to pry into domestic and foreign matters with that inquisitiveness which from much indulgence grows to a positive disease.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Ingram," said Madeleine, looking up; "I hope you are feeling well to-day? — you were suffering with neuralgia when I saw you last."

"I am suffering with it yet, Miss Severn," answered Mrs. Ingram, in a voice of resigned complaint. "It hardly ever leaves me, though I am sure Dr. Arthur has given me quinine enough to drive it out of any system. I hope you are well, and your mother and sister?"

"Thanks, yes — quite well," returned Madeleine, sealing and directing her epistle. — "The note is finished, Mary," she added, addressing Miss Carlisle. "Shall I ring for a messenger to take it into Stansbury?"

"Let me ring," said Mrs. Ingram, moving to the bell. In doing so, she passed behind Madeleine's chair, and looked over her shoulder at the address on the letter. The result was so unexpected, that she uttered an exclamation. "Mr. Devereux!" she said. "Are you writing to him, Mary?"

"Yes," answered Mary, "Madeleine has been kind enough to write a line or two telling him that I will receive him this afternoon."

"You are going to receive him, then!" said the elder lady, in a tone of strong curiosity, interest, and surprise. "I thought you said yesterday afternoon —"

"No matter what I said yesterday afternoon," interrupted Mary. "I have decided that this is best. Aunt Ingram. Please don't say any thing more about it; I have heard so much already, that I am tired."

"Not from *me*, my dear, I beg you to remember," said Aunt Ingram, with great dignity. "Of course I can't be expected to know what others may have urged on you; but I have never advised you to do other than follow your own inclination. 'You must do exactly what you think best,' was what I said yesterday as soon as you showed me Mr. Devereux's note."

"Yes, I remember," said Mary, with a faint, weary sigh. "But sometimes it is not easy to tell what one does think best. — Is that you, Stella?" — as the door opened. "Tell Joe to take this note to the Stansbury Hotel. It is for Mr. Devereux."

"And then," said Madeleine, "bring Miss Carlisle's hat and jacket and shoes. She is going to walk."

"My dear, do you feel well enough?" asked Mrs. Ingram, with an air of solicitude.

"I suppose I do, since Madeleine thinks so," answered Mary, with a smile.

"Of course what Miss Severn thinks is always right," said Mrs. Ingram, with an accent not quite marked enough to be sarcastic.

"Thank you, Mrs. Ingram," said Madeleine, taking the remark as if it had been uttered in good faith. "At least I know that I am right now."

Despite her own reluctance, Miss Carlisle was therefore taken out to walk; and acknowledged that she felt better when she paced up and down the garden-paths by Madeleine's side. "But then I always feel better when I am with you," she said. "How happy I should be if you could stay with me all the time!"

"It would be a cheap way of purchasing happiness," said Madeleine, with her caressing smile.

Yet, as she spoke, her heart smote her that she could not say, "I will stay with you!" But to do so would involve a partial separation from Basil, and in a measure from Gordon also, which, unselfish as she was, Madeleine could not face. There had been a question of doing so more than once, and Mary had used every argument and persuasion to induce her to remain permanently at the Lodge — though the strongest argument and most effective persuasion with Madeleine was the manifest need of her. Notwithstanding this fact, however, she could not decide to go. Before Lacy had been a tie, she had felt unable to leave Basil. It has been already said that they loved each other with more than ordinary tenderness, but, apart from this affection, Madeleine felt that her brother needed her. In the midst of his life of toil, it was to her that he always turned for that intelligent sympathy of mind and taste, that encouragement when he flagged, that advice when he was in doubt, which few men are fortunate enough to find at their own hearthstones. Neither Mrs.

Severn nor Rosalind "understood" Basil. The finer shades of his character, the higher thoughts of his mind, would have been incomprehensible to them; and so Madeleine could not leave him — not even for the sake of the blind girl who had been so generous a friend to both of them.

The afternoon was in its full tide of mellow brightness, and the trees were now and then dropping their leaves pensively on the broad gravel-drive, when Mr. Devereux opened the gate of the Lodge and walked in. As he did so, he glanced at his watch. It wanted yet six minutes to four. Then he looked at his boots. They bore plain testimony to the dust of the road over which he had passed, for they had changed their color from black to a fine, light brown. Without being much of a dandy, he wished for a moment that, instead of having indulged himself in the pleasure of the walk, he had followed the advice of the clerk of the hotel and driven out. But the next instant he remembered that Miss Carlisle would not be aware of the dust on his boots — nor indeed whether he wore boots at all or not. This turned his thoughts from himself to the recollection of her blindness, and, as he walked slowly forward, he regarded the pretty spaciousness of the place he was approaching with that reflection present in his mind. It seemed to lend a sadness to a scene which else possessed great brightness and attraction. The glass sides of the conservatory glittered in the sun, though the sashes were thrown open to the soft, warm air, and many of the plants were still scattered over the lawn; the windows of the house were also open, and a golden repose brooded over every thing.

Crossing the piazza, Devereux paused for a moment outside the open door — admiring the hall with its arching staircase, and that air of lightness and space which good architecture gives. As he paused, a voice from the upper regions of the house floated to him crooning a song of which the words were those of a Methodist hymn, the air that of "Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon." A slight smile crossed his face. Jessie, who was singing as she darned a pair of stockings, was quite startled by the peal of the door-bell which the next instant resounded through the house.

A tall, black servant answered it, and, receiving Devereux's card, ushered him across the hall, and into the drawing-room. This was a large, pleasant apartment, well-toned, and full of graceful modern furniture, with several long mirrors, and a few good paintings on the walls. A glass door, draped with lace, led into the conservatory. The windows looking toward the west were open, giving a glimpse of the garden all glowing and brilliant in the sloping rays of the sun. At one of these windows, the figure of a lady was outlined against the brightness. She turned as he entered and came forward. Receiving his card from the servant, she glanced at it, then addressed him with a bow.

"Miss Carlisle is ready to receive you, Mr. Devereux. This way, if you please."

She moved across the floor as she spoke, and Devereux — as much impressed as could have been desired by this ceremonious mode of reception — followed her as she led the way toward the end of the room where another lady was sitting whose appearance almost startled him, it was so very different from what he had expected.

Yet, if he had been called upon to define exactly what he had expected, he would probably have found it difficult to do so. Only, with the idea of a blind invalid he had associated something painful which the reality failed utterly to bear out. The slender figure which rose as he approached, wore a soft blue robe — so entirely devoid of the flounces and furbelows of fashion, that it would have delighted a painter — with transparent frills at throat and wrists, and the fleecy white drapery of a Shetland shawl. There was something very becoming in the simplicity of this attire, something very charming in the fair, pathetic face crowned with pale, silken masses of hair, and something inexpressibly touching in the sightless eyes. At that moment he scarcely noticed Madeleine, who introduced him with the simple words, "Mary", here is Mr. Devereux."

"I am glad to see Mr. Devereux," Mary said, and the words struck Devereux with a new sense of her great deprivation: he did not know how often those who never saw, talk of seeing.

As she spoke, she extended her hand. If another woman had done so, he would have been surprised, and his taste would not have been pleased, but in her it only seemed an act of exquisitely courteous grace.

As he took it, he murmured something — he scarcely knew what. Never before had he seemed to himself so awkward and so dull. Then Madeleine pointed to a chair, and he sat down. As he did so, she moved away, and he found himself alone with Miss Carlisle.

For a moment there was silence. Mary had resumed her seat, and sat with her face turned toward him with an air of expectation. She was anxious to hear his voice. It was chiefly by means of the voice that she judged of character. He, on his part, felt strangely at a loss for words. She was so different from what he had anticipated, that he felt thrown out of his usual self-possession. After a time he spoke.

"I hope you will pardon me for having ventured to intrude upon you."

It was exceedingly stupid, as he felt; but there are times in which, if a man is debarred from uttering stupidities, he must needs be silent altogether, and silence has its disadvantages, since we have not yet attained to the enviable state of those pure intelligences who have no need of language.

Mary answered with the utmost simplicity, yet with quiet dignity: "There is no need to consider your visit in the light of an intrusion. In the matter which concerns us both, my interest is at stake as well as your own, and I shall be glad to hear what you have to say regarding it."

"I am much indebted to you for having granted my request for a personal interview," said Devereux, interested and attracted by her manner. It was singularly free from pretense, yet it was evident that the young heiress had no inconsiderable idea of her own importance. This is common enough with heiresses, and few of them have so much excuse for it as Mary Carlisle, since the veriest Lilliputian if he lived in solitude might grow to fancy himself a giant. Neither would we esteem him a fool for doing so. It is when a Lilliputian lives among giants and thinks himself their equal that we are moved to amused contempt.

"I hope you will not think that I made the request without a reason for doing so," the young man went on. "I wished to speak to you as I could not speak to your agent or your lawyer. I wished to see you and — and learn how you felt with regard to this matter, which I fear has troubled you very much, and which of late has troubled me scarcely less."

"To be frank with you," said Mary, "it has troubled me very little indeed. I fear I shifted all the annoyance to Basil Severn's shoulders. Personally I have not felt much interest in the result. Perhaps you can understand that it would not make a great deal of difference to me."

He understood what she meant. To this blind girl all the wealth in the world would be useless (save for doing good to others), beyond the moderate amount necessary for her own comfort. There are many men who would have found in this fact an excellent excuse for relieving her of a portion of the fortune which she could not enjoy; but Arnold Devereux was not one of these men. With all his faults, there was a strain of chivalry in his nature — which to himself he scornfully called Quixotism, and kept as much as possible out of sight — which, notwithstanding his undoubted belief in the justice of his cause, made him feel just then like a robber of helpless womanhood.

"It would make more difference than you think, if the matter went against you," he said, with a tone of great gentleness in his voice. "It would cripple your fortune very seriously, and you would of necessity have to endure many deprivations. I hope you will believe me when I say that it is thinking of this which has lately disquieted me."

"You are very kind," said Mary; but she spoke doubtfully. The man surprised and puzzled her. She certainly had not expected any assurance of this kind, and she found herself wondering what would come next. His voice had a frank ring of truth in it, yet she could not help distrusting this frankness almost as much as Basil might have done. "If I could only see his face!" she thought. It had not entered into poor Mary's consideration that faces can deceive as well as

tones, Devereux, meanwhile, saw the distrust which she was feeling, in her face, and as he saw it he smiled. He was a man of the world, and he was not surprised or offended in the least.

"Say candidly what you think, Miss Carlisle," he remarked, with the gentleness of his voice unchanged. "Say that you cannot imagine why I should think of you in such a manner, and that you are sure I have some interested end to serve."

"I should be sorry to do you injustice," said Mary, gravely, "yet it is strange for you to consider me — and I am forced to think so."

"Strange or not," he said, "I hope you will believe me — not on my account, but on your own. I should like you to trust me sufficiently to listen to a proposal which I desire to make."

"I have no reason to distrust you," said she. "I only think it singular that you should have troubled yourself about my loss, in case the suit is decided in your favor."

"Why should you think it singular?" asked he, quickly. "It is not as if you — or even as if your father — had been in fault in the matter. He was deceived; but if he were living, I should not feel any great disquiet on his account. A man can generally take care of himself. But you, Miss Carlisle — you, a woman and an invalid — can you not imagine how reluctantly I face the idea of depriving you of what you consider your rightful inheritance?"

"I am not absolutely without reason, though I am a woman," said Mary, smiling. "I am able to recognize the fact that it is no fault of yours if you are forced to do so. But it is very good of you to think of me, and I am deeply obliged. There is nothing to be done, however, but to abide the decision of the law."

"Perhaps you are wrong," said Devereux, "perhaps there is something else to be done." Then he hesitated for a moment. He had something to say which he scarcely knew how to express. It would have been an interesting scene at that moment to any one with subtle perceptions looking on — Mary's fair, intelligent face, full of attention, and the doubt, irresolution, almost anxiety on Devereux's countenance as he gazed earnestly at her, meeting the lovely eyes so pathetic in their blindness. Finally he spoke, almost desperately:

"Your friends will tell you that I am thinking only of my own interest when I talk to you of a compromise; but this is not so. I am thinking of you much more than of myself, and I hope you will trust me. I have come here solely on your account. I wish above all things to be sure that you do not suffer through me — at least, not to the extent which will be inevitable if the suit, as it stands at present, is decided against you. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary for a compromise of our conflicting interests to be made. I do not ask you for a definite answer now, but will you take into consideration doing this?"

"I do not think I can," said Mary, doubtfully. "The friends of whom you speak would not entertain such a proposal for a moment, and it is impossible for me to act in a manner opposed to their advice."

This surprised Devereux, and it flashed through his mind that perhaps she might be engaged to Severn. "I beg pardon," he said. "I thought you had reached your majority, and were entirely independent."

"I am of age, and legally independent," said Mary, "but there are ties of gratitude and trust which nothing would induce me to disregard. My business is altogether in the hands of my friend and kinsman, Basil Severn."

"Will you agree to a compromise, then, if I can succeed in making Mr. Severn hear reason?"

"I will agree to any thing which he does, but " — she shook her head — "I warn you that Basil will never consent to compromise. I have often heard him say that he would not."

"He is impetuous, honest, and doggedly faithful to your interest," said Devereux; "I saw that last night."

"He has been every thing to me," said Mary, with a tender thrill of gratitude in her voice.

Then there was another short pause. Devereux felt that he had said as much as it was expedient to say, yet he could willingly have remained for a much longer time in this pleasant

drawing-room, with the golden rays of the sun slanting in, the glowing garden without, a scent of flowers on the atmosphere, and the attractive face before him, over which each wave of feeling passed like a reflection across a mirror. Suddenly he spoke, on an impulse:

"Will you allow me to see you again?" he asked. "I hope you do not think that I presume on your kindness, but I should like to know more of you, and I think that, perhaps, if you knew more of me, you might — trust me."

The last words were uttered after a short, scarcely perceptible hesitation — uttered with a cadence that was very effective. But, for once, Arnold Devereux was not thinking of effect. He would have scorned himself if he had attempted to practise any of his society fascinations on this gentle blind girl.

A faint flush came into Mary's pale cheeks. "I am inclined to trust you already," she said, "but, if you wish to see me again, I shall be glad to receive you. Do not trouble yourself further, Mr. Devereux, about any loss which may come to me," she added. "You may need this property. You can see for yourself that I do not. Its loss will no doubt diminish my income very much, but that income already greatly exceeds my wants, which are few."

"We will talk of this hereafter," said Devereux, touched by the sweetness of her manner. "You have promised to see me," he went on; "pray do not be surprised, therefore, if I return. Meanwhile, have I your permission to see Mr. Severn, and propose terms of compromise to him?"

"Yes," she answered, "I leave every thing entirely in his hands."

Devereux shrugged his shoulders slightly. "I fear in that case I shall achieve a very small result," he said.

He was wise enough to know, however, that he had already achieved a very good one, so he rose to take leave, and Mary — whose ears had that quickness usual with the blind — hearing the motion, rose also.

"Let me thank you again for having received and listened to me so kindly," he said, "and pray remember that you 'are inclined to trust me!'"

"I will remember," she answered, smiling.

## Chapter VIII.

### A Visit Of Congratulation.

After Madeleine left home in the morning, Rosalind finished her breakfast with so much deliberation that it was at least ten o'clock before the "breakfast-things" were cleared away — a fact which in Stansbury was esteemed the height of domestic depravity. Mrs. Severn herself objected to such late hours, but she was powerless before Rosalind. Not that the latter was unamiable or rudely determined to enjoy her morning sleep at the expense of her mother's convenience; but she was spoiled in the first instance and self-indulgent in the second. "I will really try and do better to-morrow, mamma," she would say, when she came down late and met her mother's mildly-reproachful glance; but the morrow on which this "better" was to be accomplished never came, and Mrs. Severn, who was far from being a disciplinarian with any one, was least of all so with Rosalind. This morning, therefore, like many other mornings, the breakfast-table stood in the floor, Rosalind idled over her coffee and toast, Ann gossiped with the cook in the kitchen, and Mrs. Severn consoled herself for this common delay in the household machinery by glancing with a distracted mind over the morning paper — taking the news of the armies in France in conjunction with her daughter's rambling conversation. Madeleine had been gone half an hour, and affairs were still in this condition when there came a ring at the door-bell.

"There!" said Mrs. Severn, looking up. "There is a visitor, no doubt, and you still at breakfast, Rosalind! What will people think of your habits?"

"Visitors who come at this hour of the morning deserve to find one in bed!" returned Rosalind, composedly. "As for what they think of my habits, they are welcome to think that I am civilized, if they like."

"Miss Champion's in the sittin'-room, ma'am," said Ann, opening the door, and thinking that she would now have an opportunity to clear off the table.

"Very well," said Rosalind, draining her coffee-cup, and rising. She gave a slight grimace, for her mother's benefit. "Helen's early appearance is to be ascribed to the warmth of a sisterly heart, no doubt!" she said, mockingly. It was a not uncommon feature of the intimacy which existed between herself and the young lady in question, that they were prone to make speeches of this amiable kind about each other.

Nevertheless, it was a very affectionate meeting which took place when she entered the sitting-room where a tall, brunette girl, with a marked profile, an abundance of black hair, a full figure, and that air of style, which go to make up what people in general call "a very fine-looking woman," and a large number of men admire as a beauty, rose to meet her. At night, and in full dress, Helen Champion was very striking in appearance, for she had then a brilliant color, and her bearing was always fine; but in the morning her complexion was pale and sallow, and by the side of Rosalind's fine features, and delicate brightness of bloom, she looked as if Nature had fashioned her heavily and carelessly, using no exquisite workmanship, but lavishing instead strongly marked tints and large curves of flesh and blood.

After embracing each other, and exchanging two or three kisses in quick succession, mingled with "*So glad to see you back again!*" and "*How do you do?*" the two friends sat down side by side, and critically regarded each other. Rosalind's glance took in the whole style and fashion of Helen's dress. Helen's eyes dwelt, with an envy which she would not have acknowledged even to herself, on Rosalind's face. Then each asked the other how she was, and having received a coherent answer, they plunged into general conversation,

"How good it is of you to come!" said Rosalind. "So early, too — I feel immensely complimented."

"I could not stay away!" said Miss Champion. "Of course it was your place to come to see me, since I reached home only yesterday, and I suppose I should have played propriety and waited for you, if Brother James had not told us his news this morning. Then I felt as if I must come! And so you are really to be my sister, Rosalind!"

"I suppose so," said Rosalind, composedly. "But James might have come this morning and asked me if I had changed my mind — one does sometimes change one's mind after sleeping on a thing — before making his news public, I think!"

This speech was uttered with slightly malicious intent, for nobody knew better than Rosalind that the Champions rather disapproved of her as the choice of their nonpareil James, though it is doubtful whether any of them were bold enough to suggest to James that he might display his wisdom to more advantage by another choice.

"Do you mean that it is not settled, then?" asked Miss Champion, who took things very literally. "Brother James spoke so positively, that we thought of course it was an engagement."

"I believe it is an engagement," said Rosalind, who knew James better than to contradict what he asserted, and who, besides, had a slightly more than conventional regard for the truth. "But I have not grown used to the thought of it yet. It seems very strange that I am really, after all, going to marry somebody who lives in Stansbury. You know I always said I never would."

"But one says a great many things which fortunately one is not obliged to carry out," said Miss Champion, who probably remembered a great many such sayings on her own account. "Though indeed you are quite right about thinking Stansbury a very poor place to marry in," she went on, with an impartial air. "Apart from Brother James, I really do not know anybody whom it is possible to call a good match."

This was a trifle hard to bear, even to the fortunate person who had the felicity to be Brother James's betrothed, and family pride, as well as the desire to be provoking, made Rosalind reply:

"I am not sure that I agree with you. What is the proverb about every swan thinking its own bird whitest? Not to speak of Basil — whom I consider a treasure too good for any woman with whom I am acquainted — there is Gordon Lacy, who, everybody says, is going to be famous some day."

"But one can't live on what everybody says, nor even on the fame when it comes," said the other, with a laugh. "Madeleine has found that out, has she not? Brother James says it would have been much better if Gordon had kept to the law. Not but that I like him exceedingly," she added, hastily, "and you have no idea how much people are beginning to talk about him — as much, you know, as they talk about any thing literary, in fashionable society, which is very little."

"What do they talk about?" asked Rosalind, who had not been out of Stansbury since her childhood, and who, whether she would or not, was therefore obliged to sit at the feet of her more fortunate friend with regard to society experience.

"People mostly," was the careless reply. Conversation may be a little brighter than ours here at Stansbury, but it is very much the same in substance. Wherever one goes, one seems to get into a groove of gossip, and the only difference is the people one gossips about."

"That must be very stupid," said Rosalind. "I grow tired of gossip here, and to go away and find no change would be very disappointing."

"Oh, but there is a change," said Miss Champion. "Here one gossips about the same people from one year's end to another; but if you go away, you find fresh people and fresh interest. Occasionally new people come here, however. Have you seen this Mr. Devereux whom everybody is talking about?"

"I fancy that I caught a glimpse of him yesterday evening. It was merely a glimpse, and only for a minute."

"I suppose it was he whom I met a little while ago, as I came up the street — a tall, handsome man, with the air of style which one does not usually see out of a city. Brother James was speaking of him this morning: he says he has come here with all kinds of sinister intentions toward Mary Carlisle; but he does not look like a sinister person, and since we know that he belongs to nice people, I think some attention ought to be paid to him. It is really very hard to face the idea of coming home and settling down without a single entertaining man to amuse one."

"How complimentary you are to your old friends!" said Rosalind, feeling herself grow warm over the implied slight to the old friends in question.

"But one's old friends are stupid because one knows all about them," said Miss Champion. "No doubt they do not strike you so, because you have not been away and seen scores of entertaining people; but I assure you I feel the contrast already very sensibly, and I am sure I shall be bored to death within a month."

"What a pity you had not made up your mind to stay away for good, then, with some one of the entertaining people!" said Rosalind, who could not resist the temptation to let fly a small arrow of sarcasm. "But the newest of friends or lovers must grow old in time, and the important question is, how will he wear in that case? After all, there are worse principles of selection than that on which the Vicar of Wakefield chose his wife, and she her wedding-gown."

"I suppose that is the principle on which you have chosen Brother James," said Miss Champion, thinking that it would not be possible for James to give the same good reason for his choice. "I am not sure that I should be complimented if I were in his place."

"James and myself understand each other very well," answered Rosalind, nonchalantly. "But tell me about yourself," said she, suddenly dropping her weapons and rushing into the affectionate familiarity which — alternating with such little amenities as the above — distinguished their intercourse. "Have you had a delightful time? Were your admirers all nice, and

your dresses all in the fashion? Did you enjoy your visits to your friends? and is watering-place life as charming as everybody says it is?"

In the course of the answers which these questions elicited, Rosalind was shrewd enough to perceive that Madeleine had been right when she said that the cause of Helen's disappointment in her summer campaign was probably to be found in the fact that she had not met with that high degree of appreciation which is necessary to the mental equipoise of those young ladies whom society has agreed to call belles. A fish which is very large in a mill-pond, would make but a small appearance in the ocean. Apart from her personal charms, Miss Champion — in a moderate way, and regarded from a *post-bellum* point of view — was an heiress in Stansbury. Miss Champion had found her personal charms outshone, and her heiress-ship quite eclipsed, when she went out into that world of society which is to be found in cities and at fashionable watering-places. Hence her views of society in general were slightly tinged with misanthropy.

"The men one meets, with a very few exceptions, are all fortune-hunters," she said, "and the women are all bent on out-dressing each other. As for manners, what one reads about the girl of the period is not exaggerated. You would not believe, if I were to tell you, all that I have seen and heard this summer. Still, I have had a pleasant time on the whole, and improved my knowledge of the world. Rosalind, we must really try to make things a little gayer than they have been in Stansbury. What do you think of attempting to organize a dramatic and musical club?"

"I think it would be very pleasant if it could be done. But where is the material?"

"That may be found. Gordon Lacy would be a treasure in any thing of the kind. You must all come to me next week, and we will try to organize a plan. I shall simply die of *ennui* if this state of affairs continues."

To avert such a calamity, Rosalind pledged herself to whatever was required of her either in a dramatic or musical point of view, and went rather beyond what was prudent in pledging Madeleine, Basil, and Gordon, also. "What an acquisition Mr. Devereux would be, would he not?" she said meditatively in conclusion, thinking of his blond beard and handsome figure, in connection with a future stage.

Miss Champion's black eyes gave a flash. "If he stays here for any length of time, I intend to know him," she said, with decision; and there was a great deal of meaning embodied in that resolution.

After much desultory conversation of this description, and many plans, largely and indefinitely sketched, for the social reformation of as much of Stansbury as the reformers chose to recognize, Miss Champion rose at last and said that she must really go. She did go — as far as the hall. There she encountered Mrs. Severn, who, being at leisure just then, was very glad to see her, and very glad to encourage her to further revelations with regard to her social experiences and knowledge of the world. Miss Champion being fond of relating things new and strange, and perhaps not loath to linger, sat down and talked for a considerably longer time. After a while, however, she was warned by the striking of a clock that the morning was over, and the primitive dinner-hour of Stansbury near at hand; so she rose and said again that she must really go. This time she reached the gate. A quarter of an hour later, she was still standing there, exchanging a few last important confidences with Rosalind, when Basil came down the street.

Miss Champion saw him afar off, as indeed she would have been blind if she had not seen him, since the view was entirely unimpeded. She laughed, and drew down her veil. "What a visitation I have made this morning!" she said. "Yonder is Mr. Severn coming home to dinner. You must really try to excuse me, but I have had so much to say. Good-by, dear, and do come to see me very soon — mamma is so anxious to see you, and I think I have earned it of you."

"Yes, I shall certainly come soon," said Rosalind; "but when I do, I will not stay and wait for James!" she added, sotto voce, as her friend moved away. She stood still and rather maliciously watched the meeting of the latter with Basil. When he saw who was advancing toward him, he raised his hat with a flashing smile, then rode up to the pavement, and, springing from his horse, eagerly shook hands. Miss Champion paused, and a conversation of some length

ensued. Finally a small boy, opportunely passing, was intrusted with the care of Roland, while Mr. Severn, deliberately turning his back on his dinner, sauntered away by the young lady's side, with that air which indicates any thing rather than an intense desire to reach the point of destination.

"Do you see no signs of Basil, Rosalind?" asked her mother, anxiously, when she returned to the house. "There is a very fine fish for dinner, which will certainly be spoiled if he does not come soon."

"I think you had better order it up and let us have the benefit of it, then, mamma," said Rosalind; "for Basil is walking home with Helen, and, to judge by the rate at which they were proceeding when I saw them last, I don't think he is likely to be here in less than an hour — if so soon."

At that moment, Basil was saying, "So you have been spending the morning with Rosalind! That is kind of you, since you reached home only yesterday, and after such a long absence had a right to rest for a week."

"But though the absence has been long, the journey was not," answered she. "Who is it remarks that one does not travel nowadays, one only arrives at places? I arrived in Stansbury yesterday, it is true, but I am not tired at all to-day, and I could not refrain from going to see Rosalind and telling her how glad I am that we are to be sisters."

Basil flushed a little. There was something very suggestive in the last word, as the girl who uttered it knew perfectly well. She looked before her, however, with the most complete unconsciousness, and went on with the prettiest propriety:

"We have always been such friends, you know — such particular and dear friends — that it really seems as if Brother James had consulted my choice as well as his own. And yet I hate to give Rosalind up even to him — that is, I hate to see her marry. People say that marriage ends a great many things."

"But affection need not be one of them," said Basil, "especially since, as you say, Rosalind is going to be your sister. I should think that a real tie would strengthen instead of weaken the attachment between you." Miss Champion shook her head. She was evidently bent upon taking a pensive view of Rosalind's engagement. "Marriage ends friendship," she said. "Husbands are always jealous. Even Brother James is a man like other men."

"But I thought it was just the other way," laughed Basil, passing over the latter admission — which was really remarkable from one of Brother James's admiring family — "I thought it was wives who are said to be always jealous of their husbands' early friends. You know the old couplet which I suppose has a grain of truth in it:

'My son is my son till he gets him a wife,  
My daughter's my daughter all the days of her life.'

That goes to prove that it is the wife, and not the husband, who makes war against early affections."

"Or else women are more faithful than men."

"Nobody doubts *that*," said chivalric Basil, "at least nobody worth considering."

"A great many people must be not worth considering, then," said Miss Champion, smiling.

Now, there was nothing very interesting in this conversation, yet both Basil and his companion felt that it was rather pleasant to idle along the shady side of the street, with the golden boughs arching over them, and fragrant, freshly -fallen leaves rustling under their feet, while they talked such common-places as these. Helen Champion felt it because she knew that Severn admired her, and she had a most sincere enjoyment of this admiration, united to an absolute necessity for some interest, some excitement, some incense to her vanity, in the dull stagnation of the life to which she had returned. Severn felt it because, against his better judgment,

he was conscious that the sun shone more brightly, the air was more soft, and the whole earth fairer to him, when this woman walked by his side.

"How well you are looking!" he said, after a while — which was as much of a compliment as he ever allowed himself to utter — "I think you must have enjoyed your summer very much."

"No — not very much; only moderately," she answered. "Part of it was very tiresome. I begin to think that I have no very great taste for dissipation, after all."

"So you have not come back ready to be disgusted by Stansbury quietness and dullness?"

"I certainly have not come back ready to be disgusted with Stansbury, but the quietness and dullness might be improved — don't you think so?"

"If you mean that it would be desirable to improve them, I agree with you; if you mean that it would be possible — I don't know."

"You have little faith and less energy," said she, shaking her head at him. "I am like Brother James. If a thing ought to be done, I say that it must be done. For two or three years past, we have all been saying that there ought to be something done to stir social life in Stansbury; yet nobody does it. Now I am going to do it."

"Are you? I shall pledge the success of your undertaking in our best bottle of wine when I go home."

"But you must do something more than pledge it, or it will never be a success. You must help me to make it one. Will you?"

"Of course I will," answered Basil, promptly. What else could he answer when such a direct appeal was made to him, seconded by bright black eyes and full scarlet lips? "That is, I will do what I can," he added. "But I have very little leisure for social amusements."

"If everybody said that, there would be no social amusements," remarked Miss Champion, with an air of conclusive logic.

"Very true; but everybody does not say it. On the contrary, there are plenty of people who care for little besides society."

"I wish we had a few of that class of people in Stansbury. I think they would improve us amazingly."

"Do you?" said Severn. They had reached the Champion door by this time, and on the steps he paused. "So you have come back demoralized, after all!" said he, smiling.

"Do you call it demoralized to have learned that Stansbury is no worse — no more given to gossip, slander, and all uncharitableness — nor very much more stupid, than its neighbors?" asked she, swinging her parasol to and fro, and looking very handsome just then with the light shadows of the branching elms falling over her.

"No; but still you seem to be finding fault with us."

"Do you fancy yourselves perfect? Socially I think there is a great deal yet to be done — and I mean to do it! Come!" — she held out her hand, a well-shaped hand in a well-fitting glove — "will you pledge your assistance when I need it?"

As Basil took the hand thus offered, an answer rose to his lips which for once he did not check: "*Qui m'aime me suit!*" he said, in a low voice. "Was that call ever unheeded?"

"Then I consider you pledged," said Miss Champion. She blushed a very little, and drew back her hand; but she was not offended. Her experiences had taught her that this was very mild flirtation indeed. "But I must say good-morning, unless you will come in. Mamma will be very glad to see you."

"No, thanks," said he, lifting his hat. "They are expecting me at home. Good-morning."

"Helen, was that Basil Severn talking with you?" asked Mrs. Champion when her daughter entered. "You ought to be very careful how you encourage his attentions. You know there has been some gossip about you already, and this foolish affair of James's will make people talk all the more."

"I have no idea of encouraging his attentions," said Helen; "but what is the good of being young if one has not some amusement? — and he is rather pleasant, as men go."

## Chapter IX.

### Rosalind Takes A Walk.

The man who was rather pleasant, as men go, told his feminine audience at dinner that he had received a short note from Madeleine, informing him that Mary Carlisle had decided to see Mr. Devereux.

"I am sorry for it," he said, "but it is one of the things for which there is no remedy. She is at liberty to see the man if she chooses — and to make a fool of herself also!" Basil was very much vexed, or he would not have used the latter expression.

"But why should you think that there is any danger of her making a fool of herself?" asked Rosalind. "Mary has a great deal of sense, and she believes in you to such an extent, that she certainly will not agree to any thing which you oppose."

"I am not sure of that," said Basil, a little grimly. "She has taken a fancy to act for herself, and, when a woman has that idea, Heaven only knows where it will end."

"Some women understand business almost as well as men do," said Mrs. Severn; "perhaps Mary may be of that kind. One never knows what one can do till one tries. There is Mrs. Anderson, Basil — you know how well she has managed two large plantations ever since her husband's death."

"Yes," said Basil, who was always respectful to his step-mother's commonplaces; "but Mrs. Anderson is an energetic, middle-aged woman, with the strength of a grenadier, while Mary is a blind girl, who has spent her life in a sick-chamber."

"There is a difference, certainly," said Mrs. Severn, candidly. "But this Mr. Devereux may be a better sort of person than you think."

"The devil is never so black as he is painted," said Rosalind, flippantly. "Helen Champion has quite made up her mind to cultivate Mr. Devereux. — Did she tell you so, Basil?"

"No," replied Basil, shortly, and his face darkened over. "It strikes me that women seem to care very little whether a man is honorable or not, so that he is good-looking, gentlemanly, and promises them amusement," he said, after a while, in a voice which sounded almost stern.

"It strikes one that the world in general cares very little about anybody's principles — or conduct either — so that he is agreeable and has money to spend," said Rosalind.

"Fortunately, the opinion of the world in general is no criterion at all," said Basil. "The world will cease to be the world when it does not applaud charlatans, and honor rogues."

And if the young man spoke a little bitterly, it may be forgiven him in consideration of the school in which he had learned his philosophy. Never was man less fitted by Nature for the part of misanthrope than Basil Severn; never was man to whom the impulse came more warmly to regard with eyes of charity all his fellow-men; but some stings sink deep and remain forever in the soul; some wounds do not pass into scars, but remain forever open and bleeding. It is doubtful whether a lifetime of success, and that eager deference which the world is always ready to pay to the risen or the rising sun, could have effaced from that gentle and kindly heart the record branded on it during the impressionable years of youth — the record of that stern struggle in which he had seen his birthright wrested from him by fraud and chicanery, in which the honor of men had been taken from his father's stainless memory to be paid to those who had robbed and betrayed him, and in which he had met only distrust and coldness in his own effort to win his bread and keep his name untarnished.

After dinner Rosalind followed him out to the portico where he was lighting a cigar, and, with a careless air, spoke again of Mr. Devereux.

"Did Madeleine mention when Mary intended to see him?" she inquired.

"At four o'clock this afternoon, I believe," Severn answered, puffing out a cloud of smoke. "Why do you ask?"

"Only because I promised Madeleine to walk out to the Lodge for her, and I did not care to chance upon the important interview."

"Has not Champion been on duty to-day? I am surprised at that?"

"He told me not to expect him. Next week is court somewhere, and it seems he is very busy getting his cases ready. You know he never defers business to pleasure."

"I know he is a remarkable fellow in more respects than one," said Basil, laughing; but he glanced critically at the beautiful, calm face as he spoke. Was Rosalind really so well satisfied with this deferring pleasure to business as she appeared? — or was satisfaction another name for indifference?

Rosalind was unusually restless that afternoon; even her mother noticed that. She wandered up-stairs and down-stairs, out into the garden, and back into the house; she sat down to the piano and sang half of a song; she read two or three pages of a new novel and then threw it down. Finally she vanished into her own room, and was neither seen nor heard from again until she emerged just as the clock was striking four, arrayed for walking.

"How pretty you look, my dear!" said Mrs. Severn — whom most people would have considered a very injudicious mother because she occasionally expressed in words the agreeable fact of which Rosalind's mirror had already assured her — "but surely you have not put on that dress to walk out to the Lodge?"

That dress was a pearl-colored walking-suit, which was one of Rosalind's prettiest costumes, though made of inexpensive material. Every thing about it was charmingly becoming — the short, kilt-plaited skirt, the puffed and paniered overskirt (one of those Second Empire styles which the feminine world was wearing in the summer of 1870), the dainty white ruffle and blue scarf at the throat, and a gold locket on a blue ribbon. Add to this a leghorn hat trimmed with blue, of one of those quaint and becoming shapes which remind one of a Watteau shepherdess, and it will be perceived that Mrs. Severn's surprise was not without reason.

"Yes," said Rosalind, with a laugh, "I had nothing else to do, so I thought I would make myself look pretty. James will take it as a compliment to himself when he comes this evening — such is the vanity and short-sightedness of man! I don't think I shall harm my dress by walking out to the Lodge, mamma. It is not very dusty."

She passed from the hall as she spoke, and Mrs. Severn watched her graceful figure down the walk and out of the gate. In her light, picturesque attire, she seemed in keeping with the glory of the afternoon, her mother thought, and she could not refrain from sighing again at the reflection that all this beauty and grace was to be bestowed on James Champion. If James Champion's mother had been present, she would probably have sighed at the thought of her matchless son throwing himself away on a frivolous girl, who had never appeared properly grateful for the distinguished honor of his preference, and who had "only her beauty to recommend her," as Mrs. Champion often remarked. There is certainly no such thing as pleasing everybody, in this world, especially with regard to the delicate and difficult business of matrimony; though it can be said for James Champion that he had never for a moment thought of pleasing anybody but himself.

Rosalind took her way out of town with meditative slowness. To do her justice, she had not made her toilet or selected her hour with any view to the possible contingency of meeting Devereux at the Lodge: her idea only extended to the probability of meeting him on the road, and observing if he were really as handsome as he had appeared to her the evening before. Seeing, however, implies being seen; and she had been mindful of this fact in the pains which she had bestowed upon her toilet. It was needful to impress this traveled gentleman with the fact that

Stansbury had one attraction, at least, of which to boast, and it was with this high and impersonal view that Rosalind set forth in her pearl-colored dress and blue ribbons.

The afternoon was so lovely — so abounding in brightness, so brilliant with color — that it tempted her to dalliance, little as she cared usually for the sunniest smile which Nature could wear, the gayest robe with which she could adorn herself. But, then, Rosalind had a reason for dalliance apart from the beauty of earth and sky. She was on the direct road to the Lodge, so that if Devereux left before she reached there, she must certainly meet him, while, if her arrival antedated his departure, she would probably only obtain an unsatisfactory glimpse of his back, from the library, in which she was able to fancy herself with Madeleine and Mrs. Ingram, while all the delicate and becoming effect of her costume was wasted. Therefore, she loitered along the sunny foot-path by the side of the road, meeting now and then a man, woman, or child, most of whom spoke to her, and all of whom stared at her admiringly. Rosalind did not object to the stares. She had a comfortable conviction that even the cows which she met, leisurely returning home, looked at her with something of appreciation in their large, full eyes.

The path which she was following kept close to a zigzag rail-fence, with blackberry-bushes growing thickly within its corners. It inclosed a cotton-field, in which the hands were at work picking, the sunlight resting like a mantle of gold over the broad acres "white with the snow of Southern summers," over other fields beyond, and blue woods in the distance. Some of the negroes were singing as they worked — one of the old plantation songs familiar to every Southern ear — a wagon loaded with wood came by, and two negroes who were perched on top caught up the refrain and filled the air with it as they passed slowly along. It brought the recollections of her childhood back to Rosalind, with a sense of startling reality. Just such barbaric melodies she had heard when, as a child, on her father's plantation, she had stood a fascinated spectator of "corn-shuckings," or gone out on the river in a flat-boat and listened to the boatmen's songs as they poled. Perhaps it was the song and the memories which it awakened, or perhaps it was the sun shining directly in her eyes, that made her inattentive to any thing except the path along which she was slowly walking — a path leading just then down the slope of a hill, at the foot of which a broad, shallow stream crossed the road. It is at least certain that she did not perceive a figure advancing to meet her on the opposite side of the stream.

That is, she did not perceive it until she had already taken several steps on the log which was thrown over the water for the accommodation of foot-passengers. Then, looking up, she saw a man standing on the other side, evidently waiting for her to cross. A glance was enough to show her that it was the stranger of distinguished appearance whom she had seen the evening before. The unexpected sight startled and confused her, just when she had most need of her presence of mind, for the log was small and offered footing by no means secure. If she had caught a glimpse of him beforehand, it would have been enough to prepare her, and there is no doubt but that she would have been collected and graceful even in this trying and tilting position, but she had not obtained that glimpse, for the road made a sharp bend immediately after crossing the stream, and around this bend Mr. Devereux had come while she was doubtfully hesitating over the passage of the log. He had started when he saw her, but then his start had the advantage of being on dry ground. It was the last thing which he was expecting to see, this daintily-dressed lady, standing on the dusty foot-path, with a flood of sunshine streaming over the beautiful face, with its wild-rose tints and hair of rich bronze-brown, which he recognized at once. He was gazing at her steadily when Rosalind looked up, and, as she met his eyes, she gave a start — tottered — and extended her hand to grasp the rail-fence which spanned the stream a little farther up. But, unluckily, human arms are not elastic. The fence was quite beyond her reach. The next instant, she had lost her balance — slipped — fallen — and found herself, with all her pearl-and-azure glories, in the water!

It is not too much to say that this was an instant of as keen humiliation to Rosalind as any she had ever known in her life. Thought, as we are aware, is quick as lightning, and she felt, in the second during which she tottered and fell, all the awkwardness, the mortification, the

undignified nature of her position, as clearly as she realized it afterward. She was one of the people to whom, of all the evils of earth, ridicule is the most terrible, and she could almost have prayed the earth to swallow her as she found herself on her knees and hands in the mud and water. But the earth, out of the Arabian Nights, is never so obliging as to do this, and, since her hat had fallen over her face and her skirts encumbered her, she had no alternative but to remain in her ungraceful and uncomfortable attitude during the long, horrible seconds which it took Devereux to stride forward and lift her up.

As he did so, her hat fell off into the water, but neither of them noticed it. Rosalind gasped as she looked at him; and, but for a timely fear of adding to the ridicule of the situation, she would have burst into tears. As for Devereux, he was seriously concerned.

"I am afraid you are hurt," he said, with the deepest regret in his voice, as he assisted her to the bank. "It was a dreadful fall. I would have saved you if I could."

"No, I am not hurt," she answered, tremulously, after a short pause. Then she flushed scarlet, and drew away from him with a little, hysterical attempt at a laugh. "It was very awkward of me, and I — I am very sorry to have troubled you," she said. "I shall do very well now, thanks."

As she spoke, she was intensely conscious of the pitiable figure which she presented — her dress wet, muddy, ruined; her hat gone, her hair disordered, her boots soaked, her gloves fit only to fling away. If she had detected a single flicker of amusement in Devereux's face, it is impossible to say what she would have done. But the sharpest eyes in the world could not have detected any thing of the kind. He was honestly sorry for her — sorry for her distress, her mortification, her uncomfortable plight — and his face expressed this sorrow in a manner which could not be mistaken.

"You will certainly take cold," he said, anxiously. "Can I do nothing? Is there no house near at hand?"

"There is none nearer than the Lodge," answered Rosalind. "I was going there. I must walk a little faster now, that is all."

"The Lodge!" he repeated. "Do you mean Miss Carlisle's place? I am just from there. My name is Devereux. Pray, let me assist you in some way."

"There is no way in which you can assist me," said Rosalind, pettishly. Just then she felt that she detested him. Was not he at once the cause and the witness of her humiliation? "It is your fault!" she added, impatiently. "Why need you have come so suddenly around the corner and startled me? If you had not done so, I should not have lost my balance."

"I am exceedingly sorry," he said — and, indeed, he looked overcome with self-reproach — "I had no idea that it was my fault. I never was more sorry for any thing. But I could not know that you had not seen me until you were on the log," he added, with a faint attempt at self-justification. "I had been in sight for two or three minutes at least."

"I had not seen you at all," said Rosalind, decidedly. "It was because I saw you at last, so unexpectedly, that I started and — and fell. There is no good in discussing it," she added, brusquely. "I am sorry that you were obliged to get your feet wet, and I advise you to go on to town as quickly as possible. Good-evening."

She turned shortly and walked away, for hot tears of mortification were, despite all her efforts, gathering in her eyes, and she was afraid that, if she delayed another minute, they would fall. Never in her life had such a misfortune befallen her before, so she scarcely knew how to bear it. She had always been one of the people who are peculiarly intolerant of any thing like awkwardness, and who guard against disagreeable accidents with particular care. To be seen in an ungraceful or an undignified position, was something so terrible to her that those who are humorous enough, or philosophical enough, or careless enough to think lightly of such things, could not possibly appreciate the keenness of her distress. She clinched her muddy hands together and swallowed the salt tears which chased each other down her cheeks, as she hastened along, so intent upon reaching the Lodge before any one came by to see her woful plight, that she would

not pause for an instant, nor glance back to see whether or not that "detestable man" was laughing at her, now that he could do so with impunity. A small negro urchin in tattered raiment, whom she met, opened his eyes and mouth both to stare at her, and, although she had a strong inclination to box his ears, she felt that she could not spare the time necessary for doing so. Even the cows had, to her excited fancy, changed their aspect of serene, contemplative admiration for a glance of wondering derision.

The detestable man whom she left behind had, meanwhile, applied himself seriously to the task of fishing her hat out of the water in which it lay with all its pretty bravery of blue ribbons and forget-me-nots. It was a sorry sight when he drew it to land at last, by the aid of a crooked stick. He regarded it hesitatingly for a minute, as if uncertain what to do next; then, with an apparently sudden impulse, turned and followed the young lady. Fast as she was walking, he soon overtook her — since, naturally enough, his legs were able to accomplish much longer strides than hers— but he was not prepared for the haughtiness with which she turned on him as he did so.

"Excuse me," she said, "but I thought I told you that there was nothing which I needed."

"Excuse me," he said, humbly, touched and made willing to pardon her *brusquerie* by the sight of the tears glittering on her lashes; "I should not have followed you only I thought it best to bring you this."

He extended the hat as he spoke. It had been Rosalind's favorite (because most becoming) head-gear, and the sight of its utter ruin did not tend to restore her amiability.

"It was useless to have taken so much trouble," she said, ungraciously. "Why did you not leave it in the stream? It will never be fit for any thing again."

"I was afraid not," said he, looking at it compassionately. "But still I am sure you would not have liked it left in the stream, if only because every one who passed would have recognized it, and wondered how it came there."

There was so much of thoughtful consideration in this that Rosalind felt suddenly ashamed of her bad temper. After all, the misadventure was her own fault, and there was no need to make the enormity greater in Mr. Devereux's eyes by pettish unamiability. Therefore she smiled — an April-like gleam which brightened her face as she turned toward him, conscious that, despite mud and water, she was still an exceedingly pretty woman.

"They would have thought, perhaps, that I had been drowned and swept away like Ophelia," she said. "That would have been tragic at least, and better than falling off a log — which is simply ridiculous."

"But people are never drowned in five or six inches of water," said Devereux, smiling in turn. "I am afraid that, with the suspicious conjunction of the log, they could only have arrived at an idea of the truth. But you must allow me to apologize again for my unfortunate appearance," he went on, seriously. "You cannot tell how I regret it. If it had been only possible for me to imagine —"

But here Rosalind interposed penitently.

"Of course it was not possible, and it is I who must apologize for having been rude enough to say that my awkwardness was in any respect your fault. Pray excuse me. It is the old impulse of human nature to blame some one else for one's misfortunes."

"But you were right in this instance," he said. "I saw that you started when you perceived me, and that immediately you lost your balance. That makes it my fault, and it is impossible for me to say how sorry I am. Do you think that you will suffer seriously? Do you easily take cold?"

"I don't know," she answered. "I never fell into water before. This is my first experience, and the consequences are yet to be seen."

"I am really afraid you may be ill."

"I have no such fear. I may take a sore-throat from my wet feet, but that will be all, I am sure. You may take the same," she added, glancing at his boots, which were quite as muddy now as they had been dusty before. "I have not thanked you yet for coming to my rescue," she went on,

with a blush which Devereux thought as exquisite as any thing he had ever seen. "You must think me very ungrateful."

"Not in the least," he answered, sincerely. "I am so much oppressed by a sense of my responsibility that I cannot for a moment think that I deserve any thanks. Besides, I did nothing."

"You placed me on my feet again. I don't know how I should have gained them without your assistance."

"I would say that I am very glad to have been at hand to render such a service, but for the dreadful fact that, if I had not been at hand, there would probably have been no accident."

"I am not sure of that," said Rosalind, showing one or two charming dimples about her mouth. "The log was very insecure."

She began to think that he bore the difficult test of an awkward introduction very well. He had that polish and ease of manner which she had always admired as the first and most desirable of social gifts, and although it is not possible to say that she was reconciled to the accident which had made them acquainted — for the undignified nature of it was not less hard to endure than the loss of her dress and hat — she was at least able to acknowledge that Mr. Devereux had borne his share of the awkwardness with tact and courtesy.

They were walking so rapidly that they reached the gate of the Lodge before very long. There Rosalind paused and held out her hand for the hat which Devereux still carried by its wet ribbons.

"I am exceedingly grateful to you," she said, more graciously than she had spoken yet, "and I am very sorry that you have had so much trouble. Thank you again, and pray try to forget my unreasonable impatience. I hope you will suffer no ill consequences from getting your feet wet."

He took his dismissal at once — stepping back a little and raising his hat. "There is no danger of my suffering any thing," he said. "A pair of wet feet are of no consequence whatever. But I am really uneasy about your condition. Will you suffer me to inquire to-morrow whether or not you have taken cold?"

"There is really no necessity for your taking that trouble," said Rosalind, blushing vividly. She would have liked to say yes; but she was not sure about the propriety of doing so, and she was quite sure that Basil and James Champion would both object. "I shall do very well," she went on quickly; "thank you again, and good-evening."

She bowed hastily and flitted away, the shrubs and evergreens which grew about the entrance of the Lodge soon hiding her figure from sight. As it disappeared, Devereux turned and walked again — rather slowly — toward the town. His first thought was that she was not less beautiful than he had imagined the evening before — a fact which surprised him, since he knew the illusive power of distance, and the effect of picturesque surroundings, and had calculated that half at least of her remarkable loveliness was due to those. His second thought was to wonder whether she was a sister of Basil Severn, mingled with a reflection that, if so, Basil Severn was fortunate in his sisters — a short-sighted reasoning from personal beauty to moral attraction, which probably arose from the fact that Mr. Devereux had no sisters of his own, and had, therefore, never had the advantage of regarding lovely woman, either generally or particularly, from the impartial fraternal point of view. His third thought was that Fate seemed capriciously bent upon multiplying remarkable impressions upon him since his arrival in Stansbury; and his fourth — which was another instance of very illogical leaping to a general conclusion — was, that Stansbury, with regard to its inhabitants, must be a remarkable town.

## Chapter X.

### Roses And Thorns.

Despite her confident assurances to Devereux that no harm to her health would ensue from the wetting which she had received, Rosalind was confined to her room the next day with a cold which required a little domestic doctoring. As for the pearl-colored dress, it was beyond all hope of ever making presentable again, and, after regarding it ruefully in the light of morning, the patient, with that fine and lavish generosity which is at the bottom of much of the charity of the world (especially in the testamentary order), presented it to Ann. "Take it out of my sight, and never let me see it again," she said; and Ann was ready enough to obey. The ill-wind of Rosalind's mishap blew a very substantial benefit to her, since, as she remarked to the cook, the dress was quite as good as ever — if you looked at it behind; and she already saw herself arrayed in it, and occupying a conspicuous seat in the African Methodist church on Sunday.

While Rosalind was confined to her room, and boring herself with a novel — she had no great taste for reading, and often declared that she never honestly enjoyed any work of fiction except "The Count of Monte Christo" — the gentleman who had the misfortune of having been the cause of her accident made his appearance in Basil Severn's counting-house with the unpleasant yet scarcely unexpected intelligence that he had Miss Carlisle's permission to see him with a view to discovering if some arrangement could not be made by which the lawsuit pending between them might be ended.

"I suppose you mean a compromise," said Basil, a little haughtily. "There is no other arrangement of which I know. Am I to understand that Miss Carlisle has consented to that?"

"Miss Carlisle has not consented to any thing," Devereux answered, quietly. "She referred me to yourself, placing her interest entirely in your hands."

"In that case," said the young man, "there is no need to discuss the matter. I shall not yield an inch, or compromise a farthing. The law must decide between us, Mr. Devereux, and the law alone."

"I am sorry that you are so determined," said Devereux. "I am sorry that you will not listen to reason. Above all, I am sorry that you distrust my sincerity when I declare that I am thinking of Miss Carlisle's interest rather than of my own."

"If you will pardon me for saying so, I am unable to imagine why you should think of Miss Carlisle's interest rather than of your own," answered Basil, coldly. "Disinterestedness is a very fine thing, but it is a thing one meets so seldom in the world —"

"That you are inclined to doubt its existence," said Devereux, as he paused. "Very well, Mr. Severn, I have done my best — I hope you will do me the justice to remember that — and the subject ends, therefore. I shall not trouble you with it again; but, before we part, I should like to ask if it is entirely out of your experience or beyond your conception that a man could prefer self-respect to interest."

The blood came into Basil's face with a quick rush. It was not so much the tone which vibrated through this question as the answer which his own conscience gave to it that, for a second, rendered him almost incapable of reply. Was he, indeed, doing another the injustice which in his own person he had more than once felt to be the keenest in the world? It would have been a trifling question to most men, but Basil never forgot the moment in which he seemed to stand accused and convicted of rash judgment.

"No," he answered; "it is not beyond my conception to imagine such a thing. I should give poor testimony against myself if it were. If I have done you injustice in any respect, Mr. Devereux, I beg your pardon; but I cannot alter my decision. The interests committed to my charge are not my own, therefore I am doubly bound to do my best for them. There is nothing I would not sacrifice sooner than compromise in the least degree the trust which has been placed in my hands."

"I appreciate your fidelity," said Devereux. "Time alone can show whether I am right or wrong in thinking that you are making a great mistake. Meanwhile, is there any reason why we should consider each other in the light of antagonists?"

"I suppose not," answered Basil, won despite himself by the other's frankness. It was impossible to avoid being prepossessed toward Devereux. Even those who were most prejudiced against him acknowledged the charm of his manner, the cordial sweetness of his smile. He was not a particularly remarkable man, except for the gift of attraction — an inscrutable gift at best, and exceedingly hard to define — which better men often lack. It was impossible to deny that he possessed this in superlative degree, and, though many people at many times had said hard things of him, no one had ever been known to say that he was disagreeable.

After this, a little ordinary conversation took place, and Basil conquered his distrust far enough to yield to a hospitable impulse, and ask Devereux if he would not spend the evening with him. "We have very few attractions to offer," he said, "but you must find Stansbury dull."

"I do," said the other, candidly. Then he paused — hesitated an instant — finally went on with a smile; "Excuse me," he said, "if I ask whether your sister did not meet with an accident yesterday afternoon?"

"My sister!" repeated Basil, opening his eyes a little; for Devereux's connection with Rosalind's misadventure had not transpired in that young lady's domestic circle. "Yes, one of my sisters was unlucky enough to fall into the water in crossing a stream. I did not imagine that it was a sufficiently important occurrence to have become an item of news even in such a stagnant and gossiping place as Stansbury."

"I scarcely think that it has become so," said Devereux, "since I was the only witness of the accident, and this is the first time that I have spoken of it."

"Oh! you were a witness, then? Rosalind did not mention that — perhaps" (with a laugh), "she was not aware of it."

"Yes, she was aware of it," said Devereux, beginning to fancy that he had been deficient in tact in not imitating the young lady's reticence. But such reflections, like many of our brightest thoughts, generally come too late. "I only wished to inquire," he added, apologetically, "if she has suffered any ill consequences from her wetting."

"She has a cold," answered Basil — "nothing more, I believe; but it confines her to her chamber."

"I was afraid of that," said Devereux. "I am extremely sorry," he added; for he could not help feeling as if the accident and its consequences were in a measure his fault.

Some one else was concerned by Rosalind's indisposition — some one with a much better right than Mr. Devereux to feel concern. Champion, to whom she had given a very light account of her accident the evening before, was surprised, and a little inclined to be incredulous, when he called in the afternoon to ask her to ride and heard that she was confined to her room with a sore-throat and fever. "Is it possible her accident was so serious as that?" he said to Mrs. Severn. "She scarcely alluded to it yesterday evening, and merely spoke of having spoiled her dress."

"She did not tell us very much about it," Mrs. Severn answered, "but Madeleine says that she was very wet indeed when she reached the Lodge; Mary sent her home in the carriage, you know."

"Do you think she will be able to see me if I call this evening?" Champion asked, after a short pause, as he drew on his gloves.

Mrs. Severn hesitated. There was no counting on Rosalind. She was an intractable patient, as well as a capricious person. She might make an effort and come down-stairs, but more likely she would prefer the solitude of her chamber, with a wrapper and a novel. "If you will wait, Mr. Champion, I will send and ask her," she said, at last; unable to arrive at a decision, and afraid of vexing Rosalind by doing wrong.

Mr. Champion consented to wait; Mrs. Severn rang the bell, and in a few minutes he was rewarded by hearing that Rosalind was very sorry, but her throat was sore and her head ached, and she did not think she would be able to see him that evening.

Receiving this decision with only tolerable grace, he made his adieux to Mrs. Severn, mounted his horse, and rode away, ordering his groom to take the other horse back to the stable.

Ten minutes later another step entered the hall. This time it was Gordon Lacy, who, sauntering into the sitting-room — he was as much at home in the house as a tame cat, Rosalind often said — asked for Madeleine. "She is in the garden, I think," said Mrs. Severn. "At least, she spoke a little while ago of filling the vases."

To the garden, therefore, Lacy took his way. It was a charming place always — being Madeleine's own particular kingdom — but just now it seemed specially attractive, specially full of the fragrance of roses, the varying tints of many changing shrubs. In the depths of a perfect rose wilderness, he found Madeleine. She had her hands full of flowers, which she held out to him, smiling brightly.

"Are they not lovely?" she said. "Except May, there is no month like October for roses."

"I am jealous of these flowers," said Lacy. "I believe you care more for them than for any thing else in the world."

"I care for them exactly as you do for your poems and your stories," said she. "Do you care for them more than for any thing else in the world?"

"That is a fine question for you to ask, when you know that I would make a bonfire of the whole of them, and swear off from pen, ink, and paper forever, if it were a question of sparing you, I will not say one pang, but one vexation or annoyance."

"Would you?" she said. Her face softened into grateful tenderness, even though there was something wistful in the steady regard of her eyes. Perhaps she knew him better than he knew himself. "You think more of me than I deserve," she added, simply, "but I shall never ask such a sacrifice of you."

"I am sure you will never ask a sacrifice of anybody," said he, truthfully. "You were born to make, not to require, sacrifices."

He looked at her with eyes of honest love as he spoke, the sunshine, the warmth, the odor, were all about her — seeming to typify the brighter light, the rarer fragrance of true devotion which would encompass her life — yet Madeleine shrank a little. It seemed as if a cold hand grasped her heart — as if the very lips of love uttered words which had been uttered in her soul long before, and from which she had shrunk, as what child of earth does not shrink? Only the saints of God can stretch out their hands with the impassioned prayer, "Give me more suffering. Lord, or else I die!"

"Don't say that," she answered, in a low tone. "Sacrifices are terrible things. Who of us can know whether we should be strong enough to make them if they were demanded?"

"They never shall be demanded of you," said Lacy, confidently. "I only spoke of what is in your nature. But leave your roses alone now, and come with me to the summer-house. I have a manuscript in my pocket with which I want to bore you."

"You know that you never bore me," said she, quickly, and no one could have doubted her sincerity who looked at her face. Her lover never thought of doubting it; partly because he knew her uncompromising truthfulness, and partly because he could not, as a serious matter, entertain the idea that his manuscripts could bore anybody. They were interesting to him; why, then, should they not be interesting to everybody else? Save in his moments of depression, he had a profound conviction that they were, and with regard to Madeleine, at least, he had good reason to know that every thing which concerned him interested her.

They went to the summer-house — one of those curious old-fashioned ones of cedar, with the dark, quaint appearance outside, the pleasant aromatic odor within, which only exist in a few old gardens now — and there, while some birds twittered and sang in the green roof over their heads, and a church-bell was softly pealing out on the still air, Gordon read his manuscript. It was a poem — one of the most elaborate, and in some respects one of the best, he had ever written. Yet, in listening to it, Madeleine missed a certain simplicity which had been in her eyes one of the chief charms of his writing. It was more artistically finished and polished than much

which had gone before, but it was also more pretentious, and for the first time she caught a decided echo of the strains of one or two of those poets who have most strongly impressed their manner and spirit upon the minor singers of the day. As she noticed this, a doubt and hesitation, with regard to what she should say, came over her. To many, sufficiently sincere people, it would never have occurred; for there was much in the poem deserving the most honest praise — there was all the graceful fancy, the delicate feeling, and the perfect knowledge of versification, which she had often praised before; but there was a strain after something higher than the writer's powers were able to attain, there was a mystical obscurity of thought and an echo of mystical forms of expression which are familiar to all of us.

When the last smooth cadence fell from his lips, Lacy looked up, expecting the quick, sympathetic admiration which had always met him before. Instead, he surprised the half-troubled look in her eyes, the hesitating quiver of her lips. In such a position, Rosalind would have been at no loss: she would have told that part of the truth which was expedient, and gracefully suppressed the rest. But a compromise with veracity was a thing which never occurred to Madeleine. "You are absurdly and unnecessarily sincere," Rosalind often said; but even Rosalind acknowledged that this unwavering truth was a rock on which others could always depend. That it was an inconvenient rock, however, sometimes dawned on the comprehension of those about her, if not on that of Madeleine herself. Just now she almost felt it, as Gordon's eager glance met her own — and then his face suddenly changed.

"You do not like it!" he said, quickly. "Don't be afraid to say so. I see that you do not."

"I am not afraid," said Madeleine, with her most tender smile. "I know you too well to fancy for a moment that you would be offended by the truth. Besides, a critic is worth nothing, if he or she is not honest; and you say I am your critic. Shall I tell you then sincerely why I do not like it? "

"Of course," said he — but, although he tried to speak as usual, there came a tone of slight constraint into his voice — "you know I always want you to tell me exactly what you think."

"What I think, then," said she, laying her hand gently on his, "is, that you have been betrayed into a little too much imitation of the style and manner of Swinburne."

Lacy started back indignantly — the blood rushing in a tide to his face. Hardest of all charges for an author to bear patiently, whether just or unjust, is that of plagiarism.

"I certainly did not expect *that*," he said — his voice trembling a little — "at least, not from you, who ought to know that I would not imitate anybody. The versification may, to the ordinary ear, be slightly suggestive of Swinburne, but in reality the subject and treatment are altogether different from any thing which he has ever produced."

"Yes," said Madeleine, eagerly, "and it is for that very reason — because, in many of the most important points, it is altogether different — that I object to the slight resemblance which it bears to — to some of his poems."

"But I maintain that it does not bear any resemblance," said Lacy, emphatically. "Point out an instance of what you mean."

Madeleine drew the manuscript toward her and pointed to a verse.

"It strikes me that this sounds like an echo of certain strains in 'Atalanta in Calydon,' " she said. "Perhaps you may not have thought of it, but read it over and see if I am not right."

"I don't need to read it over to know that you are wrong," said Lacy, positively. "There is absolutely nothing like Swinburne in the poem. If the measure suggests 'Atalanta in Calydon,' I can't help that. I should have to give up writing altogether, if I endeavored to find measures which had never been used before."

"It is not the measure only," said Madeleine. "You must acknowledge that there are forms of expression which certain poets have made so distinctively their own that they are immediately suggestive of them."

"The plain English of what you mean, then," said Lacy, pushing the loose sheets of manuscript impatiently away, "is, that you consider this a plagiarism on Swinburne."

"No, no," said Madeleine, quickly. "You misunderstand me entirely. I only mean that there is something in it which suggests his style; but there is also much in it which is original — so much that is graceful and charming — that I should like to see this suggestion of resemblance removed."

"Oh, the thing is not worth recasting altogether, as I should have to do," said Gordon, drawing the sheets toward him and beginning to fold them together. "Probably it is not worth any thing at all," he added, with a short, unmirthful laugh. "It is only a pity that I have wasted so much time over it."

"I am so sorry!" said Madeleine, in a grieved tone. She did not add for what. If she had spoken what was in her mind, she would have said, "that I have vexed and depressed you." But, even to do away with this vexation and depression, she could not unsay her just criticism.

"It does not matter at all," said her companion, shuffling the papers into his pocket, and rising with a nonchalant air. "There is nothing to be sorry about. Of course, you couldn't say any thing but what you thought. — But this summer-house is rather damp, I am afraid. Suppose we go back to the roses? They are more interesting, after all."

"Nothing is better or more interesting to me than what concerns you," said Madeleine, laying her hand on his arm, and lifting her face to his, full of affection and contrition. "Gordon, don't — don't talk in that manner! How shall I be able to forgive myself if I have discouraged you, or made you doubt the excellence of your work?"

"It is a good thing for me to be discouraged, perhaps," said Gordon. "Likely enough, I am a conceited fool to dream for a moment that I can be any thing more than an echo of other men's strains."

"You know I did not mean that — you know I never thought that!" cried Madeleine. Tears sprang to her eyes. What could she say? Gordon was vexed and petulant, and not averse to making her feel uncomfortable; but it was also true that his ever-ready doubt and depression had fallen like a cloud upon him. Even to himself he said, in the soreness of his wounded self-love, that Madeleine was right to make him understand that his work was utterly' worthless, and himself a presumptuous plagiarist. As for Madeleine, she saw that to say any thing else would only make matters worse. And so they went back to the roses, with a constraint between them which took all the brightness and fragrance out of the evening, for one, at least.

While this little scene was in progress in the cedar summer-house, while James Champion was riding alone out of the town into the lovely, color-decked country, and Rosalind was thinking that her throat was better and that she was almost sorry she had not gone with him, since her room looked narrow and confined with the sunlight shining on the twinkling ivy-leaves around the window, Basil's quick step sounded on the gravel-walk, and Basil's cheerful presence entered the room where Mrs. Severn was sitting.

"You are such a famous house-keeper, mother, that I'm not afraid to tell you what I've done," he said, with a laugh. "Since I saw you, I have invited Mr. Devereux to tea. I hope you won't tell me that I have made a great mistake — that there's no butter in the house, or something of that kind."

"Invited Mr. Devereux to tea!" said Mrs. Severn, dropping her work into her lap. "Dear me, Basil, how much you are like your father! That was his way invariably. In the most off-hand manner he would ask half a dozen gentlemen to dinner, and give me, perhaps, half an hour's notice of it. I often told him what some women would have said of such things!"

"Then I have made a mistake!" said Basil. "I am very sorry, but it really never occurred to me that the tea we have every evening was not quite good enough for Mr. Devereux."

"I did not say that you had made a mistake," answered Mrs. Severn, beginning to fold her work; "only that it was so exactly like your father. Of course, the tea is good enough, though I

could have had a better one if you had let me know in time. As it is, I'll see what Becky can do, and get out the old china."

So it came to pass that, when Madeleine came in from the garden with her hands full of roses, she found Basil lounging in the hall with a newspaper, and heard that Mr. Devereux was expected to tea. She looked amazed at this intelligence, and Lacy, who was with her, uttered a low whistle. "You must have altered your opinion of that gentleman," he said.

"Well, yes," replied Severn, candidly. "I have altered my opinion a little. I don't clearly know what to make of him; but there's no harm in asking him to tea."

"None at all," said Madeleine, "since Arabian hospitality has fortunately gone out of fashion. As soon as I have put my flowers in water, I must tell Rosalind. What a pity she is sick! I have an idea that she would enjoy meeting Mr. Devereux."

Putting the flowers in water was not much of a task to such practised fingers as hers. She filled every vase and hanging basket; then, leaving the drawing-room full of perfume and soft evening light, ran up to Rosalind's chamber. To her surprise, she found that young lady standing before her mirror, evidently engaged in making a toilet. Her hair was coiffed, and she was putting the finishing touches to some light curls about her forehead when her sister entered.

"What are you doing?" the latter asked. "Is it possible you are thinking of coming down this evening?"

"I am not only thinking of it, but I am preparing for it," Rosalind answered, looking closely and critically at herself in the mirror. "You would not wonder, if you were as tired of this room as I am!"

"But how is your throat? and are you sure that you are not feverish now? Let me feel your pulse."

"My throat is better, and my fever is all gone," said Rosalind, extending a pretty white wrist for examination. "I am almost sorry I did not go to ride with James. But I felt lazy, and my head ached just then."

"Has Mr. Champion been here this afternoon?" asked Madeline. Instantly her mind flashed to a possible contingency. "In that case, Rosalind — since you did not see him — I do not think you ought to come down," she said. "It will seem strange."

"Why should it seem strange?" demanded Rosalind. "Cannot one's feelings change? James is not so absurdly unreasonable as to think any thing of my enjoying the lively pleasure of my domestic circle because I was not able to see him."

"But it will not be your domestic circle — at least not exclusively," said Madeleine. "Basil has just told us that he has asked Mr. Devereux to tea."

"Mr. Devereux!" repeated Rosalind. She turned round with the liveliest surprise imprinted on her face. "Are you in earnest, Madeleine? How very singular! Why, it was only yesterday Basil was angry with Helen Champion because she wanted to know Mr. Devereux!"

"I don't exactly understand Basil's change of sentiment," said Madeleine. "But the fact remains — Mr. Devereux has been asked to tea; and, therefore, since you declined to see James Champion, I think you had better not come down."

"James ought to be much obliged to you for your consideration of his feelings," said Rosalind; "but as for me, I shall certainly come down now that I hear Mr. Devereux is expected. I would not miss the opportunity of seeing him" ("and being seen," she might have added), "for any thing. Besides, James is not likely to hear about it."

"People always hear about such things; and you must confess that it will seem —"

"I shall confess nothing," interrupted Rosalind, pettishly. "It is against my principles, and the matter does not appear to me of sufficient importance to have any seeming at all. I am coming down, and that is the end of it."

She turned back to her toilet with an air of decision, and Madeleine said no more. Perhaps she might have uttered a stronger remonstrance if she had been aware that, besides declining to go to ride, Rosalind had excused herself from seeing Champion that evening. But Rosalind kept

the latter fact to herself. It did not disquiet her at all. James would not hear of her being down, or, if he did, she could easily smooth the matter over to him. She had a firm belief in her power of smoothing matters over whenever she chose to do so.

## Chapter XI.

### Mr. Devereux Enters Society.

An hour later Mr. Devereux arrived, and was shown into the drawing-room where the family were assembled. The windows were open, for the weather had softened to almost summer warmth, and the gas was burning low in the large chandelier. A fragrance of roses filled the room, day was dying away in purple softness outside, in all nooks and corners shadows hung. Madeleine rose from the piano, the ivory key-board of which gleamed behind her, as he entered. Rosalind was sitting in a deep, luxurious chair just where the light from the chandelier fell most broadly. Basil came forward to meet and present him to Mrs. Severn, who extended her hand with a great deal of kindly grace.

"I knew your mother very well when she was the beautiful Miss Mansfield, Mr. Devereux," she said, "and I am happy to make the acquaintance of her son. Will you let me claim the privilege of my years and say that you look very much like her?"

"You overpower me madam," said Devereux, bowing. "I fear that your memory is kinder than I deserve."

As he spoke his eye took in the whole picture of the room, and he even recognized Lacy as the hero of the little scene on the portico, which still dwelt in his memory. When he was presented to Rosalind, she looked up smiling and blushing.

"You must let me thank you again for pulling me out of the water," she said. "I have been tormented all day with the recollection of my ungrateful conduct yesterday afternoon."

"You were not ungrateful," he answered. "But I feared that you would suffer for your wetting, and I am relieved to see you so well."

"She is not so well as she looks," Mrs. Severn said. "She has been confined to her room all day, and I am not sure that it is prudent for her to be out of it now."

"My throat is sore," said Rosalind, clasping that round white column in her delicate fingers as she met Devereux's glance. "But that is not of much consequence."

"I should think that it was of a great deal of consequence," answered he, with a very warm tone of interest in his voice. Then he turned to Madeleine: "I suppose you have heard that I was so unfortunate as to be the cause of this sore throat?" he said.

"On the contrary, I thought that you played the part of rescuer," she replied, with a smile.

"It was generous of you to tell no more than that," he said, turning again to Rosalind. Then he related the story of his share in the incident — coloring it according to the fashion of raconteurs — and by the time he had finished, and they had all laughed over it, the stiffness of new acquaintance seemed to have vanished.

As has been said before, however, it was almost impossible to be stiff with Devereux very long. The ease of his manner inspired ease in others, and Rosalind in especial was delighted with him. Seldom, in the course of her short and uneventful experience, had she seen a man so entirely according to the fashion of her own taste. She regarded him with approval from the crown of his blond head to the tip of his unexceptionable boot, and exerted herself for him — exerted herself to attract, to please, to impress him with the unusual nature of her gifts — as she never exerted herself for any man of Stansbury, not even for James Champion, whom she had promised to marry. It would have been strange if she had not succeeded in her object. It would have been strange if Devereux had not been impressed with her brightness and her cleverness —

for Rosalind was abundantly gifted with that adaptive quickness which is quite apart from intellectual power, or any great degree of intellectual culture. Then her beauty grew upon him. The more he studied her face, the more certain he felt that he had never before seen such perfection of coloring united to such delicate regularity of feature. Her manner, too, was singularly good for a village-bred maiden. It was true that he detected at once the dash of coquetry in it, and this coquetry had not the chic which a beauty of the world would have given, but it was subordinate to good taste — which is more than can always be said for the chic in question. Of vivacity she had just enough to please without offending. Devereux was fastidious, and a woman who laughed too much, or who pitched her voice in too loud a key, would have jarred on his taste if she had been a Hebe. But Rosalind, though she smiled often, laughed seldom, and no man could have found fault with the low, sweet peal of that laughter when it came.

It need not be supposed that these observations, on either side, were made at once. They were extended over a considerable length of time, for Devereux could not monopolize Rosalind's, nor Rosalind Devereux's attention. The Severns were well-bred people, and they understood the rare art of sustaining general conversation.

If the little group had been sociable in the drawing-room, they became still more so when gathered round the tea-table. It was true that something of a cloud still hung over Gordon; but only Madeleine's eyes perceived this, and Rosalind was in bright enough spirits to have atoned for half a dozen misjudged poets. When they returned to the drawing-room, Devereux walked to the piano, and taking up a sheet of music asked if she sang.

"What shall I say?" she laughed in reply. "You will think me hopelessly commonplace if I answer 'a little,' and I cannot in conscience answer 'a great deal.'"

"Do not answer at all, then," he said, "but let me hear you and judge for myself whether it is a little or a great deal."

"I would do so with pleasure if it were not for my throat, but, before I had sung three bars, mamma would interfere, and send me away to gargle with red pepper and sage-tea."

"In view of such a penalty it is impossible to press the point," he said, smiling; "but you seem to have an excellent collection of music here. We can look over the songs, can we not? Then you can tell me what you like best, and I can hope to hear them another time."

Rosalind willingly agreed to this, and contracted her drapery in the most obliging manner to make room for him and the music portfolio which he brought, on the sofa by her side. It is unnecessary to describe how they looked when they were seated with their heads bent together over the open pages, which they shared between them. We have all witnessed such scenes, and we all know that, however innocent they may be in fact or intent, they have but one significance to the general eye, and that significance is — flirtation. To add to this appearance, the pair in question were quite apart from the rest of the company, who were grouped around a table immediately under the chandelier. Mrs. Severn's crochet-needles were at work; Madeleine, Lacy, and Basil were discussing the siege of Paris. "That is a thing which is hackneyed past endurance!" said Devereux, turning over the pages of a well-known serenade, and Rosalind laughed.

"If you are critical and classical," she said, "I certainly shall not sing for you. But here is something good! — don't you like this?"

"Yes, but it is a tenor song — you don't sing it, surely?"

"Oh no, but Gordon yonder does. He has a charming voice."

"Gordon! Do you mean Mr. Lacy?" asked Devereux, glancing across the room. "He looks like a tenor. Is he" — hesitation for a moment — "is he related to you?"

"Not at all; but I have known him all my life, and he is engaged to Madeleine."

"Indeed!" said Devereux. He glanced at Lacy again — more critically this time. As he did so, a sharp peal of the door-bell echoed through the house, and Rosalind started. "Who can that be?" she said, and, as her companion's eyes returned to her, he noticed that the flush on her face had deepened.

"Is she expecting somebody, or dreading somebody?" he thought — and just then there was a sound of voices, a rustle of silk, and two ladies swept into the room. Rosalind recognized them in a moment: they were the Champions, mother and daughter.

"Pity me!" she said, with a little trill of laughter — under which, however, a cadence of perturbation might have been heard — "yonder are two people who have come expecting to find me in bed, with gargles and foot-baths. Listen!"

"Good-evening, Mrs. Severn," Mrs. Champion was saying, in a deep bass voice which suited her remarkably imposing and masculine appearance. "How do you do? Here I am at last, you see. I have been intending to come for a long time, but my intentions don't bear fruit very well, and I should not be here now if James had not returned this evening full of concern about Rosalind's illness; so I told Helen we would walk over and see how she is. I hope her sickness is not serious."

"Oh, not at all! I am glad to say that she is a great deal better," Mrs. Severn began, with some embarrassment, when Miss Champion, whose eyes were sharper than her mother's, arrested her by an exclamation.

"Dear me!" she said. "Why, yonder is Rosalind, now — and looking quite as well as ever! I think we have had our walk for our pains, mamma, if we came to see an invalid."

"Rosalind is better this evening, but she has been very unwell during the day," said Madeleine, as Mrs. Champion turned sharply round, and brought her eye-glass to bear on the *tête-à-tête* of the sofa, for Rosalind had not disembarrassed herself sufficiently from the litter of loose music to rise. She did so, the next moment, however, and came forward with a smile which might have propitiated the sternest of prospective mothers-in-law.

"How good of you to come to see me, dear Mrs. Champion!" she said. "You must not lose sympathy with my sickness because you see me down here. I really have not been shamming — though I won't say that I might not have been tempted to do so if I had thought that it would bring you! I have had a very bad cold and fever all day — have I not, mamma? — and my throat is very sore yet."

"You certainly do not look as if you had been sick," said Mrs. Champion, coldly. She gave a comprehensive glance as she spoke, which took in every thing — every tasteful detail of Rosalind's toilet, the handsome stranger in the background, the open piano, and the scattered music. "I am sorry we interrupted you," she added, stiffly. "Probably you were singing for that gentleman. Don't let me interrupt you — I will talk to your mother."

"Singing!" repeated Rosalind. "How could I sing when I can scarcely talk? It is only by chance that I am down. I felt a little better after James left, and I was so tired of my room. That gentleman is Basil's guest — not mine. — Mamma, had you not better introduce him to Mrs. Champion?"

"He is Mr. Devereux," said Mrs. Severn, in a low and rather deprecating tone. Basil had crossed the room and was speaking to Devereux, so she was secure of not being overheard. "Basil thought it would be only civil to pay him some attention. If you have no objection, I should like to introduce him to you. He is very pleasing, and I suppose you remember his mother — the great beauty. Miss Mansfield."

"I am really surprised at Mr. Severn," said Mrs. Champion, almost indignantly. "James has no opinion whatever of Mr. Devereux, and thinks it is quite wrong to countenance him. Since he is in your house, Mrs. Severn, I can't refuse to allow him to be introduced."

"So you have the distinguished stranger!" Miss Champion was, meanwhile, saying to Madeleine. "Now, I call this liberal conduct in Mr. Severn — better than glowering, as Brother James does when one says that one should like to know him."

"Is it possible the king can do wrong, in your eyes, Miss Helen?" Lacy asked. "Is not Champion's frown your law?"

"Oh, no — only Rosalind's," answered that young lady, amiably. "I wonder what he will say, by-the-by, when he hears that, although she was too sick to see *him*, she could come down to flirt with Mr. Devereux!"

This was a *sotto voce* remark, which Lacy, in the same tone, answered:

"You are mistaken about the flirting. We had only come in from tea a few minutes before you arrived. Don't judge too hastily from appearances. They are sometimes deceptive, you know."

Miss Champion elevated her black eyebrows significantly. "They don't deceive *me*!" was what that expressive gesture said. Like her mother, she noted every adorning ribbon which Rosalind wore, as she had already noted the scene by the piano. There is an old and very sensible adage about setting a thief to catch a thief, and the same rule holds good about many other things — flirting, among the rest.

After Devereux had been presented to the two ladies, a little conversation ensued, but it was not in the nature of things that this should last very long. Mrs. Champion put Rosalind through a severe cross-examination with regard to her indisposition, and then, turning to Mrs. Severn, she began discussing the different modes of treating colds and the maladies which under given circumstances might arise from them. Rosalind, as in duty bound, sat in attendance on this instructive conversation, bearing her martyrdom with outward decorum, and only casting a slight, envious glance now and then at the group on the other side of the table.

To say that Miss Champion was the most brilliant spirit of this group would express very little of the conversational power which that young lady was pleased to exert, inspired by the consciousness of three masculine listeners, each of whom she felt that it would be pleasant to convert into an admirer. Although it may be supposed that she was already certain of Basil's admiration, it may be added that few women of her class do not like to rivet fresh fetters even on an assured slave; and of Basil's slavery Miss Champion had never yet received any satisfactory assurance. With regard to Lacy, she had once considered him an admirer, and he had deserted her standard. This had piqued her a little at the time; but, since she had been from home and had heard of him as something of a celebrity, pique had changed into a resolution to win him back again, if such winning were at all possible. As for Devereux, it was not to be expected that a young lady fresh from fashionable society would be more blind to his attractions, or look on him with less favor, than Rosalind had displayed. In the effusive language of her class, Miss Champion was "charmed" with him, and she arched her eyebrows and showed her white teeth, and gesticulated with her ringed and braceleted hands, more for his benefit than that of any one else.

Instead of having their due effect, however, these efforts were more wasted on him than on either of the others. His taste was fastidious, and Miss Champion was not according to the standard of that taste. She was a commonplace specimen of the *genus* "young lady," he thought; passably fine-looking, and exceedingly talkative, but not at all attractive. If civility had sanctioned such a proceeding, he would have looked as he felt, very much bored, under the steady flow of her animated conversation. As it was, he took advantage of the first opportunity — when she was addressing herself especially to Lacy — and turned to Madeleine. A small photograph in a standing frame on the table near which they were sitting at once furnished a convenient subject of conversation, for, drawing it toward him, he saw that it was a likeness of Mary Carlisle.

"How excellent!" he said — for the sun had indeed caught with singular fidelity the pathetic charm of that sweet countenance — "I have never seen a better likeness produced by mechanical art."

"Yes, it is very good," said Madeleine, "but scarcely does Mary justice, I think."

"Justice is so hard a thing to obtain," he answered, "that it is not strange that photography should fail in rendering it to such a face as Miss Carlisle's. Her features are none of them very distinctly marked, nor are there any striking contrasts in her coloring. The charm of the face is in its exquisite expression — and that is here."

"Yes," said Madeleine, "it is there — though expression is usually the last thing which photography is able to reproduce. I have often thought that it is to the face what the soul is to the body."

"You are quite right," said Devereux, looking at her with a smile, "and it is a very candid and beautiful soul which shines in Miss Carlisle's face. May I venture to say how much I was attracted by her?" he went on, after a short pause. "I have rarely in my life been more surprised, and never, I am sure, more charmed, than by her appearance and manner."

"She is very charming," said Madeleine. The frankness with which he spoke disarmed suspicion, and yet at that moment the fears on which Basil had dwelt, the day before, suddenly occurred to her. They seemed absurd, however, as she regarded the face before her. Though people might differ very widely about every other point in Devereux's personal appearance, it was not possible for any one to say that he looked like a "scheming adventurer." So, after a moment, she added: "I am sure there is not in the world a nobler nature or a more tender heart than that of Mary; and it saddens me to think what she might have been but for the great misfortune which has shut her off from active life."

"But without that she would have been just like other women," said Devereux. "Now, she seems to stand apart, marked off, as it were, by the sacredness of great affliction."

"If you are regarding her poetically, that is true. But, apart from poetry, her life is a very sad one."

"I hope I have not spoken too lightly," said he, gravely. "I hope you do not think that I fail to realize the greatness of her misfortune. I was inexpressibly touched by the mere sight of her eyes. And there was something of the same feeling in the gracious sweetness of her manner. One felt as if

'Saint by her face she should be, with such looks.'

Madeleine smiled. "I am glad that you appreciate Mary," she said. "It is not every one who does. You are very kind to overlook the distrust with which she met you," she added, thinking that she would sound a little in the unknown waters of his intentions and desires.

"There was nothing to overlook," he answered. "The courtesy of Miss Carlisle's reception was exquisite, and as for the distrust — it would have been very unjust to blame her for that."

"You seem to have conquered it altogether."

"Did I? I am glad to hear you say so. Miss Carlisle is an uncommon woman, or I should not have conquered it so soon. Forgive me if I say that women are generally more prejudiced, and more tenacious in maintaining prejudice, than men."

"Because they are less reasonable?" asked Madeleine, with her arch, sweet smile.

"I am sure you are reasonable enough to forgive me again if I answer yes," said Devereux, attracted by her manner, her face, her voice, as he had been attracted from the first. It was a different attraction altogether from that of Rosalind's graceful beauty, and yet not half so easy to analyze. He felt unconsciously that there was something magnetic about this woman, but let no one suppose that it was a magnetism akin to the tender passion. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our narrow philosophy. Sometimes we walk with angels unawares, but again the soul rises up as if to greet the presence which is to work it great ill or greater good.

"You must not expect me to turn State's evidence," said Madeleine, shaking her head. "Men are very unreasonable sometimes — and very prejudiced, too."

"Granted with all my heart," responded Devereux. Rosalind, who was watching him closely without appearing to do so (a faculty some women possess), wondered what he was talking about that interested him so much, and decided to question her sister as soon as practicable. Just then Miss Champion rose, with a rustle of her silken skirts.

"Mr. Lacy insists on my singing," she said to Madeleine. "It is true I am rather out of practice, and I have not my notes, but still one likes to be obliging. — Mr. Devereux, do you sing? If so, I give you warning that I am beating my drum for recruits for a musical and dramatic club I am endeavoring to organize, and that I should be happy to enlist you."

"Unfortunately, I have no claim to enter such a service," said Devereux, bowing. "I am so entirely destitute of musical or dramatic ability, that I am only able to appreciate the excellence of others in either respect."

"You are too modest," said she. "I always suspect such extreme modesty. Have you really no musical knowledge? — have you never acted?"

A short catechism on his accomplishments ensued — for the organization of her club was very near, indeed, to Miss Champion's heart — which revealed a most startling degree of ignorance on Mr. Devereux's part, though it was plain that his catechist regarded this ignorance with suspicion. "He knows a great deal more than he pretends," she said, indignantly, when she went at last to the piano with Lacy. "He is conceited, and thinks the amusements of a country town beneath his dignity. I shall let him alone. He is disagreeable and supercilious."

The gentleman thus described fell under the odium of still further disgrace by taking leave immediately after her first song. As he parted with Basil on the portico, the latter hospitably gave him a general invitation. "We shall always be glad to see you," he said; and Devereux replied with more sincerity than the trite words usually contain: "I shall be very happy to come, for already I am indebted to you for a very pleasant evening."

It *had* been a pleasant evening, he said to himself, as he walked slowly along under the balmy October moon; not remarkably enlivening, but simply pleasant. It was an interesting family group, that of the Severns, and the two sisters were both studies in their different ways. On the other people whom he had met he scarcely bestowed a thought. Rosalind's lovely face, Madeleine's soft eyes, seemed floating about him in the faint wreaths of his cigar-smoke. It was an hour of reverie, lightly tinged with agreeable fancies, such as we have most of us known. Nothing warned him that an exceptional time — a transitional era of his life — had come. Nothing suggested the idea that, out of the lives of these people whom he had so casually met, many complications to his own life would result. He walked on, enjoying the soft beauty of the autumn night, until his cigar was smoked out, and his idle reverie ended. Then he turned his steps in the direction of his hotel, and dismissed the claims of Stansbury society very summarily from his mind. Fortunately, he did not know with what quiet but irresistible force Stansbury society had laid its hand on him.

## Book II.

### In Which The Shuttle Is Thrown.

#### Chapter I.

#### By The Wayside.

How Rosalind made her peace with Champion did not transpire; but that she succeeded in making it, all those interested had satisfactory evidence when she went to ride with him a day or two after Mr. Devereux's introduction to Stansbury society. It is doubtful if there was any serious breach to heal. Champion was not a jealous lover, nor, it may be added, an unreasonable one. He was also a very proud man, too proud to suspect duplicity, especially in the woman he loved. He

was hurt to think that Rosalind cared so little to see him that she had not felt inclined to make on his behalf the effort which she afterward made without any inducement; but he did not for a moment question her assertion that this effort had no connection whatever with Mr. Devereux's visit. "I was tired to death of my room, and dressing to go down when Madeleine came to tell me that Basil had invited Mr. Devereux," she said, with the strictest regard to veracity; and Champion gave her implicit faith. It was an accident, a mere coincidence; yet a disagreeable impression is not always to be banished at will, and the most reasonable of lovers may retain a slight sense of wounded feeling.

Rosalind, on her part, was glad that James was so placable. It emboldened her to think that perhaps the sameness of a recognized engagement might be varied by a spice of flirtation with the handsome stranger whom Fate had thrown in her path. She did not think of more than flirtation, for Rosalind had suffered too keenly from the thorns of poverty not to appreciate the luxury of ease; and she honestly meant to marry Champion. She liked him — with a sense of conscious virtue she told her mother that nothing would induce her to make a purely mercenary marriage — and she doubted exceedingly if it would ever be possible for her to do better. If it were possible — well, that was a contingency which she wisely refrained from taking into consideration, leaving her conduct to be swayed by future events.

"Have you really any idea," she said to her lover, while they were riding, "that Mr. Devereux may obtain the Carlisle property? I don't want you to answer as the lawyer on the other side, but as a dispassionate judge of the matter."

"It is rather hard to be dispassionate," said Champion, bending his brows a little. The subject was distasteful to him, and, when subjects were distasteful, he generally put them away. It was impossible to put this away, however, with Rosalind's eyes demanding an answer. "Of course, there is doubt about these things," he went on. "It is impossible for me to say positively that he will not obtain it. If the lease is proved, the property must revert to him."

"Can the lease be proved?"

"I think not; but I am not infallible."

"And if the suit is decided in his favor, he gains all this!" said the girl, meditatively. She pointed with her whip as she spoke, at the Carlisle mills and factories; for the road along which they were riding overlooked the lands in litigation. "It is worth a struggle," she added, as if to herself.

"It is certainly worth a struggle," echoed Champion, dryly, "and I shall leave no stone unturned in its defense. I have been very much encouraged by Devereux's offer to compromise," he added, after a short pause. "It shows conclusively that he feels — or that his lawyer feels — the weakness of his cause."

Rosalind said no more, but her glance swept over the scene before her — the tall buildings with their chimneys curling forth clouds of white smoke, and the neat rows of brown cottages which Basil had taken so much pleasure in building for the operatives. It was a small village full of thrift and energy, showing what capital and labor guided by mind and liberality can achieve. The fame of the Carlisle factories was well known, and more than once people interested in such business had come from afar, in order to see their excellent management. Rosalind had often regarded the picture before, and sighed to think how useless all this rich inheritance was to the sick girl who could never look on it — sighed not from sympathy, but from longing. "If it were only mine!" she had thought, trying to fancy what a grand young princess she would be under such blissful circumstances. This castle-building might have seemed harmless enough to all save a very rigorous moralist, but the seed of envy which had been the germ of it expanded now and put forth a shoot. "If it could be mine!" she thought, while, like a flash, a series of possible events unrolled before her — events which almost dazzled her with their brightness. Her cheek flushed, her eye sparkled. Champion, who was looking at her, thought, with a thrill of pride, how beautiful she was! She said to herself that it was only a day-dream, a castle in the air, but if it could be — her thought went no farther than this. She turned to Champion.

"Let us have a canter," she said. "Here is an excellent stretch of road."

She touched her horse as she spoke, and they swept rapidly forward at that pleasantest of all pleasant paces. The road, as she said, was excellent — a white level turnpike, with purple autumn fields stretching on each side, broken by belts of glowing autumn woods. In one of these fields not far from the road they noticed a sportsman and his dogs. A covey of partridges suddenly flew into the air. Simultaneously the report of a gun rang out. Rosalind's horse started violently — a start that would have unseated an awkward rider — then dashed into a run. Champion followed fast, but there was no need of him. In less than a minute the young lady had brought the would-be runaway to order, and turned a flushed, smiling face round to greet her escort, as he rode up.

"It was only a little foolishness and fright," she said, excusing the culprit. "One cannot expect perfection in horses any more than in people; and that shot was very near!"

"It was unpardonably careless in the man to discharge his gun just as you were passing!" said Champion. "He might have caused a very serious accident — would have done so certainly if you were not such an excellent rider."

"It was careless, but you see there is no harm done," said she. "I wonder who it was? He ought to give me that partridge. I like partridges. Hold my rein for a moment, please, while I put up my hair."

Champion held the rein, and watched with a pleasant sense of proprietary admiration the pretty hands that looped the bronze-brown curls back to their place, "I have lost nearly all my hair-pins," she said in an aggrieved tone, as she finally settled her hat and drew on her gloves again. "I shall give you a box of them to put in your pocket the next time we come out. It is always well to be provided for emergencies. Now let us move on — look! is not that Mary Carlisle's pony-carriage yonder? And Mary herself is in it, I think."

"Yes, it is the carriage — and Miss Carlisle is in it," answered Champion, following the direction of her eyes with his own. Around a bend of the road the carriage had appeared, and was now advancing rapidly toward them — the sun shining brightly on the sleek coats of the ponies, the glancing wheels of the phaeton and the gayly-striped wrap which covered the dresses of the two figures seated within.

One of them was Miss Carlisle, as Rosalind had perceived. The other was Jessie Holme, sitting bolt upright and driving with the utmost skill and care. She recognized the equestrians at once.

"Here's Miss Rosalind Severn and Mr. Champion coming to meet us, Miss Mary," she said. "Do you want to stop and speak to them?"

"Yes," answered Mary, "you can stop for a minute."

So, as the two parties came abreast, there was a pause, and an exchange of salutations and inquiries. Mary asked if Rosalind had recovered from her cold. "I was afraid you would be quite sick after such a wetting," she said.

"It was not much of a wetting," said Rosalind, who did not like allusions to her accident. "The affair was more ridiculous than serious. I have quite recovered, except for a little sore-throat. You are looking well, Mary," she went on. "What a lovely color you have! has she not, James?"

"Very good indeed," said Champion, who never paid compliments — "You are looking exceedingly well," he added, addressing directly the blind girl, for whom even he had a peculiar regard. "I am very glad to see it. You must not let yourself be worried by business-matters. They will all come right in the end."

"I am not worrying at all," said Mary — into whose usually pale cheeks the warm air and rapid motion had indeed brought a delicate carmine tinge — "I am quite content to rely on Basil and yourself. You must let me congratulate you," she went on, with a smile. "You are both very happy, are you not? I cannot see your faces to tell whether you look so; but I am sure you ought to be."

"Oh, we are very happy, no doubt," said Rosalind, with a light, careless laugh; "but please don't congratulate us — it is entirely too soon for that ceremony. Marriage is time enough for it — engagements are so uncertain."

"I cannot see why engagements should be more uncertain than marriage, when those concerned are in earnest," said Champion, in a tone of slight rebuke. There was no disguising the fact that Rosalind's words jarred on him. They sounded frivolous, he thought — and in his eyes frivolity was a capital fault.

"I only meant to express the trite commonplace that all things mundane are uncertain," said Rosalind, who knew to a nicety how far to venture. "Mary must pardon me if my remark sounded ungracious, and she must accept our thanks for her congratulations. We are happy — though we try not to be foolish."

"I cannot imagine that Mr. Champion ever was foolish in his life," said Mary, with her rare, soft laugh.

"Thanks for the distinction," said Rosalind, gayly.

At this point in the conversation, the whole party except Miss Carlisle were suddenly startled by the unexpected appearance of two dogs which sprang over the fence into the road, followed closely by a tall man with a gun, and a small boy with a game-bag. Rosalind recognized the former immediately, and uttered an exclamation.

"Mr. Devereux!" she said. "Is it possible this is you?"

"It is quite possible," answered Devereux, lifting his hat. He was in sporting-dress, and looked so handsome, that Rosalind's heart was conscious of a thrill. "I have come to apologize," he went on, addressing her. "It was my careless shot a little while ago that startled your horse. I was never more frightened than when I saw him dash off. I had not observed you before. You can scarcely imagine how much relieved I was when I saw what an excellent rider you were, and that no accident occurred."

"I was to blame as well as yourself," said Rosalind. "I should have had my horse better in hand, knowing that he is inclined to be foolish. But you see I am not *always* awkward!" she added, with a subtle play of humorous expression about her lips and in her eyes.

"Did you imagine that I thought so?" asked Devereux, smiling. "But you will accept the spoils, will you not?" he added, pointing to the game-bag — evidently a full one — which his attendant carried.

"I shall be most happy," answered Rosalind, graciously; then a laugh brought out all the charming dimples of her face. "How did you know that I said that partridge ought to be mine?" she asked.

"I did not know it, but I felt the same conviction," answered he, regarding her with an expression of admiration which Champion saw and resented.

"It was worth while being frightened to be so pleasantly rewarded," said she. "But pray excuse me; I am very forgetful. You know Miss Carlisle, I believe; but you do not know Mr. Champion. Let me introduce you — Mr. Devereux, Mr. Champion."

The gentlemen bowed— Champion a little stiffly, Devereux with his usual easy grace. "I am glad to make Mr. Champion's acquaintance," he said, with the pleasant ring in his voice which always went so far to propitiate liking. Then he turned and walked up to the carriage. He had not noticed its occupants before Rosalind spoke. Now he saw Mary Carlisle's pure, sweet face, and blue, sightless eyes.

"Pardon me," he said, as he reached her side. "I did not know that you were here. I was intent on apologizing for having startled Miss Severn's horse a short time ago. I am glad to meet you."

"I did not suppose that you observed me," said Mary, extending her hand with a smile. "But I knew your voice. Voices are like faces to me. I never forget them."

"How good your memory must be, then! Better than mine for faces. I forget many of those; but there is great individuality in a voice."

"You do not know how much unless you have listened, as I do, without seeing," she answered. "But what have you been doing to frighten Rosalind's horse? — shooting?"

"Yes, to kill time as well as birds. And my evil genius made me discharge my gun just as Miss Severn was passing. It might have proved worse — at least more dangerous — than the plunge-bath I was unlucky enough to cause her the other day."

"You have blamed yourself more than enough for that, Mr. Devereux," said Rosalind. "Pray believe that I absolve you." Then she added, seeing that Champion looked a little impatient, "Are you going into town, Mary?"

"Yes," answered Mary; "Jessie wants to do a little shopping, and I want to see Madeleine. Don't let me detain you any longer — I know this is the best part of the afternoon for riding."

"And for driving, too, so we will not detain you. Good-evening. I am almost sure you will find Madeleine at home."

Champion made his adieux also, and the equestrians rode away. This was a step which irked Rosalind no little, but which she felt the necessity of facing cheerfully. It would never do to suffer any seeds of suspicion or jealousy to take root in Champion's mind. Observing that he looked grave, she spoke with a laugh:

"Basil thought it absurd when I suggested that Mr. Devereux had come here to marry Mary. I wonder what he thinks now? It seems to me as plain as possible that he intends to do so."

"I am afraid he does," answered Champion, "but I hope Miss Carlisle has too much sense to fall into the trap of a fortune-hunter. I distrust the man altogether," he said, as Basil had said before him. "He professes too much disinterestedness. When a man does that, it is safe to suspect him of a desire to serve his own interests particularly well."

The man thus condemned was at this time saying to Mary, as he stood by the carriage, with his gun in his hand, unconscious how intently Jessie Holme's keen eyes were reading his face:

"I will not detain you, either, further than to ask if I may come to see you. I remember that you gave me a kind permission to do so the other day, but I have hesitated to avail myself of it, fearing that you might consider me presumptuous."

"Why should you have feared such a thing?" she asked, with gentle graciousness of manner. It was not Rosalind alone who felt Devereux's charm. Though his handsome face and graceful bearing were veiled from poor Mary, she could appreciate none the less — rather, more — the deference of his manner, the music of his voice. "I am not in the habit of saying one thing and meaning another," she went on. "Come when you feel inclined to do so."

"I shall feel inclined very soon, then," said he. "May I come to-morrow? Shall I find you disengaged?"

"I am always disengaged?" she answered. "Yes, you may come to-morrow." Then some instinct made her add: "You will find my dear friend Madeleine Severn with me. I am going for her now."

"Indeed!" said Devereux. He would have liked to say more, but seeing that the ponies were restless, he drew back. "I must not detain you longer," he added. "Good-evening."

Mary bowed, Jessie touched the impatient horses, and the carriage bowled rapidly away, leaving him standing by the road-side gazing after it.

He stood so long, and gazed so steadily, that the bearer of the game-bag grew quite restless, and finally suggested that the dogs were "clean out o' sight." He was rewarded for this intelligence by being told to call them back, and when they reappeared, Mr. Devereux returned to his shooting. He shot quite as well as he had done before, and many a pretty, brown bird, with its dainty plumage all bloody and ruffled, was crammed into the game-bag with its murdered comrades, before the sun went down. But through all this wholesale slaughter the sportman's face still wore the preoccupied expression which came over it as he looked at Miss Carlisle's carriage driving away, and more than once he said to himself, "After all, why not?"

Mary, meanwhile, had turned to her companion, and said, a little wistfully, "Jessie, what do you think of him?"

"He's good enough looking. Miss Mary, if looks was all a body had to go by," responded Jessie, cautiously.

"Do you mean handsome?" asked Mary. "Every one says so. I did not mean that — I meant, what do you think of him? Does he look to you like a man you would trust?"

"I have never yet found — speaking of men — many of them I would trust," answered Jessie, who regarded the dominant half of the world with profound suspicion, largely seasoned with contempt. "I've found that they'll generally take a woman in — if they can. It is not very likely this Mr. Devereux is different from the rest."

"But does he look deceitful, or — or — as if he were capable of double-dealing?" asked Mary. "Jessie, you have sight, and I have not — can you not tell me how his appearance strikes you?"

The earnestness of this appeal seemed to take Jessie by surprise. She turned her eyes quickly to the blind girl's face. What she saw there made her change her tone. There was nothing short of perjury she would not have said to gratify the least desire of her gentle mistress.

"My eyes are no better than your ears, Miss Mary, and so I've told you time and again," she said. "But if you want to know how Mr. Devereux strikes me, I can honestly say that I'd trust him as soon as I would any other man. He has a kind of don't-care look on his face, and a lazy expression in his eyes, but I shouldn't think he'd say one thing and mean another — at least not more'n men in general do."

"What a man-hater you are!" said Mary, smiling. "Don't you trust any of that sex?"

"I trust Mr. Basil Severn," replied Jessie. "If I had a mint of money — which the Lord knows I don't want — I should give it all to him to keep, and not take any receipt, either!"

"I shall tell Basil that," said Mary, "and since he knows your business character, and how inflexibly you always demand a receipt for every thing, he will appreciate the compliment."

Soon after this they reached Stansbury, and found Miss Severn at home. "I have come for you to go back with, me," said Mary, and Madeleine could not refuse. She often went to the Lodge and spent several days — sometimes even a week or two — and just now she had no excuse to refuse returning with her friend. Yet she felt very reluctant to go — a reluctance which she could scarcely analyze, but which she remembered afterward, and asked herself, as people will do, if it had been a presentiment. It was a date to which she looked back, this visit — a gap, as it were, between her old life and the new events which were coming to meet her. It is impossible to suppose that she felt any prophetic sense of this when she hesitated over Mary's request; but it is certain that she did hesitate, and when at last she agreed to go, it was with the proviso, "I cannot stay long — not more than a day or two."

"You shall come back exactly when you choose," said Mary, pleased to win consent at any price. — "Jessie, you may go and attend to your shopping. Miss Severn will drive me home. — Madeleine, don't be long in making your preparations, or we shall miss the pleasant part of the afternoon."

Madeleine's preparations did not detain her long, but, after having put together a few articles of dress, she sat down and wrote a note to Lacy — in thoughts of whom her reluctance to leave Stansbury principally took root. She had seen him only once since the evening she had played impartial critic with such disagreeable results; and then there had been a subtle reserve and constraint like a curtain between them. She had felt this — felt it keenly — and tried by every means in her power to put it aside, but she had failed; and the failure made her uneasy and miserable. She was not a woman to indulge in those piquant amusements known as "lovers' quarrels" — there was a sweet patience, a breadth of tender harmony, in her nature, which made dissension in any form impossible to her — so her engagement had altogether lacked this seasoning, and she had no experience of the past to fortify her in the vague shadows of the present. She only felt, as all truly generous natures invariably feel, that she must be in the wrong,

and, so feeling, she stretched out her hand with a great impulse of love and repentance. Despite herself, the conviction forced itself upon her that her lover was not so strong as she had fancied him — that there must be something of weakness and self-love, mingled with the poet's sensitiveness; but all the more for this realization she blamed herself for the pang she had inflicted, the harsh judgment which she had passed. She wrote now an affectionate note, telling him that she was going out to the Lodge for a few days, but she made no special request that he would come there to see her. "If he wants to come, he will not need an invitation," she thought.

The afternoon was still soft and pleasant when Mary and herself drove out of Stansbury. They met Basil, and stopped to exchange a few words. He looked a little surprised when he saw Madeleine. "You have surely forgotten," he said, "that Miss Champion begged us to come to her house to-night in order to arrange some dramatic or musical entertainment?"

"I did forget it altogether," answered Madeleine. "You must make my excuses. My attendance is not of any importance, fortunately, since I have neither dramatic nor musical ability."

"I doubt if any of us are much endowed with talent in either line," said Severn, with a laugh, "but Miss Champion is determined to put us to the test. — Mary, I am very glad to see you out, and more glad to see you looking particularly well."

"I must be looking well," said Mary, "since you are the third person who has told me so."

After a few more words, they bade each other good-day and passed on. Then Madeleine said: "Helen Champion has made Basil promise to take Mr. Devereux to her gathering to-night. I fancy he will be very much bored."

"He can amuse himself by making apologies to Rosalind," said Miss Carlisle. "He seems destined to cause mishaps to her. This afternoon he frightened her horse."

"Was there any accident?" asked Madeleine, slightly startled.

"None at all. I should not have heard of it, only he came up to apologize while I was talking to her. Then she rode on, and he lingered a few minutes to speak to me, and say that he would like to call to-morrow. Madeleine" — a slight pause — "he is really very pleasant."

"Very," replied Madeleine, rather dryly.

## Chapter II.

### Theatricals — And Other Matters.

"Mamma," said Miss Champion, with an air of severe gravity, "how do you think I look?"

"Bless me, Helen!" replied her mother. "What is the use of such a question? You know you are looking as handsome as possible. That dress is elegant — and so becoming."

The dress in question was certainly elegant, and very becoming — a gold-colored silk made demi-toilette and softened by black lace. Crimson roses were in the young lady's raven hair and on her breast; crimson roses also shone on her cheeks, and her dark eyes had that starry look which we often see in eyes that have no other beauty. A splendid-looking-woman, certainly, by gas-light, was Miss Champion, eminently "a woman with a presence," and if just now a woman slightly overdressed, considering that this was provincial society, that she was in her own house, and that the occasion was informal, what else could be expected of an heiress with lustrous silks and costly laces in her possession?

She swept down the drawing-room with her rich dress trailing half a yard behind, and regarded herself intently in a full-length mirror. "I don't think Rosalind Severn will look better than I do to-night!" she said at length, half audibly.

Low though the words were, her mother caught them, and answered from the arm-chair where she sat fanning herself — for the night was warm, and Mrs. Champion's size was large: "It

is quite beyond me to imagine how you can think that Rosalind Severn ever looks better than you do, Helen! She is pretty enough in an insignificant kind of way, but as for looking like *you* —"

"She certainly does not look like me," said Helen, with a laugh, "but some people prefer her looks to mine. There is Brother James, for instance."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Champion, with a sigh. She always sighed when James's unaccountable infatuation was alluded to. It was a safe and terse way of expressing her feelings. Just now, however, being alone with Helen, she went on to express them in words: "On that point," she said, "James's opinion counts for nothing. His fancy for that girl is something I can't understand! — something I never expect to understand! It would be impossible to find any one more entirely unsuited to him. If I am any judge of character," pursued the lady, with dignity, "Rosalind Severn will never make a good wife for any man; but for James to throw himself away on her, is — is horrible!"

"It is his own affair — he will not be warned, he has always been foolish about her," said Miss Champion, philosophically, giving a touch to the braids and curls of her elaborate coiffure. "I would not trouble about it if I were you, mamma. Something may happen. Rosalind is a born flirt — I don't think she could help flirting if her life depended on it — and, if she goes to that again, Brother James will certainly break off the engagement."

"I wish to Heaven she would go to it!" remarked Mrs. Champion, devoutly.

"I think she will — if she has an opportunity," said Helen. "There is Mr. Devereux — you may be sure that she will flirt with him if she can! You remember the scene when we went there the other night."

"But James would not believe that she meant any harm by it," said Mrs. Champion, despondently.

"Nonsense!" returned Helen, with a strong accent of incredulity. "He would not own that he believed it, but I know that he did. — Is that the door-bell? Are you sure I look my very best, mamma? I have half a mind to flirt with Mr. Devereux myself."

"I would rather you let Rosalind do so," said Mrs. Champion, with a solicitude that was touching.

Her daughter's laugh — not a very musical one — rang through the room. "How much Rosalind would be obliged to you!" she said. "But you see it does not depend on *me*. Mr. Devereux is like the sultan — he must throw his handkerchief where he pleases."

As she uttered the last words, a gentleman entered the room, and advanced down its length to where the ladies were sitting; — Helen having thrown herself carelessly into a deep chair, and making, as she knew well, a very striking picture, with the folds of her amber silk sweeping the floor, her draperies of black lace and her crimson roses enhancing the rich brunette tints of her face. It was a picture that Gordon Lacy was specially fitted to appreciate — and it was Gordon Lacy who approached.

"Is it possible I am the first-comer?" he asked, after he had said good-evening to Mrs. Champion. "I would ask you to pardon me, only somebody must be first, and you can set my early appearance down to my eagerness to see you. Now that I do see you," he went on, with an expressive glance and a slight bow, "I am well repaid."

"It is not you who are early, but the rest who are late," Miss Champion answered, her glowing color deepening a little under the admiration of his gaze. "It is provoking of them, too, for I meant that we should transact a great deal of business. But where is Madeleine? Does she not intend to come?"

"I have not seen her," Lacy answered, carelessly, "but I scarcely think she will be here, since she went out to the Lodge this afternoon with Miss Carlisle."

"How sorry I am! I wanted everybody to come. My heart is quite set on doing something that will make a sensation in Stansbury. You must tell me what it shall be, Mr. Lacy."

"On the contrary, I am the humblest of your servants, and waiting for you to tell me."

"Ah, how modest you are! It is very good of you — such an exalted person as you have become — to put yourself at the command of such an insignificant person as myself."

"Have I become an exalted person?" Lacy asked, arching his brows. "It is very kind of you to be the first to tell me such an astonishing piece of news. And have you become an insignificant person? That is more remarkable still."

"You know perfectly what I meant," said she, laughing. "I must tell you, by-the-way" — here she looked down and unfurled her fan — "that I admire your writings so very much that I have grown absolutely afraid of you. I cannot realize that we were such good friends as — as we used to be."

"You honor me too much," said he. "I hope you are in earnest, I hope you do like my writings — I shall like them better myself if they have your approval. But as for not realizing what good friends we used to be — I assure you that I realize fully and shall never forget it."

His voice had a tender cadence; he spoke as if the friendship to which she alluded was a source of mingled consolation and regret to him. Why should he not amuse himself by talking in this manner? There could be nothing reprehensible in a harmless flirtation with this star-eyed admirer of his writings, while Madeleine, their unsparing critic, was playing backgammon with Mrs. Ingram at the Lodge, and talking to Mary Carlisle.

It was a pity that a conversation so productive of entertainment on both sides should have been interrupted just here by another peal of the door-bell. A moment later, two young ladies and their attendant cavaliers entered. They belonged to the extremely talkative order, and their gay, empty chatter soon filled the room. Lacy listened for five minutes, looking intensely bored the while — then he sauntered away to the piano, and occupied himself turning over the music, scarcely heeding the people who now arrived in detachments. Miss Champion having beaten her drum to such good purpose for recruits that she had enlisted nearly every one of her acquaintance. Finally, among the very last, Rosalind appeared, on the arm of her adoring James.

She was not outshone; that was positive as soon as she entered the room. Whether some instinct had warned her to look her best, or whether — as was most probable — she did not stand in need of such an instinct, the fact remained undeniable that she did look her best, even though she wore no silk, or lace, or jewels. Fine feathers often make fine birds, but sometimes the birds themselves are fine, and then they do not need the feathers. Rosalind was one of these. Her delicate, graceful beauty stood in no need of rich adornment. She never looked lovelier than when she appeared as now, dressed in filmy white muslin, with her sash-ribbons and flowers all a clear, delicate rose-color.

Miss Champion met her effusively. "I am so glad to see you!" she said. "I have been longing for you to come and help me bring order out of chaos. I am half frightened at the tumult I have evoked. Where is Mr. Severn? I count on him for so much assistance."

"Has he not come yet?" asked Rosalind. "He went to the hotel some time ago to meet Mr. Devereux."

"Did he? He will be here then, no doubt, very soon. Now do come and see if you can make any two of these people agree."

"You set me a difficult task!" said Rosalind, with a laugh.

She came to the rescue, however, and, leaving her to pour oil on the troubled waters, Miss Champion moved down the room to where Lacy still lingered at the piano.

"Won't you sing for us?" she asked, touching him lightly with her fan. "It is not allowable to come to a business meeting and do nothing. Have you heard the confusion over yonder? I think the best plan will be to elect a president, and make everybody abide by his or her decision." "I am quite sure of that," said he, "and I beg leave to cast my vote at once for yourself. What have you decided to do? — Act a play?"

"I believe so — almost every one is anxious for that. But the question is, what play? — and you know there will be a battle-royal over the characters."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I know indeed! If you want to sound the hidden depths of people's natures, act a play with j them — above all, give them a character which they fancy beneath their powers. I wonder if you have an idea what a harvest of hatred you are going to reap in return for your efforts as a social reformer?"

"Why should you try to discourage me so? It is very unkind. But if people are offended, let them go! I shall have *you* left — and Rosalind and Mr. Severn."

"A small dramatic company," said Lacy, smiling. "But I have a suggestion to make. Instead of one of those five-act plays which you were all discussing, choose a short, three-act comedy, distribute the characters impartially as you think best, leaving out you and me altogether."

"But why?" asked Miss Champion. Her face fell absurdly. "I am not so disinterested as you seem to think," she said. "I have a great desire to act myself."

"Do you think I meant to propose that you should not do so? I am sure you will act excellently, and I am selfish enough to want you to act with *me*. When they have finished their play, let us then give some graceful little comedietta like the 'Morning Call.'"

"That is an admirable programme; but what will the rest say?"

"Don't ask them to say any thing. Make a bold *coup d'état* and constitute yourself manager. Then announce what you mean to do."

"You must support me," she said, with a laugh.

"With all my heart," he answered. "And yonder comes some one who will support you also, no matter what act of despotism you may choose to execute."

"Who is that?" she asked; but the next instant she saw who he meant. Basil Severn was entering the room with Mr. Devereux. They paid their respects to Mrs. Champion, then crossed the floor to where the younger and fairer hostess stood.

"You are very late," she said, after she had greeted them both. "How do you know what important matters might have been transacted in your absence? Mr. Devereux, I hope you mean to help us? I am sure you can if you will."

"I place myself at your command," replied Devereux. "But it is only fair to tell you that my theatrical experience is very limited."

"You have played, however, have you not?"

"A few times. I undertook to murder the character of Charles Surface once — and again to personate Dazzle."

"Ah, I am sure you will do admirably," she said, complacently. Then she turned to Basil. "Can you suggest any three-act comedy in which you would like to take a part?" she asked. "Mr. Lacy and I have arranged a programme. It is only necessary now to find a play and cast the characters."

After this an animated discussion ensued. Devereux, who felt not the faintest interest in the matter, bore the part which Fate had assigned him with cheerful philosophy, and it was he who finally suggested one of Scribe's comedies, which seemed to suit the occasion better than any thing else which had been proposed. "We must get it at once," said Miss Champion, and Lacy added the name to a long list which he had already made out. Basil took the paper from his hand and glanced over it.

"These must be ordered immediately," he said. "Until they arrive we can do nothing more."

"I wish you would make a statement to that effect," said Miss Champion.

Mr. Severn obeyed. He advanced into the middle of the floor, requested silence, and informed the assembled company that a list of plays had been made out, which would be ordered speedily, after which they would be called upon to decide what they desired to act.

"You need not have added that," said Helen when he returned to her side. "I don't mean to have such a gathering as this again. We will choose a comedy, and then we will simply let the people to whom we assign the characters know what they are to play."

"Very likely, then, they will simply let you know that they do not fancy the characters assigned, and do not care to play them."

"*N'importe!*" she laughed. "We shall do very well, I dare say. Now let us have some music. Mr. Devereux, go and bring Rosalind. She must sing."

Mr. Devereux went — nothing loath. He had the quick eye of a society-man, and, the moment he entered the Champion drawing-room, he had seen that there was but one woman in it worth any attention. That woman was Rosalind, looking fair as her namesake of Ardennes, in her fleecy white muslin and the delicate tints of rose about her. He went up to her now — amused to see how listlessly she was enduring rather than receiving the attentions of one or two Stansbury gentlemen. Champion, on his part, had fallen into the hands of a very lively young lady across the room, who evidently had not the slightest idea of relinquishing him.

Rosalind saw Devereux approach before he reached her, and the listlessness vanished instantly from her face. Animation waked to lustrous beauty the lovely blue-gray eyes, and brightened the carmine on her cheeks till it matched the roses in her hair. She turned her shoulder deliberately on her faithful attendants, and greeted him with the most radiant of smiles.

"I thought you did not mean to come to let me thank you for your partridges, and tell you how much I enjoyed them," she said, when he reached her side. "You may frighten my horse again any afternoon you choose."

"Thank you very much for the permission," he answered. "But I hope I shall never be so awkward again. I am glad you enjoyed the birds — you must let me send my game-bag to you hereafter. It will give me an object in shooting besides that of killing time."

"You are too good — I don't want to be selfish. But do you only shoot to kill time?"

"Only for that — and a little, perhaps, for the sake of the sport. One must do something, you know."

"Stansbury is certainly a very dull place," said she, candidly.

"Any place is dull to a man with few acquaintances, and no occupations," he replied. "I assure you I am not inclined to find fault with Stansbury. It has one or two attractions which would redeem a very Sahara of dullness."

"Such as amateur theatricals?" asked she, laughing. "How sorry I am for you! How good it is of you, to submit to be bored with the smiling serenity of a martyr!"

"You forget that boredom — like every other form of martyrdom — occasionally has its rewards," said he, looking straight into her eyes as no Stansbury man ever looked. "I am being rewarded now."

"How delightful it is to find a man who knows how to pay a compliment!" thought Rosalind, with a growing sense of gratification. But she was careful to give no expression to the feeling. Though she lacked society training, she had innate tact enough to hold her own even with Mr. Devereux.

"You are very kind," she said, quietly; "more kind than sincere, I am afraid. But have you really pledged yourself to the theatricals? Do you mean to take a part?"

"I have pledged myself to take any part which Miss Champion assigns me; but I may be allowed to express a hope that she will cast me to play with you."

"I should like that," said Rosalind, frankly. "I am sure you play well — and, in amateur theatricals, bad playing is the rule."

"You must not think that I am the brilliant exception to prove the rule," said he. "I might allow you to do so — for none of us object to being overrated — if you were not destined so soon to find me out. — But I am neglecting the mission on which I was sent," he added, suddenly. "I see Miss Champion is shaking her fan at me. I came to beg that you will sing for us. I hope your throat is well enough to allow you to do so?"

"My throat is quite well," she answered, "but, honestly, my singing is not worth listening to. It does well enough for Stansbury, but I had rather not sing for you."

"Why not for me? Do you take me for a nightingale or a critic?"

"You may be either or both, for aught I know to the contrary. I do know, however, that you are accustomed to hearing cultivated voices, and therefore I prefer you not to hear mine."

"I will not press the point, if you would really rather not sing," said he, "but, if that is your only objection, I must disclaim any such critical knowledge of music as you attribute to me."

She raised her shoulders lightly. "Ah, I know!" she said. "Besides, it does not matter. Yonder is Linda Berry going to the piano. She will please the company better than I can. She sings American ballads — horrid things that I have culture enough to despise."

"Need we stay and listen to her, then?" he asked. "The night is lovely. Won't you go out on the piazza and look at it?"

Rosalind hesitated. It was an entrancing prospect that of going out in the moonlight with this pleasant companion, but — there was James! What would he think? Whatever he might think, she decided, after a moment, to go — and this decision was not taken in a spirit of recklessness, but of sober calculation. It might be absolutely necessary to her future plans and prospects for her to encourage Devereux's attentions, and fan into something more than liking, the — well, the appreciation he showed her. If that lease should be proved — Rosalind's thoughts did not go definitely farther than this, but she rose and moved toward a window which was open near them.

"The night is lovely," she said. "It seems a pity not to enjoy it."

The night was truly lovely. A great, silver moon was hanging in the dark-blue heaven, in the midst of fleecy clouds, and the air had that softness which is peculiar to the autumn. Over the lawn in front of the house, dark shadows lay, and the half-stripped branches of the trees stood out with delicate effect against the sky. While Rosalind and her companion admired this scene — no doubt with pleasure and profit to themselves — the gay voices talked and laughed within, and a merry clatter of tongues came out to the silent night which was filling earth with the beauty of its pageantry. Champion still performed his share of social duty, but his face began to wear a look which his mother and sister both knew well, though it would have been scarcely perceptible to one not familiar with his countenance. The firmly-cut mouth only set itself a little more sternly when he was not speaking, and the dark, straight brows drew a shade closer together. It would be difficult to express how strongly he disapproved of flirting — especially of a woman who flirted with other men after she had engaged herself to marry one — and it was more disapproval than jealousy which hardened his face now. He did not fear that Rosalind was in love with Devereux, but he felt that she was acting in a manner unworthy of herself, and a shade of disgust mingled with his displeasure.

The evening wore on. Miss Berry having exhausted her repertoire was succeeded by others at the piano, and finally Lacy's melodious tones — he had a remarkably good and remarkably well-cultivated voice — floated out on the moonlit night in the exquisite "I arise from dreams of thee." Miss Champion played his accompaniment, and, when the song was ended, she looked up with a smile.

"How beautiful that is!" she said, "and how well you sing! It must be charming to have such a poem addressed to one! I suppose you often address your poems to Madeleine — do you not?"

"I address them, or rather, they address themselves, to any subject which inspires me," he answered. "I am no Shelley, alas! but I have been tempted all night to put you in a poem. May I do so? — and shall I call it 'The Fair Odalisque?'"

"Are you in earnest?" she cried, with sparkling eyes. "I should be delighted! But you can't mean it, I am sure."

"I do mean it most sincerely," he answered. "Since you are kind enough to admire my verses, why should they not be dedicated to you?"

"I admire them *inexpressibly*," said she, with emphasis. "But then, I am not alone in that. Everybody is enthusiastic about your writings — prose as well as poetry. I suppose a hundred people asked me this summer all about you, and I felt very proud of having a genius for a friend."

"Not much of a genius," said he, with a faint, self-scornful laugh. Yet the flattery soothed his ruffled pride. He knew perfectly well the intellectual weakness of the woman who spoke — her absolute incapacity for forming an intelligent critical opinion — yet the admiration which she expressed pleased and gratified him. A vague consciousness came to him that perhaps this was the ideal comforter, after all. A household critic might prove an undesirable and uncomfortable thing. A man's home should be an asylum from criticism; the divinity of his hearth and heart should be one who took his genius for granted, and admired rather as a matter of faith than of judgment.

"What do you mean by saying 'not much of a genius?'" asked Miss Champion, with a melting glance. "You should not doubt your great powers. It is really wrong to do so!"

"You inspire me to believe in them," said he, with tender gallantry.

In this strain the conversation continued for some time. Lacy meant no disloyalty to Madeleine. He was simply entertaining himself after an old fashion, which of late he had rather laid aside. Perhaps his volatile nature had grown a little tired of undeviating constancy, or perhaps poor Madeleine in her straightforward simplicity had wounded his vanity more deeply than she knew that evening in the cedar summer-house. At all events he was quite ready to receive the homage of this "fair odalisque" in golden silk and crimson roses — and to repay it in kind.

Basil, looking on, felt a suspicion which he would not acknowledge to himself, that things were not quite right. He did not like to own that he was jealous of Lacy — who was engaged to Madeleine; yet he felt sure that, if any other man had so devoted himself to Helen Champion, he should have been jealous of him. Yet he was too loyal to blame the young lady for accepting these attentions. What he would have thought if he had known how deliberately she was encouraging them, it is not worth while to conjecture. Our code of morality and good taste is generally an elastic one, and fitted to stretch over the shortcomings of those whom we like or admire. It will be seen, however, that matters were not all tranquillity in this first of the gatherings which were meant to reform Stansbury society.

There was some slight change in affairs when two or three servants entered with trays of refreshments. Pyramids of ice-cream and piles of frosted cake are not only good things in themselves, but they serve admirably to relieve the tedium of an evening when people have nothing definite to do beyond talking to each other. Miss Champion came forward to assist in serving her guests, and, having made Basil very useful, rewarded him by taking her ice-cream in an alcove with him. It was the only pleasant hour of the evening to the young man. The window was open behind them, and a fragrance of honeysuckle came in with the silver moonlight; draping curtains in front shut them partially from view, and gave a picture-like effect to the lighted room and clustered groups beyond. Did it matter that the voice by his side talked nonsense, while the face that looked at him was fair, and the eyes full of alluring light? There are some things on earth, if not in heaven, which will always remain beyond the ken of any philosophy — and the manner in which a sensible man will tolerate and admire the silliness of a pretty woman is one of them.

Rosalind, meanwhile, was taking her ice-cream with Devereux still by her side, for Champion held resolutely aloof. When she came in from the piazza, a glance had showed her the state of her lover's feelings, but she took the matter philosophically. There was time enough to soothe him — she could not afford to be distraught just now, and weaken the impression she had made on Devereux. In highest beauty and brightest spirits, therefore, she talked; and Champion, without seeming to glance at her radiant face, saw and marked it all.

There were one or two dances to the piano after this. Miss Berry playing waltzes and galops very obligingly. "Will you dance?" Devereux asked Rosalind; but she shook her head reluctantly. This was more than even she dared venture. It would have been delightful to float round the room on this handsome stranger's arm, but James would never forgive *that*, she felt quite sure; and she was not ready to resign the substance for a shadow which, after all, might prove only a shadow.

When the hour for departure arrived, when the assembly was dispersing, and the last good-nights had been exchanged, Champion came up and offered his arm to her; but he did so in almost perfect silence. For the sake of his peace of mind it is to be hoped that his eye was not quick enough, or his observation close enough, to miss one of the pink perfumy roses from her hair, else he might naturally have identified it with one which Devereux held in his hand when they passed him standing on the piazza lighting his cigar.

### Chapter III.

#### At The Lodge.

The day following Miss Champion's "evening" was overcast, as days sometimes are after lovely moonlight nights, even in October. A south wind had brought hazy clouds, and rheumatic people were conscious that there was dampness in the air. Notwithstanding this fact, it might be some days before the dampness culminated in rain — so Madeleine thought as she walked in front of the Lodge after breakfast. Mary had not appeared at that meal, and a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Ingram was never agreeable to Miss Severn; indeed, so much the reverse, that she was glad to end it by taking her hat and strolling out as soon as they left the breakfast-room. Few things can be conceived more wearying than an absolutely vapid and negative companion; but Madeleine's gentle courtesy could have borne with the vapidness if that had been all. It was not all, however. Like most negative people, Mrs. Ingram could be positive occasionally in her dislikes, and she heartily disliked this friend and cousin whom the heiress loved and trusted. She made no active display of this feeling, but it was clearly patent to the subject of it, as such feelings always are. Love may conceal itself, but aversion has a language that not even the veriest dullard can fail to read. "Poor woman! she is envious and jealous," Madeleine thought, as she met the cold glance and detected the venom lurking under the measured tones. She made not the slightest difference in her own manner, but this morning — as on many other occasions — she found it tiresome to talk platitudes and commonplaces to an uninterested companion, and she was glad to escape.

She strolled slowly along toward the gate with her hat in her hand — there being a gray veil of cloud over the sun — her pretty brown hair coiffed in the graceful knot which suited the classic arch of her head, and her soft brown eyes gazing somewhat wistfully before her. Not a beautiful woman like Rosalind, nor a magnificent woman (considering a woman in the light of a fine animal) like Helen Champion; but one whose charm had the power of strong individuality, and whose bravery was veiled in softness, as a woman's courage should always be. Just now her heart was conscious of a sense of heaviness. She was thinking of Lacy, and more than once she sighed. "Was I unkind?" she thought. "Am I a blunderer, trampling heedlessly on the sensibilities of others? Ah! how hard it is to remember that we must take people as they are — as God has made them — and not try to remodel them according to our poor, presumptuous ideas!"

These were not cheerful reflections, yet she was so absorbed in them that she did not notice the sound of a horse's hoofs on the hard, graveled drive, until she walked slowly around a curve and found herself facing Basil and Roland. The young man smiled at her start, reined up his horse, and dismounted.

"I am glad to meet you," he said. "It was to see you more than any thing else that I was coming in." Then he laid his hand on her shoulder, and, stooping, kissed her brow — an unusual caress on his part, for the Severns were not a demonstrative family. "What is the matter?" he said. "You look pale, and a trifle sad."

"I think you must be mistaken," said Madeleine. "The overcast day makes every thing look a little sad. I am like the leaves, perhaps, and need sunlight to brighten me. You are the

sunlight," she added, slipping one hand in his arm and clasping the other over it. "I am very glad to see you, but why have you come?"

"Don't I always come to you when anything worries me?" answered he, with a slight laugh. "I often feel ashamed to think how I cast my cares and annoyances on your shoulders. Women ought to be shielded from such things, but it has always been the other way with you, and habit is strong."

"I hope that habit will always be strong with you," said Madeleine, in her sweet voice. "It seems to me that the woman who does not help others — who does not take on herself as far as she can the troubles of others — has scarcely a right to live. People talk of a woman's rights. I think that is the chief of her rights — to share the burdens of those she loves. What is your burden now?" she asked, glancing up in his face.

"Not a burden — rather a doubt," he answered. "After leaving Mrs. Champion's last night I had quite a talk with Devereux, and we went over that business of the lease in all its bearings. It is a staggering thing sometimes to hear a matter with which you have fancied yourself perfectly familiar, and with regard to which your convictions are entirely settled, presented clearly and impartially from the opposite view. I begin to think that he may be right and Champion wrong — I begin to think that it might be well to compromise."

"Is it possible!" said Madeleine. She was so much surprised that for an instant this was all she uttered. Then she said, "So Mary's interests are, after all, seriously threatened?"

"Very seriously threatened, as far as I can judge," Basil answered. "Champion thinks I am wrong, but Champion is by nature a very obstinate partisan. I believe Devereux is honest, and I believe his case is a strong one. The lease was never registered, but he has a witness who can swear positively to his grandfather's handwriting, and the handwriting of Shelton, who held the property. One thing is certain, Mr. Carlisle was not as careful as he ought to have been about looking into the titles when he bought the land. Necessarily, in the course of years, it passed through many hands, but a thorough business-man goes back to the fountain-head. He did not do so. Hence this claim."

"And you think it ought to be compromised?" said Madeleine.

"I am not so positive as that. I told you it was a case of doubt. But I am inclined to think so. Devereux is willing: — indeed, I may say anxious — to compromise, and of course, if a decision is given in his favor, Mary loses the whole. Tell me your opinion. Champion is as determined as ever to fight the matter out. He firmly believes that General Mansfield sold the property to Shelton in the year 1815."

Madeleine shook her head. "I cannot advise you," she said. "You must act as you think best. I know Mary will say the same thing. She throws all the responsibility on your shoulders, and she is too generous as well as too just to blame you, whatever happens. But I somehow think" — here she paused and looked up in his face with an expression half-sad and half-amused — "that there will be no compromise needed. Do you remember what you said when Mr. Devereux came? I begin to believe you were right."

"Do you mean that he wishes to marry Mary?"

"Yes, I mean that. I may be wrong, but I think so."

"And she?" Basil stopped short, and stood with the keenest interest in his face. "Can it be possible she will think of such a thing?"

"My poor Mary!" said Madeleine, with a thrill of tenderest pathos in her voice. "She was talking of him last night, and I thought I could perceive that, unconsciously to herself, he has touched her fancy, which, with a woman, is the first step toward touching her heart. From Mary's affliction and isolation, her heart will be all the more easily touched by one so attractive as we must acknowledge Mr. Devereux to be. Whether he is worthy of her or not, that is another question."

"I wonder if you are right?" said Basil, and, notwithstanding the fact that this had been his own suggestion, surprise seemed his predominant emotion. After a moment, he went on with

energy: "There is no need to question whether he is worthy of her. No man is worthy of the woman whom he marries solely as a matter of convenience. If Devereux wishes to marry Mary, it can only be for that reason. I don't consider him the designing fortune-hunter that I suspected him to be at first. I recognize the fact that, as a man of the world, this may seem to him the best solution of the difficulty. With many women such an arrangement would answer very well, but — but Mary is not like other women to us, Madeleine."

"No," said Madeleine. "I feel as you do — such a thing, connected with Mary, seems like a desecration. But we must hope for the best. Mr. Devereux spoke of her the other night with an unusual degree of appreciation. Perhaps she may touch his heart."

Basil looked doubtful. "Men like Devereux have not, as a rule, hearts that are easily touched," he said. "He has evidently amused himself with many women — if his reputation had not preceded him I should know that from the manner in which he speaks of them. I don't mean that he deals in hackneyed cynicism, but there is a tone of contemptuous lightness running through all that he says of the sex, which is very significant. And this reminds me," the speaker went on, "that I think he is inclined to amuse himself with Rosalind. It might be well if you warned her, Madeleine, that he is not the kind of man whose attentions she should encourage."

"Does she need the warning?" asked Madeleine. "Surely now that she is engaged —"

"I am afraid her engagement has not altered Rosalind," said Basil. "She seems as much disposed to flirt as ever. She flirted with Devereux last night to a degree which made her the object of general attention and the subject of general remark."

"How sorry I am to hear it!" said Madeleine, with a look of distress in her eyes. "Such conduct is so unworthy and so unkind; Rosalind lowers herself, while she is paining as faithful and disinterested a lover as ever woman had. What did Mr. Champion think of her?"

"That is more than I can say. He looked as black as midnight, and I have no doubt expressed his disapprobation when he was taking her home, but I was not there to hear it. If she is not careful she will wear out his patience: he is not a man to endure such treatment beyond a certain point. — Well, I must go now." They had been walking slowly onward, and reached the gate at this moment. "Give my love to Mary, but it is not necessary to say any thing to her about the compromise at present. We can wait a little longer, and see what turn affairs will take."

"But you have not told me any thing about yourself yet," said Madeleine, laying her hand on his shoulder as he was turning to mount Roland. "I may be wrong, but I think you have something you meant to tell."

"You are mistaken," he answered with a slight increase of color. "I have exhausted my budget. There is nothing else with which I need burden your mind or your heart. I am as right as a trivet. God bless you. Take care of yourself, and good-by!"

He kissed her forehead again, then sprang into his saddle and rode off, leaving her quite still in the open gate — stricken as it were into silence. What did he mean? She felt sure that his last words, his last caress, had some more than ordinary meaning attached to them — but what could it be? Naturally her mind reverted to Lacy. Did Basil suspect any thing of the subtle estrangement there? — or was the trouble his own? "My poor boy!" she thought with a pang of that vicarious suffering which it falls to the lot of some women to endure all their lives. "How hard it seems that he should have given his heart to such a woman as Helen Champion!"

Basil, on his part, was thinking as he rode away that his courage had failed at the critical moment, that he could not tell Madeleine how Lacy had made himself conspicuous the evening before by his devotion to Miss Champion. "She will hear it soon enough," he said, grimly. "As for Lacy, it will not be well for him to attempt any thing like trifling — Heavens what a riddle life is! Now, why should a woman like Madeleine have fallen in love with such a man as that?"

The speaker did not consider that the world is full of such enigmas — that he who looks around observantly may find them by the score — and that no one has ever been wise enough to solve for us the least of them. They are part of that great mystery which we call life, that burden

of sore doubt and misunderstanding, of confused meanings and hidden purposes that only eternity can lift away and make clear to the puzzled soul.

When Madeleine returned to the house, she found Miss Carlisle in the library, where she usually spent her mornings; looking very fair and fragile, in a white cashmere morning-robe, as she lay on a couch near the fire. She held out her hands with a smile when she heard the light, welcome step which entered.

"It is you, Madeleine, I know," she said. "How differently you walk from Aunt Ingram or Jessie! Are you well this morning? You can't tell what a comfort it is to wake and feel that you are in the house!"

"I am always well," answered Madeleine, kissing her. "What should ail me this morning? But how are you? Jessie looked doubtful when I asked about you before breakfast, and hinted darkly that you were kept up too late last night."

"Jessie knows nothing about it," said Mary, "I was not kept up too late at all; and I am quite as well as usual. I suppose I shall never be strong — I never have been, you know. What a good thing it is on that account that I am rich! — for, if I were poor, I should be a terrible burden to somebody."

"You can never, under any possible circumstances, be a burden to anybody," said Madeleine, quickly. Somehow those words — the first expression of satisfaction in her wealth which she had ever heard the blind girl utter — struck her strangely and almost painfully coming so immediately after Basil's foreboding acknowledgment that her interests were "seriously threatened." Of course in no case — even granting the worst — would Mary Carlisle be poor in the literal meaning of the term; but still that congratulation made Madeleine feel as if she were concealing something which it was the other's right to know.

"What can I do to amuse you?" she said, changing the subject. "I am here to play companion. Shall I read to you? I see some new magazines and novels on the table."

"One of the magazines has an essay of Gordon Lacy's, so Aunt Ingram told me," said Mary. "Read that."

Madeleine obeyed, nothing loath. She was an admirable reader, and Lacy's prose, like his poetry, was full of ease and grace. The style flowed so pleasantly, the pure, delicate English was so well chosen, there was so much of sparkling brightness here and there, that it was almost impossible to ask whether there was not a certain lack of nervous vigor, and whether the social theories which the writer expounded were sound, or his broadly generalizing criticism always just.

Certainly, these questions did not occur to the reader or the listener. The fire burned with a pleasant sound on the hearth, the mild, balmy air came in through the open window, and there was a tenderness at Madeleine's heart which echoed in the musical rise and fall of her voice. She was blaming herself and exalting the writer in a glow of remorseful love and pride. She longed to see him, in order that she might put her self-reproach into words, and make generous amend for every expression of seeming depreciation which she had uttered.

This longing was so strong that, when a peal of the door-bell suddenly echoed through the house, she laid the magazine down in her lap — almost sure that he of whom she was thinking had come. A man's voice sounded in the hall — a sudden flush rose to Mary Carlisle's cheeks. She thought, "It is Mr. Devereux!" and she was right. It was Devereux, not Lacy, who entered the room when the door opened.

It has already been said that he was a man of unusually quick perceptions, so it chanced that he caught the look of eager expectation — the love-light, as it were, of welcome — shining in Madeleine's eyes, and read aright the disappointment in which that light died out. It interested him and wakened his curiosity. Miss Severn, who rose to greet him, had no idea how much her eyes, in one swift second, had betrayed.

His manner certainly did not enlighten her. He advanced with the ease which always characterized him, and made his apologies for appearing so early. "But I am like the lover in

Shelley's serenade," he added, with a smile. "'A spirit in my feet,' brought me, whether I would or no. How well, by-the-way, Mr. Lacy sang that song last night. Miss Severn!"

"He sings very well, I think," said Madeleine, with a consciousness that it was odd that Lacy's name should be the first mentioned. "I hope you enjoyed your evening," she went on, remembering what Basil had told her of Rosalind's flirtation.

"Very much indeed," answered Devereux, probably mindful of the same fact. "Miss Champion promises to be an energetic manager, and I think will carry the theatricals through successfully. Do you not mean to take any part?"

She shook her head. "None at all. I do not think that I have any dramatic talent, and I am sure I have no dramatic ambition."

"Rosalind will act well," said Mary. "She intends to play, does she not?"

"I think she will likely be the star actress — what on the lyric stage is called *prima donna assoluta* — of the company," answered Devereux. "She is already cast for the leading part in the comedy."

"And Helen Champion," said Miss Carlisle. "What part will she take?"

"Miss Champion intends to play an after-piece with Mr. Lacy, in which she will share her laurels with no one."

"Indeed!" said Mary. It was impossible for her not to wonder what Madeleine thought of this. But Madeleine only looked up with a smile. Neither suspicion nor jealousy entered her mind. If it pleased Lacy, there was no reason why he should not play a dozen after-pieces with Helen Champion.

"I hope they will extract some amusement from the affair," she said. "It really seems to me a laborious pursuit of pleasure; but who can account for tastes! Are you much of a reader, Mr. Devereux?" she added, glancing at the magazine in her hand. "Do you keep up with the current literature of the day?"

"I confess, to my shame, that I am very little of a reader," said Devereux, with humility. "I skim the journals, and manage to know what books are out, but as for reading them — " he paused expressively.

"How strange!" said Mary, in her pathetic voice. "If I could read, I should like literature best of all things! I often think if I could only take a book and lose myself in it — not be obliged to tax any one else's eyes and throat in my service — pain might be forgotten, and life prove easy. And you, who can read — you do not care for it!"

"I did not mean to express quite so much as that," said he; "but you make me feel how little I have appreciated a great source of enjoyment. But then, one might feel that of almost every thing. In truth, I have lived a life which does not fit one for intellectual pleasures; the most barren and aimless life in the world, I begin to think — that of a society-man."

"If you feel that it is barren and aimless, why do you continue to live it?" asked Mary, with the direct frankness which people were good enough to pardon in her.

"One falls into a groove," he answered, "in which it is less trouble to walk than to rouse one's self and step out of it. I have never had a motive to rouse me, and I have been an epicurean from my birth, liking pleasure, loving ease. If I were absolutely a poor man, now —" Here he stopped. "I am tempted to be frank with you," he went on after a moment, addressing Mary, yet looking at Madeleine. "Personal details are never in good taste, but it may help you to understand why I am here. I came out of the war with only a moderate fortune, and I lived extravagantly. The result was that my means were soon very much diminished — so much diminished that I was obliged to apply to Mr. Stringfellow, a keen lawyer and old friend of my father's, for legal aid in some pecuniary difficulties. He found my affairs in a desperate state, and, in examining them, he hit upon this matter of the forgotten lease. I shall never forget the expression of his face when he said to me, 'Well, Mr. Devereux, I have found another fortune for you to make ducks and drakes of!' The lease had already expired, and he instituted suit at once for the recovery of the property. It went on for two years without my troubling myself much about it, but during this past summer

I met some people who knew you" — he spoke directly to Mary — "and they told me so much of you, that I began to feel as if I should like to know you, also. To Mr. Stringfellow's disgust, I determined to come and offer to compromise. I came, and you know the result. If the suit goes against me, I shall be a poor man; but that may be for the best. I have been a good-for-nothing all my life. Perhaps I possess no ability to be any thing else; but, if there is any power of doing in me, poverty ought to bring it out."

"Poverty must be a terrible thing," said Mary, "though I speak of it as one safely sheltered talks of tempests. How would you learn to struggle with it after such a life of careless ease? I begin to think with you that the claim should be compromised."

A sudden flush rose to Devereux's face. "You cannot do me the injustice of supposing that I spoke of myself with any reference to that, with any idea of touching your compassion!" he said. "I must beg you to believe —"

Mary lifted her hand with a slight silencing gesture. "I do you no injustice," she said, softly. "I believe that you have thought of me more than of yourself; but you must not quarrel with me if, in turn, I think of you a little."

"Quarrel with you!" said Devereux, touched by the sweetness of her words and smile. "You know that is impossible. But I cannot permit you to think of me in such a way. I am a man, though a good-for-nothing one. I shall do well in any event."

"You cannot be sure of that," said Mary, with a serious air. Then, hearing the rustling sound of Madeleine's dress as the latter suddenly rose, she turned to her. "Where are you going?" she asked quickly.

"Only to meet Rosalind, who is coming toward the house," answered Madeleine. "No doubt she wishes to see me. I shall be back presently."

"Bring her with you," said Mary. "Mr. Devereux and herself can compare notes of the last night's entertainment, and we can listen."

Madeleine said nothing — she did not even glance toward Devereux to see how he received this suggestion — as she crossed the floor, and passed out of the open window, through which she had perceived Rosalind approaching; She was possessed by a feeling of angry contempt so unusual, that it almost startled her. It is impossible to say whether this feeling was most strongly directed against Rosalind or Devereux, or whether it was shared equally between them. She felt an instinct approaching to a conviction that their meeting at the Lodge was not altogether an accident — and if it were arranged, there was an air of duplicity about it which made her heart stir with a hot sense of indignation. If they wanted to flirt, had they not honor enough to do it openly and brave the consequences? This was what she thought as she swept by Devereux with disdain, and stepped out on the piazza to meet Rosalind.

That young lady was looking quite as lovely as usual, as she advanced toward the house. Nothing that could possibly happen ever disturbed Rosalind; unless, indeed, it happened to herself. The misfortunes, the anxieties, the troubles of others, caused no ripple on the smooth surface of her content and self-complacency. Not even a recollection of the pain she had inflicted on Champion marred her calm. She was not cruel, as some women are, for the very love of cruelty; but she was entirely absorbed in herself, and wrapped in egoism like a garment.

She looked a little surprised as Madeleine descended the piazza-steps to meet her. "Good-morning," she said, with her light, rippling laugh. "I did not know that there was a watch-tower here, from which you observed the approach of visitors. How is Mary to-day?"

"She is as usual," replied Madeleine, with a strain of coldness in her voice. "But she is occupied just now, so I came out to meet you, thinking most likely you wanted specially to see me."

"Not at all," said Rosalind, quietly. "I only walked out because the morning was pleasant and I had nothing to do at home. If Mary is occupied — but how strange that Mary should be occupied! I did not know that she ever attended to business or any thing of that kind."

"She is not attending to business," said Madeleine; "a visitor is with her. If you will come into the drawing-room, or up in my room —"

"No, thanks," interrupted Rosalind. "The open air is much pleasanter. We can walk here until the important visitor is gone. I should like to see Mary."

"We will walk in the garden, then," said Madeleine.

She turned in that direction as she spoke, and Rosalind did not demur, though she knew perfectly well who the visitor was. It was no part of her policy to seem to seek Devereux's attentions, and she thought as she moved away that the step would have a good effect. He could not now suspect her of having come to meet him. She was consoling herself with this reflection, when Madeleine spoke.

"Basil was here an hour or two ago," she said. "He looked, I thought, a little jaded, and not as if he had enjoyed himself last night."

"I don't suppose he did enjoy it," responded Rosalind, coolly; and, being vexed, though she showed no sign of it, she went on with the deliberate intention of annoying her companion, "Helen Champion spent the evening flirting with Gordon Lacy. You can imagine whether or not that was pleasant to Basil. I wonder he did not give you a hint that you had better look after your property."

"Basil knows that I trust Gordon entirely," said Madeleine, in her calm, proud voice. "But how can you, Rosalind, talk of others flirting, when I heard with the deepest regret that you made yourself conspicuous last night by the manner in which you received Mr. Devereux's attentions."

"I suppose Basil told you that," said Rosalind, nonchalantly, "How strange that he had only an eye for my small peccadilloes! Mr. Devereux was the most agreeable man in the room, why should I not have received his attentions? I was very much obliged to him for entertaining me so well as he did."

"The most agreeable man in the room!" repeated Madeleine. "Where was Mr. Champion?"

Rosalind laughed, half mockingly. "James was there," she said, "and would no doubt be infinitely gratified by the compliment your question implies. But he is not Darby yet, and I am not Joan — pledged to think him the pleasantest as well as the wisest man in the world."

"Rosalind, how can you speak so lightly!" said Madeleine, pausing abruptly, with a glow in her eyes. "How can you be so ungrateful, and — forgive me if I speak plainly — so unfeeling? Do you think that it is honorable to pledge yourself to marry one man, and then to lower yourself and him by flirting with another? Basil said I must tell you that Mr. Devereux is not a man whose attentions you ought to encourage, even if you were not engaged. But since you *are* engaged —"

"Since I am engaged," interposed Rosalind, coldly, "I can manage my own affairs, without the assistance of Basil or yourself. I know what I am doing. As for my being ungrateful and unfeeling, that is — stuff! I have never thanked James Champion humbly for the honor he did me in asking me to marry him, and I have no idea that his heart will break because I amuse myself with Mr. Devereux."

"You cannot deny that he was pained," said Madeleine. "Even Basil saw that."

"He was jealous and angry," said Rosalind, carelessly. "We had rather a stormy scene last night, and I am glad he has gone off to his courts this morning, and will not be back for two weeks. A jealous man is a dreadful bore," pursued the young lady, contemplatively. "I like people who take things lightly and gracefully, like Mr. Devereux."

"There are certainly disadvantages connected with feeling any thing deeply," said Madeleine, with a tone of scorn in her voice.

After this there was silence. They paced slowly along between the flower-beds all aglow with bright autumn flowers, and the rose-bushes laden with sweet blossoms, yet neither of them heeded these things — Rosalind because she was wondering whether Devereux would go without making an opportunity to speak to her, Madeleine because her thoughts were in a tumult.

This was how the world went, she said to herself with unaccustomed bitterness. To the light of soul fell the rich gifts of life — the love, faith, devotion, loyalty, which are worth more than the wealth of kings! While to others — somehow, she could go no farther than this. There was a pain at her heart which she could not or would not analyze. She turned her back on the demon of suspicion, but how could she still the pang that was like a lance?

When they reached the end of the walk, they turned to retrace their steps toward the house. Then Rosalind uttered a slight exclamation which caused Madeleine, who was looking down, to glance up. At the end of the long alley two figures, framed in green, were advancing toward them. One was Miss Carlisle, the other Mr. Devereux.

#### Chapter IV.

##### "On Pleasure Bent."

"So it is Mr. Devereux who is Mary's visitor!" said Rosalind, with the least possible accent of triumph. "Odd of you not to mention the fact! You surely did not fear that I would go in and take his attention by storm, did you?"

"You know that I feared nothing of the kind," said Madeleine. "But I did not think that his presence concerned you."

She spoke quietly, yet she was in truth very much disturbed by Devereux's appearance. It seemed to justify her worst forebodings, and changed all the kindly feeling which she had begun to entertain for him as Mary Carlisle's possible suitor into dislike and distrust. It may be thought, perhaps, that she was rigid and strained in her ideas of what constituted honorable conduct, but she only followed in this the tradition of her family. If Devereux wished to marry Mary Carlisle, was it honorable of him to amuse himself with the vanity of another woman, and, above all, to make Mary's own house a place of rendezvous? This was what Madeleine was saying to herself when they met the others, and paused.

"How do you do, Rosalind?" said Mary. "It is Rosalind, is it not? You see we came in search of you, Madeleine. — The day is so pleasant, I thought I should like to enjoy the air."

"It *is* pleasant," said Madeleine, "in a sere soft, autumn fashion; but too damp for you, I am afraid."

"Don't believe her, Mary — it is not damp at all," said Rosalind, with a light kiss. Then she turned to Devereux with her eyes shining under their silken lashes, an enchanting smile dimpling her cheeks and showing her pearl-like teeth. "How are you this morning, after your arduous exertions last night?" she asked. "I had no idea of meeting you here."

"It is a very charming place to be met," answered he. "May I say that I am glad to see you looking so well? Evidently your social duties last night did not exhaust you."

"What social duties had you, Rosalind?" asked Mary.

"None at all except to be amused," answered Rosalind. "There was a good deal that was amusing, too, was there not?" (this to Devereux), "Everybody was so comically selfish and intent upon getting the best of every thing for themselves and their friends. Human nature, regarded from a dramatic point of view, is certainly a study."

"Is it not a study from any point of view?" asked Devereux. "But whether it repays one for devoting time and attention to it, may be doubted."

"I should think that, of all things in the world, it would repay one best," said Mary.

"Such an opinion speaks well for your own disposition, and for the friends you have made," said Devereux. "But cynical, worldly-wise people like Miss Rosalind Severn and myself, cannot agree with you."

"What reason have you for classing me with yourself as cynical and worldly-wise?" demanded Rosalind, looking at him with laughing eyes.

"I thought you favored me with a good deal of that kind of philosophy on the piazza last night," he answered, half-unconsciously lowering his voice a little.

"Ah," said she, gayly, in the same tone, "but that was all moonshine."

Talking in this manner, the quartet strolled about the garden for some time — Rosalind and Devereux bearing the chief burden of conversation, Mary joining in occasionally, but Madeleine saying scarcely any thing at all. Often she looked back to this morning, and thought of it as the beginning of a time of doubt and trouble. The flowers, the fragrance, the south wind laden with coming rain, all seemed full of the suggestion of anxiety — all seemed to stamp the occasion with picture-like vividness on her memory.

When they finally returned to the house, Mary asked Rosalind to come into the drawing-room and sing for her. "I do not have so much music as I should like," she said, "and your songs always please me."

"So I shall have the pleasure of hearing you at last!" said Devereux to the girl, as she hesitated.

"And the pleasure of laughing at me, very likely," she retorted. "Only remember, please, that I know quite as well as you do that my voice is nothing."

"But at least you will sing," said Mary, when they entered the hall.

"If you really wish to hear me," Rosalind answered, turning toward the drawing-room.

There was no fire in this room, but the air everywhere was mild and warm. Madeleine opened a window, and Devereux raised the lid of the piano. Rosalind sat down and began to sing. She had a clear mezzo-soprano voice, flexible and sweet, and, though untrained, she sang with taste; it is not possible, however, to add with feeling. She knew this, and consequently she rarely attempted to render a song which required any thing like pathos. But certain light and graceful melodies she sang charmingly. On the present occasion she did herself more than justice. Her gay tones rang out with silvery effect. "Through the wood, through the wood, follow and find me!" the arch-voice lilted. Devereux stood leaning against the piano, handsome and indolent, his eyes on the singer's face. At the other side of the instrument Mary sat, while at the farther end of the room Madeleine's slender figure was outlined against the light, as she stood by the window she had opened. It was the same window at which Devereux had seen her when he came to the Lodge first. He thought of this as he glanced toward her once or twice.

Presently the song ceased, and compliments were paid; then other songs followed, and might have continued for some time, if Madeleine, in one of the interludes, had not approached Mary.

"You will take cold in this atmosphere," she said. "It is very damp. Come over to the library. If Rosalind wishes to go on singing, and you wish to hear her, the doors can be left open."

"I have not the least desire to go on singing," said Rosalind, rising. "On the contrary, I must say good-morning, and take my way back to Stansbury. Mamma will be wondering what has become of me. — Good-by, Mary — I shall come out soon and spend the day with you."

"What! are you going?" said Mary. "Not before luncheon, surely? I cannot hear of such a thing! You must stay — and, Mr. Devereux, you will stay also, will you not?"

Devereux felt no inclination to decline — especially when Miss Carlisle added, "I will order the pony-carriage afterward, and you can drive Rosalind back to Stansbury."

"My dear Mary, how kind of you!" said Rosalind. "But I dislike to trouble Mr. Devereux."

"The trouble will certainly be terrible," said Devereux, looking at her with a smile.

They adjourned to the library after this, and found Mrs. Ingram established there. She had come down specially to see Devereux, concerning whom her curiosity was greatly excited; yet, when Madeleine presented him, she acknowledged the introduction very stiffly. What business had this claimant of Mary Carlisle's rightful property, under the roof of the Lodge, she thought, being one of those quietly venomous people who are esteemed amiable by the many, and are only known by the few.

"What a charming room this is!" said Rosalind, sinking into a puffy chair that was a very nest of luxurious comfort. She heaved a heart-felt sigh as she did so. Why was not all this brightness and grace of wealth hers? If it only could be! Already, from a mere day-dream, this idea had grown to a tangible desire. She looked at Devereux, who was essaying a few commonplaces in the direction of Mrs. Ingram. How she admired him! How entirely such a husband, and such a house, would suit her; would realize all her aspirations and desires! What would become of Mary in such a case, she did not trouble herself to consider, further than that no doubt she would be very comfortable with Madeleine and Basil.

Leaving the group about the library-fire, Miss Severn, meanwhile, sought Jessie out in the region of the store-room, and suggested that luncheon should be served as speedily as possible. "Rosalind and Mr. Devereux are here," she said, "and I think the sooner they go the better — Mary is exerting herself too much."

"She'll bring on some o' them awful spasms of the heart if she don't take care," said Jessie, anxiously. "I saw her walking in the garden with Mr. Devereux. Miss Madeleine, what is he comin' here for?"

"How can I tell?" answered Madeleine, who understood perfectly the drift of the question. "Have luncheon, Jessie, at once, and don't forget to put down wine — claret and sherry will answer, I suppose."

"Is there any thing else you can think of, Miss Madeleine?" asked Jessie, who always scorned to accept a word of advice from Mrs. Ingram. "It isn't often a gentleman comes to the Lodge, and a body likes to have things nice."

"You always have them nice," said Madeleine. "I cannot think of anything else to suggest. But pray make haste."

She went back to the library after this adjuration, and Jessie did make haste. In less than fifteen minutes, Albert, the tall, black, well-trained servant, who had waited in the Carlisle dining-room ever since he was a boy, appeared, and announced that luncheon was ready.

The dining-room was one of the pleasantest apartments of the Lodge — pleasant and thoroughly well fitted up as they all were — and immediately in front of a deeply-recessed bay-window, draped with lace curtains, stood the round-table, on which was spread a luncheon that was dainty enough to tempt the appetite of a valetudinarian. Devereux was charmed. Like all men, he appreciated excellence in the gastronomic department, and after a week or two at the Stansbury Hotel, he was specially fitted to enjoy this well-served collation, with its carefully-prepared dishes, snowy damask, beautiful china, and fragile glass. The wine, too, was good — better than is usually found in a lady's cellar — and altogether he felt like one for whom the gods have a special care. He had come to this strange region on an absolute uncertainty, not knowing what manner of people he should find, and lo! how Fortune had rewarded his somewhat blundering effort to do the thing which was right! When, in all his life, had he ever found a more interesting character than that of the blind girl by his side, or a more exquisite face than that of Rosalind, which blushed and dimpled opposite him?

When luncheon ended, the pony-carriage was standing before the door, and Rosalind put on her gloves. "Are you ready to play cavalier?" she said to Devereux. "I do not know how to drive. Madeleine is an accomplished whip, but I make it a rule never to learn to do troublesome things. Then somebody else must do them for me."

"An excellent rule," said he, smiling; "at least it seems excellent to me just now. In fact, at all times, one of the chief charms of a woman is her helplessness."

"Why not say her selfishness at once!" Madeleine thought — but such thoughts as these are among the large number that never find expression. She did not know whether Devereux was sincere, or whether he was merely uttering a commonplace of gallantry; but she was well used to hearing foolish and selfish speeches commended when spoken with infantine sweetness by lips of coral.

"Good-by again, Mary!" said Rosalind. "I have spent such a pleasant morning, and am so much obliged to you for sending me home in this delightful fashion!"

"Let me bid you good-morning also, Miss Carlisle," said Devereux, "and thank you for your graceful hospitality. Will you forgive the unconscionable length of my visit, and permit me to have the pleasure of seeing you soon again?"

"The length of your visit is very easily forgiven," said Mary, as he took her hand, "and I shall be glad to see you when you come again."

The soft graciousness of the tone was more than the words — was so much, indeed, that Devereux felt strongly tempted to lift to his lips the delicate hand which lay in his. But, even if they had been alone, he would scarcely have ventured on this — of course with three ladies standing by such a thing was not to be thought of for a moment. He pressed the hand slightly, however, saying as he did so, "Do not blame me if I come too soon."

"When do you expect to return to Stansbury, Madeleine?" Rosalind was saying, meanwhile, in her careless voice. "Honestly, I think Gordon needs looking after — which reminds me that Helen Champion is very anxious to know definitely if you will not take a part in the dramatic entertainment with which Stansbury is to be edified."

"Let her know as definitely as possible that I shall not," answered Madeleine, a little coldly. She would have scorned herself if she had been "jealous" for a moment, but still human nature is only human nature; and it was with Helen Champion that Lacy's name had been coupled before this.

Then Devereux led the young lady out and assisted her into the luxurious little phaeton, where she leaned back with an air of extreme satisfaction, while he took his seat by her side, Joe sprang to the rumble behind, and the ponies darted off. The air was more damp than it had been an hour or two before, the clouds had gathered more grayly, prospect of rain was more certain; but there was a sense of exhilaration in the moist freshness of the atmosphere, and the breeze created by their swift motion soon brought a lovely flush to Rosalind's face.

"Oh, how delicious this is!" she cried, as they swept out of the Lodge-gates. "Pray, Mr. Devereux, if you have no special reason for going at once to Stansbury, let us take a drive! Mary never goes out such a day as this, but *I* think it is perfect — the southerly wind and cloudy sky of the old hunting-ballad."

"I shall be delighted!" said Devereux, who thought that he might be more uncomfortably placed. "I am obedient to your commands. Tell me where to go."

"Turn here to the right," said Rosalind. This was the road away from the mills, for she had no desire to meet Basil. Devereux obeyed, and with their horses' heads turned in the opposite direction from Stansbury, and the southerly wind in their faces, they bowled along over the smooth autumn roads. "Who would not be rich!" thought Rosalind, with a sense that the transformation scene in her life was about to dawn. The cinders of poverty, metaphorically speaking, had been her portion during many weary years, but the turn of fortune's wheel had come at last, and she was to be lifted to that position for which she was fitted, and which she felt a calm certainty of adorning.

It boots not to tell how far this well-entertained pair drove, nor at what hour they returned to Stansbury. To them the result of their morning's visit was no doubt thoroughly agreeable and satisfactory. It was an example of the different effects which may follow the same cause that it was exactly the opposite of these things at the Lodge. Miss Carlisle, as Madeleine feared, had been too much excited. The inevitable consequences of excitement and exertion followed. After the visitors left, she complained of lassitude. "Lie down, and I will read you to sleep," Madeleine said. But there was no such thing as sleep for Mary — though tired, she was still full of nervous excitement. By evening she was feverish and suffering with those "spasms of the heart" which Jessie had prophesied and by ten o'clock at night a messenger was galloping into Stansbury for Dr. Arthur.

He came, to find his patient suffering with her most dangerous malady — that terrible form of heart-disease known as angina pectoris. Madeleine and Jessie were by her bedside — they had shared many a vigil like this before, and knew perfectly all that could be done, and how to do it — while Mrs. Ingram dozed placidly near the fire. Nobody was paying the least attention to her, but she thought that it would not "look well" if she was not visible when the doctor came; so she established herself comfortably in a deep chair, placed her feet on a cushion, and said "O dear!" and "poor child!" at sympathetic intervals, when Mary's agony found expression in shuddering moans and gasps.

It was agony such as Madeleine had never seen her suffer before, and she was not surprised that Dr. Arthur's face settled into anxious gravity as soon as he approached the bedside. He spent the night there, and only took his departure in the morning when the paroxysms of pain had at last subsided, and the exhausted girl sank to sleep under the influence of the opiates which had been freely given. Then he went down-stairs with Madeleine and uttered a few impressive words of warning, while she poured out a cup of coffee for him.

"Miss Carlisle should avoid all excitement," he said, "and she should be very careful with regard to over-exerting herself. I am sorry to perceive that her attacks become more frequent, and the paroxysms more severe. Her heart is organically affected, and, when that is the case, a fatal result may ensue from any imprudence. It might be well for you to let her know this, Miss Severn, without alarming her more than you can help. It is above all things necessary that she should be prudent, and prudence is not a virtue in which young ladies excel."

"Mary is not foolish enough to be recklessly imprudent," said Madeleine. She was unstrung from watching and anxiety, and she looked at the doctor with quivering lips and tearful eyes. "Do you really think the heart is organically affected?" she asked. "Does not that mean danger of — of sudden death at any time?"

"It means that in a measure; but in this disease the chief danger is of acute and prolonged suffering ending in death," answered the doctor. "I am sorry to pain you — as I see I do — by such words; but you must understand the case, and the need that there is for prudence and care. Miss Carlisle may live for many years if she avoids excitement and over-exertion. I cannot impress this upon you too strongly, and you must impress it upon her in any way that seems to you best."

These were not the last words he spoke, but they were the words that rang in Madeleine's ears after he was gone, and she stood for a few minutes at the window watching the mist-like rain which was falling rapidly, and the canopy of clouds that bent low over the sere trees and brown earth. The day was ineffably sad and dreary, or seemed so to her as she looked out. Who has not felt the depression which weighs on mind and body after a night's vigil? And with this depression already resting like an incubus upon her, she had heard that the life of the gentle girl who filled a sister's place in her heart, hung on a thread, that a little excitement, a little exertion, would end all things whatsoever — as far as things can end on earth — for the richly-dowered mistress of this pleasant home.

She felt that she could not trust herself to think of all that was implied in such an idea; so, hearing Mrs. Ingram's step on the stairs, she turned hastily and left the room. That estimable lady had retired to her slumbers the night before at eleven o'clock, and this was her first appearance since that time. She was looking injured and majestic when Madeleine met her in the hall, for she had called at Mary's door in passing, and Jessie had declined to admit her.

"I hear that Dr. Arthur has gone. Miss Severn," she said. "I hoped that I should have come down in time to see him and hear what he thinks of Mary's case. I am sure she is not seriously ill, and I said so last night if you remember; but still it is always well to have the opinion of a physician."

"Dr. Arthur thinks that she will do very well now, provided she is quiet and careful," said Madeleine. "I suppose you have heard that she is asleep at last, after a night of terrible suffering."

"Jessie Holme told me so," replied Mrs. Ingram, with severe emphasis on that offending person's name. "She was afraid that I would disturb Mary if I went to her room — I, who have always been considered one of the best people in the world for a nurse, because, as everybody' always says, I am so quiet. I was sorry I could not sit up after midnight last night; but there seemed no need of me, and I feel that at my time of life I must consider my own health."

"There was no need of you at all," said Madeleine, passing on. She felt too weary and anxious to be quite as courteous as usual, and Mrs. Ingram appreciated the change in her manner.

"One would really think that Miss Severn was mistress of the house!" she said, with spiteful emphasis, to Albert, who was bringing in warm buckwheat-cakes when she entered the dining-room.

Unconscious of the offense which she had given, Madeleine went up the broad, thickly-carpeted stairs to Mary's room. She sent Jessie away, and sat down by the bed on which the sick girl lay, heavily sleeping, her fair hair pushed back from the white brow on which every azure vein could be clearly traced. Madeleine gazed at the delicate, unconscious face until tears misted her sight. "My poor Mary!" she whispered once or twice. She was just then in that morbid state of mind — a verb uncommon state with her — when feeling, events, foreshadowings, are magnified and distorted beyond their true proportions. She connected the doctor's warning with the fears which had oppressed her the day before, and to her fancy it seemed as if a double doom was impending over that quiet sleeper — a doom of love and a doom of death. Which was worst? Madeleine said to herself that she could not tell. "To give such a heart as yours to an idle *vaurien* who cares only for your fortune!" she thought. "O my poor Mary, God may be kind if He takes you away from that fate!"

These were not cheerful thoughts; the fire burned low, the room was dark, and presently, through very weariness of spirit, Madeleine fell asleep. She must have slept an hour or two, but she waked at last suddenly with Jessie's hand on her shoulder and Jessie's voice in her ear.

"I am sorry to disturb you. Miss Madeleine," she said, in a low voice, "but Mr. Lacy is down-stairs."

## Chapter V.

### The Result Of Pleasure.

As Madeleine took her way down to see Lacy, she could not fail to be conscious of a sense of constraint with regard to him. There was no coldness, no jealousy, no injured self-love in this; it was not that she resented any thing which he had done, or left undone, but it was simply the inevitable result of certain given causes. Perhaps the depression under which she was laboring deepened the effect. At all events she looked like a pale wraith of herself when she glided into the library where Lacy was standing before one of the bookcases, apparently reading the titles of the volumes.

"Good-morning, Gordon," she said, in her sweet, clear voice; and he started and turned.

"Heavens, Madeleine! — what is the matter?" he exclaimed. "Is Miss Carlisle dying or dead, that you look so like a ghost?"

"She has been very ill indeed, and I suppose I look badly from having been awake all night," Madeleine answered, as he came forward and took her hands. Even then, with his warm clasp on her own and his eyes reading her face, the sense of constraint still oppressed her. It was so subtle that she could not define in what it consisted, yet it was decided enough to keep her from drooping her head on his shoulder, as she might else have done. She made an effort, however, and, looking at him with her usual tender smile, said: "I am very glad to see you. I hoped you would come; for I do not know when I shall be able to go back to Stansbury."

"Why not?" asked Lacy. "I cannot bear that you should be here. It puts you so far away from me, and I need you so much!"

"Do you miss me, then?" she said; and despite herself she could not help a little wistfulness, a shade of doubt, in her tone.

"Miss you!" be repeated. "What a question! As if I could do any thing else than miss you! I have come out here this morning because I must have your advice; are you not my counselor? Here are some letters I have received. Come to the fire and read them."

He drew her gently forward and placed her in an arm-chair. It was pleasant to be so cared for, and yet, for the first time, Madeleine felt an intangible sense of want. What was it? She did not ask herself, she only felt that it would have been better if he had come because he wished to see her, not simply because he desired her advice. But she was that rare thing — a thoroughly unselfish and unexact person. This reflection cast no shadow on her manner. She only said: "I fear I am dull and stupid this morning. You must excuse me — Mary has been so ill."

"You are never dull and stupid," said Lacy. "The idea is absurd! But I am sorry that Miss Carlisle is so ill, and still more sorry that you were obliged to sit up all night. Was it necessary? Has she not attendants?"

"Attendants — yes," said Madeleine. "But do we leave those whom we love to attendants? Now, what are your letters about? Of course you know that my best advice is at your service."

The letters were produced and examined. Two were from editors, a third from a publisher. One of the first accepted and complimented highly the poem which had been so unfortunately criticised. When she read this Madeleine looked up with a smile of pleasure so sincere that no one could doubt or mistake it.

"You see I was wrong!" she said. "How glad I am! Now you will forgive me for my blunder, will you not? — and I shall never try to play critic again."

The sweet frankness of her tone and glance touched Lacy with a sudden sense of admiration and self-reproach. At this moment it was not agreeable to remember that he had come to the Lodge specially to show her how wrong she had been — or at least, how differently others thought. The better part of his nature was fast becoming spoiled with success and the desire for praise, which is like an unhealthy appetite, that grows with indulgence; but still he felt dimly that Madeleine was his good genius, that her fearless truth, her tender sincerity, was better for mind and soul than the laudation which had become so necessary to him.

"I am not sure at all that this fellow is right," he said, touching the letter. "But, since the matter was at issue between us, I thought I would submit it to some one else."

"And the some one else has decided against me," said Madeleine, who was really delighted — it was so pleasant for Lacy to be gratified, and for herself to be proved wrong! "Dear, I congratulate you with all my heart."

"What a heart it is!" said Lacy. "The sweetest, the bravest, the best in all the world!"

"You don't know all the hearts in the world," said Madeleine, laughing. She looked up with her soft glance. Constraint and doubt fled in one happy moment. She did what many women before her have done — shut her eyes to the weakness, and threw over his faults the generous mantle of love. What people take to their hearts, they do not criticise. There is a certain degree of distance always necessary for that unpleasant operation, and Lacy had only himself to blame when he placed himself in a position where Madeleine's judgment was forced to regard him, instead of Madeleine's heart.

In this manner, that which scarcely deserves the name of an estrangement was ended, and perfect harmony restored. Lacy's wounded *amour propre* was soothed, and Madeleine felt that she was magnanimously forgiven. What did that matter? Peace and trust were sweet — and there was a golden charm about the hour which followed. The autumn rain beat mournfully on the windows, but the firelight within flickered over the apartment, Mrs. Ingram's large Maltese cat dozed placidly on the hearth-rug, and Lacy, thoroughly comfortable in a luxurious chair, talked of himself, his hopes, fears, doubts, and intentions, to his full content.

He could readily have spent the morning, if not the day, in this fashion; but an interruption occurred. The door-bell rang sharply, and Albert's voice was heard answering some one's questions with regard to Miss Carlisle, and finally saying that Miss Severn was in the library.

"Who is that, do you suppose?" asked Lacy, irritably.

Before Madeleine could reply, the door opened and Devereux entered. He looked, as usual, self-possessed and graceful, though Miss Severn's manner was chiefly remarkable for its coldness as she rose.

"Pray pardon me," he said, coming forward, "but I have been extremely concerned to hear of Miss Carlisle's illness — and especially concerned because I fear that I am to blame for it. I called to inquire how she is, without hoping to see any one, but the servant at the door told me that you were here, and I ventured to enter, in order to learn her condition, and express my most sincere regret."

"She is quiet now," said Madeleine. She spoke courteously, but he felt the chill in her voice, as if it had been a draught of cold air. "She spent a terrible night, but, for the present, danger is over, I hope."

"Danger! — was there danger?" asked Devereux. He looked shocked. "How can I forgive myself?" he went on, "You do not say so, Miss Severn, but I feel that her having walked out yesterday morning —"

"Had nothing to do with her illness," interrupted Madeleine. "But she was too much excited. I knew that at the time. She lives so quietly, she is not accustomed to seeing visitors very often, and Rosalind and yourself —"

"I cannot sufficiently express my concern," said Devereux, as she paused. "If I had suspected such a thing for a moment, nothing would have induced me, for my own gratification, to incur any risk. May I beg you to let Miss Carlisle know how sorry I am, and how earnestly I hope that she may soon be well again?"

"I will let her know," said Madeleine, "but I do not think she will soon be well. She is always very much prostrated after one of these severe attacks, and absolute rest is essential for her."

Devereux understood the hint, and was a little amused by the decided manner in which it was given. "When she recovers sufficiently to receive visitors, I hope to express my regrets in person," he said. "But I do not think you need fear that I will repeat the same offense. I have received a lesson which I shall not forget."

"I do not think it was your visit alone," said Madeleine, who felt as if she had been a little rude. "It was the general excitement. Will you not sit down?" she added, with a sudden recollection.

"No, thanks," replied Devereux, bowing again. "I only called to inquire — forgive me for troubling you, and pray express my most sincere regret to Miss Carlisle."

He passed out of the room, and Madeleine, with a slight flush on her cheek, turned back to Lacy.

"I am afraid I was not so courteous as — as I should have been," she said, contritely. "But it was all his fault — his and Rosalind's — that Mary has been so ill."

"I met them driving into town together in Miss Carlisle's carriage, about four o'clock yesterday afternoon," said Lacy, with an air of lazy amusement. "I thought it lucky Champion was not about. Rosalind looked lovely, and as full of mischief as possible. She certainly is *seduisante* to an uncommon degree. But what is to be the end of it all?"

"Heaven only knows!" said Madeleine. "Rosalind heeds no remonstrance. As for Mr. Devereux, I distrust him altogether."

"You and Champion can shake hands, then — but Basil seems to have gone over to the enemy, horse, foot, and dragoons."

"Basil thinks he means well in a business point of view; and perhaps he may — I cannot tell. But with regard to Mary, I think that he does not mean well. He intends, if he can, to marry her for her fortune, and meanwhile he is flirting with Rosalind in a way that no honorable man would think of doing."

"According to your code, few men are honorable," said Lacy, with a slightly uneasy laugh, which may or may not have had its origin in one or two pricks of conscience.

"You do not think my ideas strained, do you?" said Madeleine, looking at him with earnest eyes. "It seems to me that if I was in Mr. Devereux's place, I should feel that truth was all the more owing to poor Mary because she might be so easily deceived."

"Men of the world —" began Lacy, but she interrupted him with an impetuosity which was very novel with her:

"Even 'men of the world' profess to believe in honor, do they not?" she asked. "And I am sure you could not call it honorable to try to win a woman's hand solely as a matter of convenience, and then to fail in giving her even the poor compliment of faith, in return for such great gifts as her heart and her fortune!"

Lacy shrugged his shoulders. "The rule is the other way," he said. "But have you any right to talk of men? Do women act much better? There is Rosalind!"

"Ah!" said Madeleine, as if the mention of Rosalind in such a connection was equivalent to a physical pang. Her pride was hurt as well as her heart. One of the Severns! — one of those whose name has been for generations a synonym for honor, of whom "all the men were brave and all the women virtuous!" — that one of these should be at last that weak and volatile thing, a woman whose faith was like a feather! There is no denying that this stung Madeleine to the quick. "I cannot talk of it!" she said. "Such conduct is unworthy of any woman — it is doubly unworthy of Rosalind! I do not know where it will end. I am sorry for Mr. Champion. O Gordon, is not life a puzzle!"

"Sometimes it seems particularly so," said Gordon. He spoke feelingly. There was no disguising the fact that sometimes the puzzle was almost too much for him. It had weighed upon him heavily since he saw Madeleine last, and, if the unquiet spirit was laid a little now by the magic of her presence, he knew that it would return to torment him when his dark hour came — the dark hour of temptation as well as depression.

Presently the door-bell rang again, and this time it was Dr. Arthur who made his appearance. Then Madeleine's attention was claimed, and Lacy felt that he must go. She went out with him to the piazza, and stood there in her pretty morning-dress, the damp air waving her brown hair, and bringing a faint color to her pale cheeks, while he mounted his horse. Having done so, he turned again to say good-by. "Come back to Stansbury as soon as possible, *anima mia*," he said, caressingly. "There is no telling what will become of me if you do not. I cannot live without my counselor."

"But you can come to see her, can you not?" the counselor asked.

"And be interrupted by Messieurs Devereux and Arthur! That is not very satisfactory. Promise me that you will come as soon as you can."

"Of course I will," said Madeleine.

But she was not destined to fulfill this promise very speedily. Mary's illness lasted as she had feared that it would. There were more paroxysms of heart-disease, followed by utter prostration; and so, for two weeks, Madeleine scarcely left the sick-room where Jessie alone shared her labor of watching. The doctor knew that he could depend implicitly on these two, and all other nurses were excluded. Of how the world went on during this time Miss Severn scarcely knew. Basil came daily to inquire about Mary, but sometimes Madeleine did not see him, and when she did he was not communicative with regard to outside affairs. Indeed, there was not time for any extended communications, if either of them had felt inclined that way. Those who have watched in a sick-room know how engrossing that occupation is — how absorbing to the mind, how wearying to the body! Lacy came once or twice, but found these visits so "unsatisfactory,"

that he discontinued them. Perhaps it was natural that it should not have occurred to him that they might be a pleasure to Madeleine. Other visitors called, were received by Mrs. Ingram, and departed leaving sympathetic cards and condolences. Rosalind flitted in and said she would be "glad to do any thing she could." Being assured that her services were not needed, she gladly departed. So matters went on. By the end of the second week Mary began to mend, but the third week was well advanced before the doctor said that she might be taken to the library and see a few quiet friends.

## Chapter VI.

### Madeleine Returns To Stansbury.

Foremost among these quiet friends was Basil Severn. The first day that Mary was established on her familiar couch by the library-fire — fire needed now, since it was a clear, frosty November morning — he entered, with warmest pleasure and congratulation on his frank, sunburned face. This face poor Mary could not see, but she could hear the genial ring of his voice, and feel the cordial clasp of his hand.

"What a pleasure it is to see you down again!" he said, holding her fragile hands — thin and shadowy as a fairy's — tightly within his own. "I began to think you meant to retire permanently into winter quarters up-stairs, or that Dr. Arthur meant to keep you there! By Jove! it is odd to think that when I saw you last I told you how particularly well you were looking, and now — "

"And now you can tell me exactly the reverse, I suppose," she said, with a smile. "How fortunate it is that I can't see how badly I look! Dear Basil, I am so glad to be down — and what a weary time Madeleine has had with me!"

"Do you hear her?" said Madeleine. "She does not talk of her own great pain — such pain, Basil! — but of how tired I must be who have suffered nothing."

"The pain is gone," said Mary, simply. "Why should I talk of it? But I am sure that Madeleine feels and shows the effects of her confinement. Basil, does she not? I cannot let you have her in Stansbury yet, but she must certainly go to drive to-day. I have told her that. I hope Gordon Lacy will come to go with her."

"Have you seen Lacy lately?" said Basil, looking at his sister — and something in his tone, or in the expression of his face, seemed to Madeleine full of restrained significance.

She shook her head. "It is nearly ten days since I saw him last," she said. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Severn, carelessly, "except that I wondered if he had found time to come; he seems to be absorbed in those theatricals which they are organizing in Stansbury."

"So that is still going on?" said Madeleine; then she laughed. "When one has been withdrawn a little from the world, one is apt to forget that it has not stood still," she said. "Instead of asking if the theatricals are still going on, I should have asked, how are they going on?"

"As well as such matters usually do, I believe, with not more than a quarrel a day, on an average, among the performers — which, of course, does not include any that may spring out of the half-dozen deadly feuds flourishing in the town."

"Are you one of the performers?" asked Mary,

"I fill the honorable and onerous position of stage-manager," said he, "and heartily tired of the whole affair I am. If it had been possible to retreat, with due regard to others, I should have resigned my office long ago."

"Tell us all about it," said Mary. "We have heard nothing — Madeleine and I. Does Rosalind play leading lady?"

"In the comedy, yes — to Devereux's leading gentleman," answered Basil, looking again at Madeleine — a look in which the significance was not at all restrained now. "Champion has been induced to take a part in the same play, very much against his will. I fancy he will throw it up in disgust before long. Miss Champion and Lacy monopolize the after-piece."

"And what is the end of it all?" asked Mary. "Amusement pure and simple?"

"Amusement, certainly," replied Severn, "with a decent pretext of 'charitable purpose.' If you ask what the charitable purpose is, however, upon my word I am unable to tell you."

"I wonder if the rest are as well amused as you are?" said Mary, with a laugh, while Madeleine looked at her brother with wistful eyes. She understood him thoroughly, and, under every careless word he uttered, heard the sharp cadence of suffering. Instinctively she felt all that had been going on — at least as far as he was concerned. She felt how the fancy for Helen Champion, against which he had struggled for years, had been fanned by the coquetry of its object, and the association of these past weeks, into a torturing love. "For her own triumph!" Madeleine thought. "Oh, the sinfulness, the heartlessness, the cruelty of such conduct!" Her soul was sick with indignation. It was not only that she loved her brother as few brothers are loved, but she pitied him with that tender compassion which is akin to pain. His life had been so hard, and he had borne it so bravely! This was what she often said to herself. And that a frivolous woman, simply for her own amusement, should add the bitterness of squandered love to the failed ambition and weary toil of this life, seemed almost too much to bear. Yet such things must be borne. It falls to the lot of many women to look on powerless, and see their dearest and best fling their hearts down into the dust at the feet of some unworthy Circe.

After Basil was gone — and he did not stay very long — Madeleine felt a spirit of restlessness take possession of her. Despite the efforts to do so, she could not forget how he had looked when Lacy's name was mentioned, and again when he had spoken of Rosalind and Devereux. She was conscious of a sudden desire to see with her own eyes, and hear with her own ears, all that there was to see and hear. After struggling for a time with the feeling, she suddenly rose.

"If you have no objection, Mary," she said, "I will leave you for a little while. I think I should like to go to Stansbury. It was three weeks yesterday since I left home, and there are several things needing my attention."

"Certainly," said Mary. "I am not selfish enough to want to keep you pinned to my side now. But you will be sure and come back, will you not? I cannot give you up, and, pray, ring and order the carriage. You must not think of walking."

Madeleine made no demur about this. Generally she liked walking, but now she felt languid from confinement, and impatient besides. This impatience struck her as something strange. For three weeks she had no more troubled herself about affairs in Stansbury than if they had been affairs in Paris; yet now, all in a minute as it were, she felt charged with restlessness as with electricity. Was it because of the suffering she had seen on Basil's face, or the significance in his tones? Whatever it was, she was trembling with nervous excitement when she went up-stairs and changed her dress for driving.

The close carriage which she had ordered, in preference to the pony-phaeton, was at the door when she came down. Gilbert, the coachman, would probably have kept Mrs. Ingram waiting half an hour, but all the household liked to serve Madeleine, and he had brought out his horses with unusual celerity when he heard that they were wanted for her.

The day was bright and sparkling, though cold — as cold is reckoned in the South. There had been a white frost early in the morning under which the roses had drooped their heads, to raise them no more till spring. Indian summer was yet to come with all its mellow, hazy beauty, but for the present the earth felt

"... Winter's scourge, with Summer's kiss  
Still warm upon her lips."

The drive to Stansbury was short, and when Madeleine entered the town she was struck by the change which the past three weeks had made in the appearance of every thing. Autumn splendors were gone, brown leaves covered the earth, bare trees lifted their skeleton branches against the pale-blue sky — how different from the glowing world of color she had left when she drove to the Lodge with Mary Carlisle on that October afternoon! Her road led past the Champion residence, one of the stateliest in the town, an imposing, white-pillared house, crowning a hill, its beautiful lawn dotted with evergreens, sloping down to the street in front. This was Rosalind's future home. Madeleine could not restrain a slight sensation of wonder as she looked at it. She knew Rosalind so well — her intense love of ease and luxury, her passionate desire for wealth — yet, now these things were within her reach, she was playing fast and loose with the man who represented them! What did it mean? Miss Severn asked herself, conscious of her knowledge of character being at fault somewhere. Rosalind could not think that Devereux — who had frankly avowed himself a poor man — would marry a penniless woman, neither was it at all likely that so thorough an epicurean as that young lady would, under these circumstances, desire to marry him. Was it all a mere pursuit of the pleasure of the minute? Or was a *grande passion* — that mad fever of heart and brain which is thoroughly reckless of consequences so long as it lasts — involved with either or both? Mrs. Severn was the only person at home when Madeleine entered the familiar sitting-room. She was darning a table-cloth with great care, from which she looked up as her step-daughter appeared.

"Why, Madeleine, is this you?" she said, with placid surprise. "I am very glad to see you back again — and how is Mary? I told Rosalind only this morning that I thought I would go to see her."

"Mary will be very glad to see you now that she is better and able to receive visitors," said Madeleine. She bent and kissed the faded lips as she spoke, and then sat down — looking round a little vaguely. For what had she come? She could scarcely tell, except that it was not to sit here and watch Mrs. Severn go back to her work — her slender, blue-veined hands, which seemed made for other uses, moving methodically to and fro across the shining damask. Darning is absorbing work, but nevertheless she was able to glance at the face opposite and say:

"You are looking badly yourself, Madeleine. I am afraid you have been confined too closely with Mary; indeed, Basil has been quite uneasy about you."

"I am very well;" answered Madeleine, "but of course the confinement has told on me. I have not much appetite. I hope you have been well — and Rosalind. Where is she?"

"She has gone to a rehearsal," replied Mrs. Severn. "I suppose you have heard of the theatricals Helen Champion and herself are engaged in getting up. I can't say that I exactly approve of such amusements; but young people must have some diversion — and this is a dull place."

"I suppose they are diverting," said Madeleine, who was not interested in the theatricals further than what might grow out of them.

"They seem so," answered Mrs. Severn, threading her needle. "Rosalind has been at home very little lately; and the company have been here several times in the evening. I shall be glad, however, when the entertainment is over," she added, in a tone which to Madeleine's ear was full of meaning.

"Probably Rosalind will not be sorry," she said. "Such affairs generally end in proving more tiresome than entertaining."

"I am afraid Rosalind is very well entertained," said Rosalind's mother, dropping her work in her lap and looking up with her still pretty and pathetic eyes full of anxiety. At this point she hesitated. She did not wish to say any thing severe of her darling; and yet she, like every one else connected with Madeleine, always went to her in matters of doubt and times of trouble.

"I think I can easily conjecture what is going on," said Miss Severn. "Rosalind is flirting with Mr. Devereux, is she not? I expected nothing else. And what does Mr. Champion think of it?"

"He is very jealous," said Mrs. Severn. "Any one can see that; and, O Madeleine, I am greatly afraid the engagement will be broken off. It is not," the lady went on, raising her delicate head with an air of pride, "that I do not think that Rosalind is in a manner throwing herself away upon James Champion; but then he is the best match she can command *here*, and — "

"And she engaged herself to him, I believe," said Madeleine in a tone which was a trifle hard — if such an expression could possibly be applied to her voice.

"Yes, she engaged herself to him," said Mrs. Severn. "And it is not in good taste to break engagements — so I have told her; but she only laughs. If you would speak to her —"

"Excuse me," said Madeleine. "I have no influence over Rosalind. I should have discovered that three weeks ago, when I tried to remonstrate with her about this very matter, if I had not known it before."

"I do not see what she means," said Mrs. Severn with a sigh. "Mr. Devereux has squandered all his fortune, Basil says, unless he wins this suit, when in that case — Why, what is the matter, Madeleine?"

"Oh, nothing," said Madeleine; but she had started and grown suddenly paler than she had been before. Mrs. Severn's words gave, like a flash, the key to the enigma which had puzzled her. That was what Rosalind meant! If Devereux won the suit — if Mary Carlisle was dispossessed of her fortune — she would marry him. If not, all this would pass as the amusement of an idle hour, she would probably bestow the inestimable treasure of her hand on James Champion, while Devereux — but this was more than Madeleine could bear to consider. "My poor Mary! my poor Mary!" she said to herself, while a flood of passionate resentment rushed over her. Involuntarily she rose. "I will be back presently," she said, and quitted the room.

Left alone, Mrs. Severn shook her head. Madeleine's affairs did not by any means possess to her the interest which belonged to Rosalind's; but she was nevertheless sufficiently attached to her step-daughter to feel sorry for a blow which she knew to be impending over her. More than once lately Rosalind had spoken of Gordon Lacy's "flirtation" with Helen Champion; more than once she had said that she thought it would end in something more than mere flirtation. That very morning at breakfast, after Basil's departure, she had calmly delivered her opinion on this subject.

"Helen is crazy to marry Gordon since she thinks he is likely to become distinguished," Rosalind said. "She cared nothing about him before she went away and heard people talking of his writings. Now she professes to 'adore intellect,' and all such stuff, and is perpetually paying him compliments, which he receives condescendingly and returns in kind. I used to be very fond of Gordon, but really he is growing so spoiled that he is not like himself, and, as a matter of self-respect, Madeleine will be forced to discard him before long, I think."

"Do you think he can possibly wish to marry Helen?" Mrs. Severn had inquired.

"I think he does," Rosalind returned, coolly. "He may be in love with Madeleine — I don't pretend to know about that — but Helen is handsome and rich, and shows her preference for him openly."

"I call it very singular conduct on her part when she knows he is engaged to another woman," remarked Mrs. Severn, with faint indignation.

Her daughter laughed. "Helen cares nothing for that. She believes in

The good old rule, the simple plan,  
That he shall take who has the power,  
And he shall keep who can, "

she replied, carelessly — though how much she indorsed such a rule herself, she did not add.

Mrs. Severn remembered this conversation, and so it chanced that she shook her head over the table-cloth. But she had exhausted her powers of keen emotion earlier in life, and now was in the habit of taking things, pleasant or otherwise, with a mild philosophy — which she did not in the least suspect to be philosophy. She went back to her darning in this spirit. Matters

would probably right themselves after a time. Meanwhile, it would not do to "slight" this beautiful damask which had worn so admirably for twenty years.

When Madeleine came back to the sitting-room she still had her hat on, and she bade her step-mother good-morning, much to that lady's surprise. "I promised Mary not to be gone long," she said, "and I have some shopping to do down-street. By-the-way, can you tell me where the rehearsal is going on? I should like to see Rosalind for a few minutes —"

"The rehearsal is at the theatre," answered Mrs. Severn. "If you could only say something to Rosalind to make her more careful, Madeleine —"

"I fear that is impossible," said Madeleine, gently but coldly.

This coldness remained with her as she drove away. She felt that she could never again voluntarily speak to Rosalind on the subject. She was filled with a sense of scorn which was new to her, and which may seem overstrained to those who do not consider first her peculiar organization, and secondly the sacredness which to her, as to Basil, seemed to encircle Mary Carlisle.

When Gilbert drew up before the building, which was a very passable little theatre for a country-place, and was always grandiloquently spoken of in bills and posters as the Stansbury "Opera-House," a group of young ladies and gentlemen were descending the steps which led to that temple of art. This was the *corps dramatique*. But among them Rosalind was not, neither was Helen Champion, neither Lacy nor Devereux. Madeleine stopped a member of the group to ask for the missing performers — at least for the only one in whom she chose to express an interest.

"Rosalind is still in the hall," answered the young lady addressed. "I saw her as I came out. Are you going up? This is the stage-entrance."

"I am going up for a few minutes," said Madeleine. "The other entrance is closed."

She passed on as she spoke. The theatre was on the second floor, and the stairs leading to the rear of it were steep and dark. Having climbed to the top of them, she came to a door and pushed it open, finding herself in that bewildering region which lies at the back of the stage. She walked a few steps, and while she then paused, irresolute which way to turn, Helen Champion's artificial laugh suddenly fell on her ear.

"That will do for Sir Edward Ardent," the voice which matched this laugh said, coquettishly; "but you have no right to say such things to me as *Mr. Lacy*."

"Why have I not?" Lacy's well-known tones replied — indolent tones, with a strain of banter in them, yet a subtle accent of admiring tenderness, too. "Are they not true? You know as well as I do that they are. Let me be Sir Edward Ardent, then, and say how well that yellow rose looks in your hair, *belle Odalisque*!"

"It came from the hot-house; there are no roses in the garden this morning. Should you like to have it? You said the other day that you only cared for things which were rare."

"I should like to have it if you can honestly aver that you gathered it and wore it for me!"

"Of all conceited men, you are certainly the most conceited and spoiled!" said Miss Champion, with another laugh of gratified vanity. "And suppose I did say so — what then?"

"Then I would beg you to put it in my button-hole, while I quoted Waller's verses for you."

"I never heard them — are they very pretty?"

"Very indeed."

"As pretty as yours?"

"I never wrote any thing half so good in my life."

"I am sure I shall not think so; mamma says I am quite absurd with regard to your poems, I like them so much."

"You are very kind, but about the rose —"

"Oh, I suppose I must confess that, when I saw this bud, I thought of what you said the other day about yellow roses, and so — here it is! Now for the verses."

"You must pin it in my button-hole," said Lacy, placidly.

It need not be supposed that Madeleine overheard this artless conversation voluntarily. For a moment she had paused — doubtful whether to go on or to go back — her heart throbbing, her cheeks flushing. Then instinct said, "Go on!" and she went forward. But to reach the point whence the voices proceeded was not so easy as it seemed. There was little light, and apparently endless confusion. Madeleine had never been behind the scenes in even the smallest theatre before, so it occurred most accidentally that she made her appearance on the stage just when Miss Champion was pinning the yellow rose under discussion in Lacy's button-hole, while that gentleman repeated those charming verses of Waller's which begin, "Go, lovely rose!"

The lady's face was turned toward the wing at which Madeleine made her entrance, and it was she who started so violently, flushed so deeply, and dropped the rose, that Lacy turned. His surprise and confusion were scarcely less great when he saw Miss Severn advancing. He was generally the farthest possible remove from an awkward man, but at this moment he was thrown off his guard, and he looked as he felt — startled and guilty. Altogether it was an odd little scene — a bit of impromptu drama — and Rosalind and Devereux, who were conducting their flirtation in the auditorium, paused, surprised and amused, to look on.

It was Madeleine who ended the awkwardness and put them at their ease. Her pulses were beating with a vibrating rush, but pride steadied her nerves and gave all its usual composure to her manner. Such tests as this show mettle and breeding. She came forward with a smile, and when she spoke her voice had lost none of its sweet frankness.

"Good-morning, Helen — good-morning, Gordon," she said. "Pray, pardon me for startling you by such an unexpected appearance, but I ventured to come up unpiloted, and it seems that it is a very difficult undertaking to find one's way on the stage. What a lovely rose!" she added, as she stooped, lifted and handed the beautiful cloth-of-gold bud to its owner.

"Yes, it is very pretty," said Miss Champion, who had the grace not only to look but to feel ashamed. "I am glad to see you in Stansbury once more, Madeleine," she went on, with an effort to speak cordially. "How is Mary Carlisle?"

"Better, I am glad to say," replied Madeleine. Then she looked at Lacy, and spoke with the faintest possible trace of malice in her tone. "Are you rehearsing?" she said. "I beg that you will not let me interrupt you. I came in search of Rosalind. Is she not here?"

"She was here a moment ago," said Lacy, looking round. "There she is, in the auditorium! Will you let me take you down to her?"

"That is not worth while," Madeleine replied, "if you will tell me how to get down. Do I go this way?"

"No — in this direction." He moved in the direction indicated, and she followed him through the side-scenes, down a flight of steps, to a door, which he opened. Then she said: "Thank you; do not let me trouble you any further" — and passed him with an air of quiet decision.

He looked after her a moment as she walked away — admiring, perhaps, the gentle stateliness of her carriage, the graceful poise of her head, the whole air of distinction which stamped so unmistakably her manner and bearing. Then he turned, and went back to Miss Champion, who was rather sedately fastening her boa round her throat.

"Pray, do not think of attending me home," she said, with an air of elaborate indifference. "Of course, I do not expect such a thing with Madeleine here. Good-morning."

"Allow me to relieve you of that book you are carrying," said Lacy, coolly, "and where is my rose? — am I not to have it, after all?"

"Are you really coming?" asked she, pleased, yet incredulous, as he took the book from her hand.

"Do I not always come?" he replied. "Is it likely I shall deprive myself of that pleasure this morning? Take care of the step! Let me assist you."

## Chapter VII.

### "La Belle Odalisque."

Rosalind met Madeleine very warmly. In some slight manner she was probably attached to her sister — in some slight manner, also, indignant with Lacy. This indignation was not extreme, for the younger Miss Severn was not an impulsive person, nor did she ever feel keenly any thing which concerned others; but it was sincere, and untempered by any reflection that she was acting in the same manner. It was a woman's privilege to flirt, she would have said, if such a consideration had been suggested to her, and it is well known that many things which are allowable in women are contemptible in men. She had no doubt that Madeleine would find or make an occasion to say something disagreeable to her, but that did not greatly matter, and in the mean time the little throb of sisterly feeling, already mentioned, stirred in her breast and gave a genuine warmth to her greeting. Devereux, on his part, received the somewhat frigid bow which Madeleine bestowed on him, with the air of one whose conscience was altogether void of offense.

"Where do you come from?" Rosalind asked. "I never was more surprised than when I looked up a minute ago, and saw you advancing on the stage. You appeared quite dramatically — did she not?" (this to Devereux). "And so gracefully, too! I wish I could hope to make my appearance so effectively. But how is Mary? — and have you come home 'for good,' as children say?"

"Mary is much better," replied Madeleine, "but I have not come to remain — only for a short visit. I did not find you at home, so I thought I would call by here to see you."

"I am glad to see you!" said Rosalind — who felt any thing but grateful, since her *tête-à-tête* with Devereux had reached a very interesting point when the interruption occurred. "But are you walking?"

"No — I am driving. Mary's carriage is at the door."

"Then you can drive me home — I detest walking! Let us go down, for this place is growing cold."

Back over the stage, therefore, they went; and as Rosalind led the way, Madeleine found herself with Devereux. After a minute, he spoke:

"I am exceedingly glad to hear that Miss Carlisle is better, Miss Severn, and I hope you have forgiven me for my unlucky share in the imprudence which caused her illness."

"I should be very unreasonable if I blamed you for her illness," said Madeleine, who felt that she must be just, even though she disliked and despised this handsome, well-bred man of the world. "Of course, you could not know that Mary had heart-disease, or that so slight an excitement might lead to such painful consequences."

"No, I could not know it," he said; "but now that I have learned it — now that I am not likely again to be guilty of so much imprudence — will you not give me the hope of seeing her soon?"

She turned almost involuntarily, and a look which startled and surprised him flashed suddenly out of her brown eyes. Devereux never forgot that moment. He was holding open the door which Lacy had held open before him, and the full glance met his own, just as Madeleine passed into the darkness beyond. Such a glance! It seemed to thrill him like a flash of electricity. He asked himself in amazement, what it meant. What had he said or done? What had called forth that flash of fire out of the softness which usually sheathed it? What was it the eloquent look expressed? — scorn? — indignation? But what had occurred to wake either sentiment?"

Madeleine, unconscious how much she had betrayed, walked on till they emerged upon the stage. Then she turned and addressed him. "I believe I did not answer your question," she remarked. "The doctor has said that Miss Carlisle is able to receive visitors, but I think it would

be well for those who see her to be very cautious. The least excitement may cost her another severe illness, or — her life."

"This way, Madeleine!" said Rosalind, turning round. "Take care! — the steps are steep. Laura Gresham fell here the other day, and injured herself severely."

"Can I assist you?" asked Devereux, but Miss Severn returned a decided negative, and, as he followed, he asked himself again, what had he done? He could think of nothing that deserved such severe punishment: from which it will be perceived that Mr. Devereux was afflicted with rather a callous conscience.

Having put the two ladies into the waiting carriage, he closed the door, and was turning away, when Rosalind spoke.

"You will remember to-night, at the Champions', will you not?" she said; and Madeleine, glancing at her, thought how much seductive beauty there was in the face bent forward, the lovely eyes upraised, with an expression in their depths that the dullest man alive might have read.

Devereux read it and smiled. After all, can we blame a man for being flattered, when his vanity is gratified as some women know so well how to gratify it? "I will endeavor to be there," he replied. "But I may be detained away — by business. I shall see you at the rehearsal to-morrow, however. Good-morning."

He lifted his hat, and walked away — an elegant figure, in strong contrast with most of the Stansbury men loitering about. Rosalind looked after him approvingly. "Are not his manners charming?" she said to her sister, "and does not he dress faultlessly? There is no suspicion of the dandy about him, and yet every thing is in such perfect taste! What beautiful gloves he wears! What exquisite handkerchiefs he uses! Ah, how I adore the polish and refinement of men of the world!"

"And what has become of Mr. Champion?" asked Madeleine. "Have you altogether ceased to adore him?"

"Did I ever adore him?" replied the other, raising her brows. "Poor James! I don't think I ever did, though of course I like him very much — after a fashion. He came back from his courts about a week ago, and has been very unpleasant ever since. If men only knew how much they injure their cause by behaving like bears — but fortunately he is very busy, and I do not see much of him. I suppose you have heard that he has thrown up his part, and refuses to have any thing more to do with the theatricals?"

"I had not heard that important fact."

"It is quite true. Helen came to the rehearsal this morning very much vexed. 'Brother James announced at breakfast that, since next week is court week, he will not have any time to spare for theatrical absurdities.' So now we are almost in despair for some one to take his place. Helen wants Gordon Lacy to do so, but he only cares to play *Sir Edward Ardent* to her *Mrs. Chillington*. It affords him no pleasure to take the part of my lover."

"Did you fancy that it would?"

"Oh, dear, no. Why should it? I am not sympathetic and *spirituelle*, like you — nor yet a wealthy Odalisque, like Helen Champion."

"Why do you call her such a name as that?" asked Madeleine. Despite herself, she shrank a little. The same expression had been on Lacy's lips.

"Have you not heard it before?" asked Rosalind. She laughed, yet she glanced keenly at her sister. She was sorry, but then she was angry too — with Lacy — and thought it "high time" for his misdemeanors to be known to the person most concerned in resenting them. "That is what every one in Stansbury is calling Helen just now," she said. "Gordon addressed some verses to her under that name, and she was so elated that she has exhibited them to everybody. People are laughing and talking no little over the affair, and one hears of 'La Belle Odalisque' on all sides."

"Have you seen the verses?" asked Madeleine. As she spoke — steady though her voice was — her heart turned faint.

It was not the isolated fact of Lacy's having dedicated some verses to another woman which so affected her, but the realization of how one little circumstance after another seemed to be fitting into each other like a mosaic work of proof against him.

"I should think so, indeed!" said Rosalind. "The question is who has not seen them? I took a copy for your benefit, thinking you might like to glance over it. Come in, and you may have that pleasure."

The carriage stopped before the Severn gate as she spoke, but Madeleine hesitated. "I hardly think I have time," she said. "I hardly think I care —"

"Oh, *pray* come in!" said Rosalind, anxiously. "I want your advice about my dress for the comedy. I must look my prettiest, you know, and mamma has lent me all her point-lace. It is lovely on my green silk, and I want your emeralds, Madeleine."

"Of course you can have them," said Madeleine. "Shall I get them for you now?"

"If you will be so kind," answered Rosalind, springing from the carriage.

They entered the house together, and went up to Madeleine's room. Here the latter unlocked the drawer of a small cabinet and took out a casket containing her mother's jewels. The set of emeralds which Rosalind wished to borrow was the handsomest among them — so handsome, indeed, that Madeleine seldom wore it. She had a fine sense of the fitness of things, and she knew — what many people seem not to know — that jewels are only appropriate at certain times and under certain circumstances.

"How lovely!" said Rosalind, slipping the ear-rings into her ears and running to a mirror. "Fancy Helen Champion with such a tint next her complexion! One should certainly be obliged to Nature when she has given one a delicate skin! Thank you very much, Madeleine! And now I will get you the poem."

Before Madeleine could reply, she left the room, and in a moment came back with a sheet of folded paper in her hand.

"Here it is!" she said. "Take it and read it at your leisure — keep it, also, I beg, for *I* don't want it! To think of all that nonsense about Helen Champion, one of the most ordinary girls in the world! Gordon ought to blush with shame! But I was determined you should know about it, and, if you take my advice, you will write at once and discard him."

"Thanks for the advice," said Madeleine, slightly smiling. She took the paper and looked at it doubtfully for a moment. "You are sure there is no breach of confidence in your showing me this?" she said.

"Breach of confidence!" repeated Rosalind. "What non-sense! I tell you Helen shows it to anybody; and I scribbled off that copy before her eyes. You certainly have the most absurd scruples, Madeleine!"

"It is better to have too many than too few," said Madeleine.

She slipped the paper into her muff, however, put away the casket, locked the cabinet-drawer, and turned to go. "Mary will be anxious," she said. "I promised to be back soon. Rosalind, I wish that it was worth while to speak to you seriously once more —"

Rosalind put her hands over her emerald-hung ears. "I don't mean to be impolite," she said, "but it is really not worth while at all. I know what I am about. If you want to speak seriously to anybody, devote your attention to Gordon."

In this way they parted; and when Madeleine found herself in the carriage, alone again and driving out toward the Lodge, she drew from her muff the paper which Rosalind had given her, and opened it. The following verses were copied thereon, in that very large and almost illegible "English hand" which has become so fashionable of late:

#### LA BELLE ODALISQUE.

Half reclined on silken cushions,  
Veiled in mellow, golden light,

With a smile so sweetly gentle,  
And with eyes so darkly bright,  
With an air of tender softness  
On the lovely, downcast face,  
Yet a spell of subtle passion  
In the languid Southern grace!

With an arm upon the sofa,  
Ivory-white and rounded fair,  
And a slender hand caressing  
The dusk curls of raven hair;  
With a smile on lips half parted.  
While the fringed lids droop low,  
And a charm of pensive beauty  
On the smooth, broad, Grecian brow!

With a royal grace of motion  
Waves the fan within her hand,  
Trained as any queenly sceptre  
To the gesture of command!  
And behold a dewy rose-bud  
Glowing blushfully above  
The warm heart-beats of a bosom  
Thrilled with happiness and love!

Who may master, my empress!  
The deep secrets of your grace?  
Who may read the rare enigmas  
Hidden in your haunting face!  
What your arch-enchantments whisper,  
And what fateful meaning lies  
In the depths of star-like lustre  
Dawning from your midnight eyes?

'Neath the shade of drooping lashes  
What gay gleams of light beguile!  
Who can say what magic dwelleth  
In your swift, bewildering smile!  
All your tones are rife with music,  
Rhythmic rills of silvery sound.  
Rippling through the dreamy softness  
Of the perfumed air around.

Oh, the whirl of captured senses!  
Oh, the pulse-beats swift and strong!  
What to me the rush of dancers?  
What to me the glittering throng?  
Fettered by your eyes' dark splendor,  
I confront you charmed and dumb;  
Wondering what strange fate shall crown you,  
Siren! in the days to come!

If Madeleine's lip curled over this effusion, let no one blame her, or fancy that it curled from jealousy of the woman so berhymed. Indeed, the flattery with which every line was redolent, struck her almost absurdly. This to Helen Champion! She smiled as her hand dropped the paper into her lap — a smile of faint amusement dashed with a scorn that with many women would have passed into cynical bitterness. It stopped short of bitterness with Madeleine, yet Lacy would scarcely have been gratified thereat if he had read her thoughts. These thoughts were not angry or contemptuous, but they simply faced for the first time a consciousness which had before this dawned upon her — a consciousness that the man whom she loved, the man she had promised to marry, was no high ideal, no stainless knight, no sublime demi-god at whose feet she could offer incense, but a mortal very full of faults, and (worse still in the eyes of a woman!) full of weaknesses.

There are few passions to which such an hour of awakening does not come, and let us own that there are few that stand the test of the revulsion of feeling which inevitably follows. The love which draws together the rank and file of mankind, partakes very little of the nature of an idealizing sentiment, therefore to this love no such disenchantment is possible. But to the few who are exalted — whether for their own good or not, who can say? — above this level, the passion of love must be an idealizing sentiment, or else it is degradation. Yet to how many the hour comes when the veil of romance is rent asunder and the clay feet of the idol stand confessed! Who blames Love then, if he turns and flies? But there are some rare natures in which he only changes his guise — changes from passion to forbearing tenderness. Such a nature was Madeleine Severn's. Not a weak nature clinging like a reed to that which has shaken it off, but a nature rock-like in its constancy and truth.

As she sat, with the poem lying in her lap, gazing absently out of the carriage-window at the landscape flitting past — the bare fields, the brown woods, the curling white smoke of the Carlisle mills in the distance — she was asking herself sadly what she had better do. She put herself aside, she would not listen either to her pride or her heart, as she pondered the question. There was no one to whom she could appeal. Basil, in a different spirit, would have echoed Rosalind's advice, and urged her to discard the man who thus paraded his devotion to another woman. But Madeleine held her pledge as something which had not been lightly given and could not be lightly broken. No one would ever say to her:

"I think you hardly know the tender rhyme  
Of 'Trust me not at all or all in all.' "

As she entered the Lodge, she encountered Mrs. Ingram in the hall. "Mary grew tired, and has been taken up-stairs," said that lady, "but Mr. Lacy is in the library, and has been waiting for you for some time."

The speaker was not very observant, or she might have noticed the start which Madeleine gave at the sound of that unexpected name. It was the last she had any idea of hearing, and she stood still for a moment, undecided whether to go in at once, or to take a little time to consider what she should say. But what good purpose would consideration serve? surely none, and so, turning, she entered the room.

Lacy had seen the approach of the carriage, and when she opened the door, he advanced quickly to meet her with both hands extended.

"My Madeleine," he said, eagerly, "do not judge me until you hear me!"

"Is there any need for me to judge you at all?" asked Madeleine with gentle coldness. She allowed him to take her hands, but she looked at him with a glance which stopped any warmer demonstration. After all, her pride had been keenly wounded, and she would have been something more than a woman if she had showed no sign of it.

"Have you not the right to judge me?" said Lacy, "and are you not exercising that right now? Madeleine, are you angry with me, or are you contemptuous of me? An ordinary woman might be both; but you — tell me, is it only that foolish conversation which you overheard that makes you look at me with eyes which are not like your own?"

"What does it matter?" asked she, a little wearily. She drew her hands away — not impatiently, but decidedly — and going to the fireplace sank down into one of the deep chairs always placed there. She was inexpressibly tired, and though her tears did not usually lie on the surface, she felt just then as if it would be a relief to let them flow. It all seemed so hopeless, why waste words over it? Palaces may rise from their ruins, but who can build up again a shattered trust?

Her apathy alarmed Lacy more than an avalanche of reproaches could have done. He followed and stood before her.

"Madeleine," he said, "is this kind? is it just? I can imagine all that you have heard, but I did not think you would condemn me before I had spoken in self-defense!"

"I do not condemn you," said Madeleine, quietly. "It is natural enough, I suppose. I only beg you to tell me this thing frankly, do you wish to be released from your engagement?"

"Great Heaven!" he said, vehemently, "what have you heard? What madness is this? Do I wish to be released? Let me ask another question: why should you imagine such a thing?"

She felt a strange disinclination to words, and having the paper containing the poem still in her hand, it seemed an easy way to answer him — at least it embodied many things difficult to utter. She extended it, therefore. "There is one reason why I might think so," she said.

He received and opened it. Certainly he had not expected to find what he did within. The blood leaped in a torrent to his face, and for an instant he stood speechless. Then he recovered himself, and, crumpling the sheet angrily in his hand, flung it on the glowing coals.

"And you have given a moment's consideration to that piece of consummate folly!" he said. "Madeleine, I did not think such a thing possible! I thought you so far above the class of women who are suspicious and exacting, that it never occurred to me to hesitate in writing that absurd bit of flattery, to fulfill a promise and gratify Miss Champion's vanity!"

"It is not only that," said Madeleine, forced to express herself, and watching the shriveled black paper on the fire. "I should despise myself if I were jealous or exacting, but it seems that what I overheard to-day — most accidentally — is very common, that you have been devoting yourself to Helen Champion until every one in Stansbury is talking of it, and — I cannot bear to say such things!" she broke off abruptly. "Gordon, let it end. You know all, more than all that I mean."

"I know," said Gordon, "that I am a great fool, and that I have probably amused myself more than I ought with the vanity of an uncommonly silly woman; but my folly has not yet reached the point of giving up you, Madeleine, the good angel of my life. My darling, can you not forgive me?" — again he held out his hands — "if I had thought for a minute that such a thing would cause you pain or annoyance, do you not know that I could never have been guilty of it? But I fancied your trust so perfect—"

"It is!" she cried, interrupting him with sudden impetuosity; "it is! I could not believe that you meant any wrong, any thing unworthy of yourself, any thing unkind to me, yet — yet — it was of you that I thought when I asked if you did not wish our engagement ended."

"Never ask me such a thing again!" said he, quickly. "It is frightful! I feel as if the solid earth had shaken under my feet. A hundred Helen Champions are not worth such a shock! And you — how pale you are!" He knelt in front of her to look into her eyes. "Is it *I* who have made you look so? How can I forgive myself! But do you forgive me? Tell me so!"

"Is it necessary for me to tell you so?" she said, with her caressing smile. "Do you not know it?"

But, as she spoke, her eyes involuntarily went past his face to the shriveled fragment lying on the fire.

## Chapter VIII.

### A Mode of Compromise.

The business which detained Mr. Devereux from the social gathering at Mrs. Champion's was not merely the excuse which too often passes current under that name. He had received a telegram early in the day from Mr. Stringfellow, telling him that he would be in Stansbury that evening, and, if an appointment with a lawyer is not business, what can possibly come under that head? On a train which reached Stansbury at 7.45 P. M., Mr. Stringfellow arrived, therefore, and an hour later his client and himself sat together over a bright fire in the room of the former, with a bowl of punch on a table between them. This punch Mr. Stringfellow had mixed with his own hands, and he was now doing full justice to it. He looked, indeed, as if he were in the habit of doing justice to such refreshments of the inner man; not that there were any signs of vulgar intemperance about him, but he bore every stamp of the habitual *bon vivant*. His ruddy face was full and jovial, though his small gray eyes were keen and piercing; his pronounced aquiline nose was also ruddy, but his cleanly-shaven cleft chin was quite Napoleonic. In society he was remarkably popular, being a genial host and pleasant companion, a giver of good dinners and a lover of good wines; at the bar he was esteemed an acute lawyer, and an honest man withal, as men go. This gentleman now glanced with some disapprobation at his companion, who, leaning back indolently, with the firelight flickering over his face, seemed rather inclined to trifle with a half-drained glass of punch.

"You are like your father, very like your father, Arnold," he said. "You are even like him in that" — he indicated the glass of punch — "I knew no man of his generation who drank so moderately; of course he *did* drink, like a gentleman, but 'pon my life I don't believe he cared much more for it than a woman might. Give him his choice, and he always took light Rhenish, or something of that kind. Bless my soul, how much you remind me of him as you sit there now!"

"I suppose I am like him," said Devereux. "At least I know that I deserve no credit for being temperate — I have never felt any temptation to be otherwise. I also prefer light wines — though I esteem myself a judge of all. I have cultivated the accomplishment as an accomplishment. One should not be at the mercy of a wine-merchant, nor offer one's friends poor vintage whatever else may be lacking in one's *ménage*. You must not fancy that I do not appreciate your punch, my dear Mr. Stringfellow," he added. "It is excellent!" and, as a practical commendation, he drained his glass.

"It is made according to a receipt which I may call an heirloom in my family," said Mr. Stringfellow, helping himself to another supply. "Though a great deal of diplomacy has been used to obtain it, neither my father nor myself has ever given it to any one. My grandfather, who was a sea-captain, brought it home from one of his voyages — quite the most valuable thing that he did bring. Take some more, Arnold, don't be afraid of your head! It would scarcely hurt a kitten!"

"I am not at all afraid of my head," replied Devereux, truthfully — having tested that organ too often not to know its capacities. "But no more just at present, thank you; will you have a cigar? I can recommend these."

Mr. Stringfellow took one of the offered cigars, bit off the end, lighted it, drew two or three whiffs, and nodded approval. "Uncommonly good!" he said. Then warmed by the fire and the punch, he stretched out his legs before him on the hearth-rug, and looked benignly at his companion. "Well," he said, "you have been in the field for a month now, I believe: how goes the campaign?"

Devereux shrugged his shoulders lazily. "It scarcely goes at all," he said. "The invincible obstinacy of Miss Carlisle's lawyer and agent foiled all my attempts at compromise, as I wrote you."

"So much the better!" said the lawyer, with an air of satisfaction. "You were a — hem! — very foolish ever to make such an offer. I told you so when you came here. Quixotism is a very fine thing in its place, my dear boy — and you inherit that too, from your father — but quixotism in business matters is devilishly out of place! I told you, when we parted, that the only sensible way to compromise would be to marry Miss Carlisle. Have you thought at all of that?"

"Yes," replied Devereux, quietly, "I have thought of it."

"You have, eh? And have you induced the lady to think of it also?"

"I might have done so, perhaps, but I have lacked opportunity. She is an invalid, and has been very ill for two or three weeks."

"Hem!" said Mr. Stringfellow, in a tone of strong disapproval. "Sick women are the very deuce! My first wife was an invalid, and I learned that to my cost. Miss Carlisle is blind besides, is she not? On the whole, with your chance of winning the lawsuit, I don't know that I would advise you to compromise in that way."

"You think there is no doubt of my winning the suit?"

"No doubt in the world. The case will be decided in your favor next week."

"Ah!" said Devereux, in a musing tone. He took the cigar from between his lips, and emitted a cloud of light-blue, curling smoke that formed a fantastic haze about his head. "You will think me more of a Quixote than ever, I am afraid," he said, "when I tell you that such an assurance gives me the strongest possible reason for endeavoring to compromise, or rather to fuse Miss Carlisle's interest and my own in the manner of which we have spoken."

"You mean out of regard for her, I suppose?"

"Yes, out of regard for her. Is it not the best thing I can do as matters stand?"

"That depends," said Mr. Stringfellow, cautiously. "If she were an ordinary woman, I should say that it was the best thing, but blind! and an invalid! By George, you are more of a Quixote than I gave you credit for being, if you can stand all that!"

"It is precisely because she is not an ordinary woman that I think of it," said Devereux, in his careless, indolent voice. "I have altogether passed the age of sentiment — if I ever had such an age, nothing would astonish and, on the whole, bore me more than to find myself involved in a *grande passion*. But certain requirements of my taste must be satisfied in the woman whom I marry. As I grow older, I find myself becoming critical and fastidious to an uncomfortable degree. An ordinary woman with the dowry of a princess would not tempt me."

"Then Miss Carlisle—?"

"As I have said, is not an ordinary woman. She interests and pleases me exceedingly. I feel sure that I can make what the French call a *mariage de raison* with her, and find it thoroughly satisfactory, even though she is blind and an invalid."

"A very odd taste!" said Mr. Stringfellow, shaking his head; "a very odd taste, indeed! I should have fancied you would have wished to marry a woman of great beauty and fashion — one who would make a sensation in the world."

"You think so because I have been in the train of such women ever since my boyhood. But can you not imagine that one may have a surfeit of even such excellent things as beauty and fashion? You understand me well enough to believe that I am not affecting *blas épuppyism* when I say that I know such women thoroughly, and have altogether ceased to be attracted or entertained by them. They have palled on my taste — if, indeed, they ever suited it."

"Odd!" said Mr. Stringfellow, still shaking his head "But convenient, at least, in the present instance. And Miss Carlisle, herself? Vanity apart, can you not tell what kind of an impression you have made upon her?"

"Vanity apart — for, indeed, what need is there of vanity? — I think that she is inclined to like me," said Devereux, with unmoved quietude. "But her illness came at an unfortunate time

— just when I had decided on this step — and, no doubt, I shall have to make my impression over again. Besides this, I have to face the disadvantage of being disliked and distrusted by her closest companion and nearest friend."

"Not a woman, surely?"

"A woman, certainly — why not?"

"I thought women were always your friends."

"There is no rule without its exceptions. Miss Severn is not my friend."

"Miss Severn!" repeated Mr. Stringfellow. "I am told that Champion is engaged to a Miss Severn. No doubt this is the same, and she is merely taking his side against you. Women are always partisans."

"Very true; and your reason would be quite satisfactory but for the slight fact that the Miss Severn who is engaged to Champion is not the one of whom I speak."

"Not — eh? Then who is the one of whom you speak?"

"She is sister to Mr. Champion's fiancé and cousin to Miss Carlisle."

"Then she is doubly pledged to oppose you; and may prove dangerous if she belongs to the class called designing."

Devereux could not restrain a smile. Madeleine's face rose before him — the delicate, noble features, the dark, eloquent eyes. "No one could possibly think that she belongs to that class," he said. "But her prejudices against me may be strong, nevertheless."

"You ought to devote yourself to conciliating her, if her influence is really great," said Mr. Stringfellow, complacently. "But, after all, why should she be prejudiced? Any one might see that you are acting, and have acted, with most uncommon regard for Miss Carlisle."

Devereux did not choose to enter into the possible or probable grounds of Madeleine's prejudice. He let the subject drop; and so, for a minute, there was silence. It was Mr. Stringfellow who spoke first.

"I suppose, since you have been here, you have seen old Burnham — the witness to your grandfather's handwriting?"

"I have seen him only once," Devereux answered. "Then, though his mind was perfectly clear, his health seemed very feeble."

"He must not die before he gives his evidence," said Mr. Stringfellow, hastily. "That would never do! We must go to see him to-morrow. How far does he live from here?"

"Eight or nine miles, perhaps."

"Well, we must drive out. In the morning, say — have you any engagement for the morning?"

"I am sorry to answer yes — I have been foolish enough to become entangled in some ridiculous amateur theatricals, and there is a rehearsal in the morning."

"The afternoon, then — are you free for the afternoon?"

"Entirely so. We will go after dinner, if the weather is good."

The next morning, at the rehearsal, Rosalind noticed that Devereux seemed a little *distract* — a very little, for he was too thoroughly accustomed to the social habitude of concealing what he felt, to betray, in any marked degree, the real absence of his mind. It was an unusual state with him, for he generally kept his mind well under control; but, since Mr. Stringfellow's words the night before, his thoughts were running very much on Mary Carlisle. Not as a lover's thoughts run on the object of his choice — that was not to be expected — but as a man thinks of something which puzzles and disquiets him. It was not any consideration of Mary herself which puzzled and disquieted Devereux, but a doubt which he could not decide, whether he should or should not speak to her definitely before the suit came off in the courts. He wished very much to do so before that time, for reasons which will be at once apparent. If things were already settled between them, the decision of the court would not matter; but if things were not settled, and if the decision were given in his favor, he felt instinctively that Mary Carlisle would greatly distrust his reason for addressing her, and would set it down unhesitatingly to pity for her changed condition.

Yet, to speak to her at once on such a subject would seem premature, if not presumptuous. Then a recollection of Madeleine's warning suddenly came to him. What if he should endanger her life, or kill her! On the whole, Mr. Devereux had various considerations to revolve; and his slight absence of mind at the rehearsal was not very remarkable.

When the important matter was over, he glanced at his watch. It was only twelve o'clock — fully time for a visit to the Lodge — and he felt that it was imperative that he should see Mary. Her manner would tell him, better than any reflections of his own, how far he might venture to speak openly. He felt that he could rely on his judgment, as a man "in love" can never do. Much as he liked and admired the gentle blind girl, his heart beat no whit quicker at thought of her, nor sent up any mist to cloud and confuse the cool, steady brain. This fact did not make him pause for a moment in his resolution to ask her to be his wife. One or two fever-fits of passion in his early youth had cured him of all desire to drink again of the cup of Circe. *Mariage de raison* commended itself to his philosophical soul as the thing to be most desired, and certainly reason, kindness, and good taste, were all on the side of a marriage with Mary Carlisle.

With these admirable dispositions he approached the Lodge. The mellow November sunshine was lying over the house, the soft November haze was draping all the distant landscape. The atmosphere had the Indian summer deliciousness — a warmth without heat — in its golden stillness. Devereux remembered the last day he had been there — the falling rain, the lowering sky outside; within, the hushed house, and Madeleine's cold, proud face. He smiled a little to himself, and wondered if she would see him again, and send him away without a glimpse of Miss Carlisle.

In answer to his summons at the door, Albert appeared and ushered him into the drawing-room. Here he was left for a few minutes in suspense, which did not prove very irksome, until the servant reappeared saying that Miss Carlisle would receive him. Thereupon he was conducted across the hall and admitted to that pleasant, anomalous apartment known as the library.

Fate had befriended him. Mary was alone. She was reclining in a deep chair, dressed very much as he had seen her first, in soft pale blue. Her fair, delicate face, sharpened by illness, was turned toward the door, and there was something inexpressibly touching in the sightless eyes and sensitive lips which made Devereux's heart melt with a sensation very closely akin to tenderness; indeed, it was such tenderness as he might have felt for a frail, attractive child. He advanced and took her hand. "How glad I am to see you well again!" he said.

The faint color flickered into her cheeks, the lips smiled, the blue eyes met his own with their pathetic introspective regard. "You are very kind," she said, gently. "Yes, I am well again, that is, as well as I shall ever be, I suppose. I have never had strong health: I know that I must never expect it."

"Why not?" he asked; involuntarily speaking as gently as herself. "Do you not think, if you went to a warmer climate, perhaps —"

She shook her head, shrinking into the depths of her chair. "I could not leave home," she said. "I have never done so — I think I have taken root. Why should a mild climate help me? I have no disease which it could cure."

"A mild climate helps almost all diseases," said Devereux. "Then change of air —"

But again Mary shook her head. "I am sure there is no better air anywhere than that which one breathes here," she said. "Is it not pleasant to-day? Perhaps it is because I have been sick that it seems to me so delightful."

"I scarcely think so. I have not been sick, and it seems delightful to me. Do you know, by-the-way, that I have been suffering great self-reproach during your illness? The last day that I was here I remained too long, and so became accountable for part at least of your suffering."

"Why do you think such a thing?" she asked. "Did any one tell you so?"

"Miss Severn told me that you were ill because you had been over-excited."

"Ah, yes! over-excited. But you had nothing to do with it — at least I mean that you could not imagine I would be excited by that which would be no excitement at all to any one else."

"I should have remembered that you are not like other people."

"No," she said, eagerly, "you must not blame yourself! I assure you it was not the excitement of your visit which caused my illness. I should have been ill in any event. I am confident" (very positively) "of that."

"You are very good to reassure me," he said, watching the play of expression over the mobile face, the soft lights and shadows which chased each other across it, and the tremulous motion of the flexible lips. Dared he speak? This was what he was thinking, and, while he thought it, Mary went on:

"And what have you been doing during these weeks which have seemed to me so weary? Surely you have not spent the time in rehearsing the play of which I have heard so much?"

"I have spent more of it in that way than I should like to consider, if there had been any thing else for me to do," he answered. "But when I was not shooting there was nothing else. You may remember that I shocked you by confessing when I was here last that I am not very much of a reading-man."

"You did not shock me, but I thought that it was strange," said Mary. "We always think it strange when others do not like what we like."

"Yesterday my lawyer arrived — Mr. Stringfellow, of whom you have heard me speak," Devereux continued, plunging headlong into the subject which he saw no means of approaching carefully, though he wished to do so. "Will you forgive me if I draw your attention again to the case at issue between us, which will probably be decided next week?"

"Do you think it is at issue between us or between our lawyers?" she asked, smiling. "I hope you are not disquieting yourself on my account. You cannot tell how little interest I feel except for others. But it will be a terrible blow to poor Basil if the case goes against me!" she added, gravely. "And this reminds me, Mr. Devereux, that I have a great favor to ask of you."

"Surely you know that you have only to ask, that I will do any thing which lies in my power for you," he said, earnestly, touched afresh by the sweet face turned toward him.

"It is this, then," she said: "If the decision is given in your favor, and the property becomes yours, will you not retain Basil in his present position? I should not make such an appeal if he were not the most honest and faithful of men, or — or, if you had not showed so generous a disposition."

"Do not let us discuss such a possibility!" he said, impetuously; "I cannot bear, I will not bear to think of despoiling you of your inheritance! There must be some means —" He rose suddenly, very much to her astonishment, and walked away. In truth, he scarcely knew what he was doing. A most unusual agitation seemed to possess him — an agitation which he had never felt in the presence of those women of the world of whom Mr. Stringfellow had spoken. Should he risk all that he desired by speaking now? or should he risk still more by waiting? He had to decide this, and besides to take into consideration all the danger connected with excitement. As he stood by the window debating these questions, he did not perceive that, after a minute's hesitation, Mary rose and came to him! He did not hear her light footstep on the thick carpet, nor was he aware of her presence at his side until she spoke.

"You are considering *me*," she said, with the frankest simplicity. "Pray do not! In any case I shall not suffer, you may be sure of that. But I could not help thinking of Basil. He did so much for papa, and he has done so much for me."

In her pleading, she involuntarily extended her hand and laid it on his arm. The opportunity which he desired seemed to come to Devereux without his seeking. He took that hand in his own — took it not passionately, as a lover might have taken it, but with almost hesitating gentleness. To him, as to Basil and Madeleine, there seemed a sacredness about Mary Carlisle.

"It is not worth while to speak of these things," he said. "There is no certainty that the decision of the court will be in my favor. You know how anxious I have been to compromise my claim, and how persistently your friends have refused to entertain such an idea — but — but has it never occurred to you that there might be one mode of compromise in which your agent and your lawyer would have no voice, which would rest altogether with yourself — a compromise which would make it a matter of indifference to us in whose favor the court gave its decision?"

He spoke with the utmost quietness to which he could modulate his voice, fully mindful of the danger of exciting her, yet he felt a throb of keen anxiety when he saw the start which she gave, the quiver which ran over her from head to foot, and he was haunted afterward by the inexpressible mingling of wistfulness and doubt on the face turned toward him.

"What do you mean?" she faltered. "I do not think I quite understand —"

"For Heaven's sake, do not excite yourself!" he said, hurriedly. "I mean only this, that, if you could think of such a thing as marrying me, the whole matter would be settled. God knows I have very little to offer you," he said, with a tone of genuine humility in his voice, "and I am aware that you know very little of me, and that this may seem to you very presumptuous; but still, if you would consider —"

He broke off abruptly as she retreated from him with a low cry, clasping her hands with a sudden motion over her heart. The gesture dismayed him. What had he done?

"I shall never forgive myself if you allow what I have said to agitate you!" he exclaimed. "I only ask you to take such a thing into consideration, not to decide on it now. If you can only tell me that you will think of it —"

"But why should I tell you so?" she asked, in a tone of keen pain, as he paused. "Why should I think of it? You only propose it because you are sorry for me; because you believe that I shall be poor!"

"You are mistaken," he said, quickly. "I would not insult you by such a proposal if I had no better reason for it than that. Besides, there is no certainty that you will lose any thing. It may be I who will lose every thing, and then, be branded perhaps, as a fortune-hunter. But do not let us talk of interest, let us put that aside. In speaking as I have done, I think of you, not of that which is at issue between us. I cannot tell you how charmed I was when I saw you first, and that impression has never left me. I do not expect you to feel toward me in the same manner; I only ask you to let me try to win your heart, and to take into consideration the thought of marrying me. Will you do this?"

She was silent for a minute, a troubled expression on her face, her fingers lacing and unlacing nervously. Then without a word she turned away and went back to the fire. Devereux followed, and when she sank into her seat took one of the slender, trembling hands and tenderly kissed it.

"Do not trouble or disquiet yourself to answer me now," he said. "I can wait. All that I ask is that you will suffer me to plead my cause when you are able to hear me."

## Chapter IX.

### The Eve Of Battle.

When Devereux left the Lodge he felt that he had gained a great deal, and had every reason to hope for final success. Mary had promised to take his proposal into consideration, and the manner of this promise had been more than its matter. He felt satisfied that he was acting with wisdom and discretion, and he had been more than ever attracted and pleased by the gentle sweetness of the girl he hoped to win. It would not matter now in whose favor the suit was decided, though of course he entertained a not unreasonable desire that the balance of fortune

should be on his side. Few men with any genuine manhood in them fancy the idea of playing the part of Prince Consort, and Devereux fancied it even less than most men, that strain of Quixotism in his nature which had brought him to Stansbury, and made him Mary Carlisle's suitor, asserting itself on this point with marked distinctness. More than once in his past life he had allowed opportunities of the kind, which his friends had esteemed really providential, to slip by unheeded.

That there was any danger of the suit going otherwise than in his favor, his friend Mr. Stringfellow would not for a moment admit. As they were driving that afternoon, on their way to visit Mr. Burnham, who was so important a witness in the case, that gentleman expressed himself again with great decision.

"The case will undoubtedly go for you," he said, as they passed the Carlisle Mills, "and a very fine property you will come into; I don't know a finer anywhere! And to think of that lease having been laid aside and forgotten for so long!"

"The property was almost valueless when it was leased," said Devereux. "That accounts for it, I suppose, together with the fact of my mother, who was sole heiress of her father's estate, having married and gone away. And you think," touching the horse meditatively, "that the decision will certainly be rendered in my favor?"

"I am not a betting-man," said Mr. Stringfellow, "but I would take odds, fifty to one, on the point. In fact, I am confident of it, and I sincerely hope that old Burnham is as clear in his head as he was when I saw him eighteen months ago. That length of time sometimes makes a great difference in one of his age — confound Champion and his miserable quibbles and delays! He has fought off the case for two years, in order that Burnham might die. But Burnham, luckily for us, is not dead."

"He was very feeble when I saw him three or four weeks ago," said Devereux. "I don't know that I would advise you to count too confidently on his testimony."

"Oh, he will be all right when he is wanted," said Mr. Stringfellow, who was plainly bent on regarding every thing as cheerfully as possible. "He has the right stuff in him, that old fellow! I saw it at once. He has good stamina to his constitution, and doesn't mean to die while he is needed."

The speaker was, however, forced to retract a good deal of this sanguine view of things when he saw "Old Burnham," who was really, as Devereux had said, very feeble. But this feebleness related altogether to the body, not at all to his mind. The clearness of his intellect was something remarkable when one considered that he was, as his son proudly stated, eighty-nine on his last birthday.

"Archie's right," said the old man, with some exultation in his uncommon age. "If I live to see Christmas I shall finish my ninetieth year. I haven't such use of my limbs as I should like, but, thank God! my memory's as clear as ever. I remember your grandfather well" (nodding to Devereux), "and I remember all about the lease you want to prove. Tom Shelton had been renting the property for some time when General Mansfield gave him a lease for fifty years. That was in 1815. I remember the year as if it were yesterday."

"And you remember seeing the contract of lease," said Mr. Stringfellow briskly, "which was signed by both the lessor and lessee?"

"Yes, I remember it," answered the old man, nodding his white head. "There was a duplicate; General Mansfield kept one and Shelton the other. I saw Shelton's."

"I wish *we* could see it," said Mr. Stringfellow. "It would strengthen our case amazingly. Well, General Mansfield died, his only child married and went away, and Shelton after holding the land for twenty-odd years — long enough to give a title on the strength of possession — sold the property and moved West."

"Just so, just so," said Mr. Burnham, tapping on the floor with his stick, while a small grandson stood by his knee and gazed, with his finger in his mouth, at the strangers, at the energetic, rubicund lawyer, and the quiet gentleman who watched the scene with lazy, almost uninterested, eyes. "He moved West, and nobody in these parts has ever heard of him from that

day to this. I wasn't living here at that time. I went out to Mississippi — which was what you might call real frontier country then — with one of my sons, and I never came back till just before the war. The land had passed through a good many hands in the mean time, and at last had come to be owned by Mr. Carlisle. He was building factories at a great rate, and I never thought of the lease till I heard about the lawsuit."

"And you don't know anybody else in the country round here who might remember it?" asked Mr. Stringfellow.

The old man shook his head. "I'm alone of my generation," he said. "I know nobody else. If you had come and asked me the same question ten years ago, I might have given you a different answer, but war and trouble have killed off the old men very fast. I'm the last of my generation, and I shall go soon."

"You mustn't think of such a thing before you have given your testimony," said the lawyer. "Bless my soul! I don't see any reason why you should die for ten or fifteen years yet — you are hale and hearty!"

"Not so much so as you think, perhaps," said Mr. Burnham, "I'm not what you might call sick, but I'm weakly — very weakly, of late. But I'll try and get into court to give my testimony. Do you think the case will be tried next week?"

"It certainly will be, unless the other side manage to have it put off again; and I don't think they can do that," replied Mr. Stringfellow. Then he turned to the son — a stout, middle-aged farmer sitting by. "To-day is Saturday. You'd better bring your father into Stansbury to-morrow, had you not?" he said. "The case will be called early in the week, and we had better have him on hand."

"That's what I meant to do," answered the younger Mr. Burnham. "I've a sister married in Stansbury, and I thought I'd take him in to her to-morrow if it's a fine day. The old man is right — he has been giving way uncommonly of late," he added, in a lower tone. "If you put off your case again, I'm inclined to think you won't have him for a witness."

"It shall not be put off!" said Mr. Stringfellow.

"You can't tell that," said Devereux, after they had taken their departure and were driving away; "Champion may succeed in having it deferred again."

"I don't think so," replied the other. "He has exhausted his excuses for delay, and must come to trial. He has showed great ingenuity in staving matters off so long, but the tug of war must take place next week."

It chanced that on this same day Basil Severn appeared in Mr. Champion's office, and, finding the latter alone, at once plunged into the subject of the lawsuit.

"As sure as you live we have made a mistake!" he said. "The more I think of it, the more certain I am that we ought to compromise the matter. Upon my word when I think of the case coming off next week, and of the danger of Mary's losing almost every thing she has by our obstinacy, I feel nervous as a woman!"

"I think you must be nervous as a woman to talk in that fashion," said Champion, coolly, looking up from his writing. "I have told you all along that the case will be decided in our favor, and I tell you so again. If you choose to sacrifice Miss Carlisle's property by a compromise, however, I suppose it is not yet too late to do so. No doubt Mr. Devereux and his lawyer will grasp eagerly at such a proposal — but you must excuse me from having any thing to do with it."

"There is old Burnham ready to swear every thing necessary for making out their case," said Basil, with the most sincere anxiety and perturbation on his face.

"Old Burnham is in his dotage," said Champion, contemptuously. "The contract of lease which they produce is invalid. That is what I maintain, and what I shall prove. You must of course act according to your own judgment, but, if I were in your place, I would not surrender an inch. Compromise is the very thing they want, and the very thing at which they are aiming with all their blustering talk. I know Stringfellow of old; and as for that fellow Devereux —"

"You are prejudiced against him," said Basil. "So was I at first, but I think now that he means well on the whole."

"He means to compromise his claim if he can, and, failing that, to marry Miss Carlisle," said Champion, bending his black brows. "A more insolent puppy, or fortune-hunter, never lived!"

"I wish to Heaven I knew what to do!" said Basil, with energy. "The responsibility falls on me, and, in case we lose the suit, I shall never forgive myself."

"Now look here!" said Champion, with decision. "That is nonsense. We must all accept responsibilities in this world, do the best we can according to our honest judgment, and leave the rest to — Providence," he said — thinking that form of expression as good as any other. "If we could realize Adam's ambition, and be as gods knowing good and evil, of course it would be more convenient; but, that being impossible, we must be prepared to make mistakes sometimes, and bear the consequences philosophically. In my opinion, we shall not lose the suit — but, if we do, I shall not regret having advised you to stand by your colors!"

"I am afraid you don't put yourself exactly in my place when you give that advice," said Basil.

"If I were in your place I should not need it," replied the other, dryly.

There was a little more talk of this description, and then Severn took his departure, no whit easier in mind than when he came. He had described his condition accurately when he spoke of being nervous as a woman over the approaching trial. What was it best to do for Mary's interest? That was the question which tormented him. It certainly seemed too late to compromise, now at the eleventh hour, yet more and more his judgment turned toward compromise. Perhaps he might have disquieted himself less if he had known the result of Devereux's morning call at the Lodge; or perhaps his disquiet might have taken another form, and he would have thought that Mary's happiness was in greater jeopardy than her fortune.

This certainly was Madeleine's opinion when she heard — as she soon did — all that had passed in the course of Devereux's visit. It is not saying too much to declare that she was aghast. She knew that it was likely to occur, but she had not looked for it so soon — so suddenly. A pang of pity and indignation seized her heart. The man rose before her with all his *débonnaire* grace, as she had seen him last, smiling on Rosalind's beauty, and that he should have come immediately from that shrine to offer his empty heart and impoverished fortunes to Mary Carlisle, seemed to her almost too much to be borne. But what was to be done? Should she warn the latter by declaring all that she knew and much more that she suspected, of her suitor's unworthiness? No one could doubt that Madeleine possessed moral courage in no common degree, yet she shrank from this. Not only because she feared, most naturally, that she would be speaking in vain, but because she could not bear to dash with pain the happiness shining on the blind girl's face. Her heart melted over this happiness — which, indeed, had in it many elements of pathos — almost as a mother's might have done. So hopelessly cut off and debarred from all the pleasures of youth had Mary always been, that it seemed little less than a miracle that this cup of delight should at last be held to her lips. Could any hand have dashed it away or infused bitterness into it? Assuredly not Madeleine's. When the story was hinted rather than told, she put her arms around the faltering speaker as if she had been indeed her sister. "My dear, dear Mary, God bless you!" she said. It was all that she could say — at least for some time. But the tender benediction was full of sweetness to the listener.

Unconscious, meanwhile, of the bold move which her sworn vassal — for so she esteemed Devereux — had ventured to make, Rosalind was arranging all her plans for the future with great satisfaction to herself. She found that possessing two strings to her bow was an agreeable excitement, and developed all her diplomatic talent, besides offering very substantial benefits in prospective. James, it is true, had become very unmanageable of late, and more than once she had a twinge of fear lest she might have committed herself too far with Devereux; but on the whole she had succeeded in keeping matters very well balanced between the two. She

entertained no doubt whatever of her ability to manage the *d'énouement* entirely to her satisfaction. Devereux, she felt sure, only waited for the successful termination of his lawsuit to declare himself, while nothing was easier than to make Champion demand his freedom — when she was ready to give it to him. His patience had reached its farthest limit, she knew — a little more provocation and it would end altogether.

On this somewhat tangled web of different hopes, fears, desires, and intentions, the sun of Saturday went down, and, as Rosalind watched the pageant of sunset from the ivy-encircled window where she had seen Devereux first, she said to herself "Another week will end suspense."

### Book III.

#### Warp And Woof.

#### Chapter I.

#### Basil's Mind Is Relieved.

We all know how weeks, months, even years, often pass, carrying us with them down the stream of time, without a single event of importance coming to stir the placid current of monotonous life. Then, again, this life seems suddenly full to overflowing, crowded to the brim with momentous occurrences — occurrences, perhaps, which revolutionize all the familiar world around us — and which may put untold possibilities of happiness or sorrow into the space of a few days. There are such tidal periods in almost every existence, and something like this came to those interested in the lawsuit and all that was likely to arise from it.

That next week to which Rosalind looked forward as the end of suspense came as brightly and serenely — beautiful November weather, all blue haze and mellow sunshine — as if it had been freighted with no such important meaning. On Sunday Mr. Burnham was brought in by his son to his married daughter's house, and here Mr. Stringfellow found him on Monday morning, when he called, on his way to court, to inquire into his condition. That condition was by no means so satisfactory as it might have been. The old man was very much shaken by his unusual journey, and his daughter looked grave when she admitted the lawyer into the room where he lay in bed. "Father's an old man and not well enough to be worried in this kind of way," she said, in a tone of strong disapproval. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if this business would be the means of killing him. He was excited and restless all night, and this morning he's as weak as a baby."

"What on earth was there to excite him?" demanded Mr. Stringfellow, in a tone of great disgust. "All that he is asked to do is to keep quiet and be ready to go into court and give his testimony when it is called for. There's nothing in that to make him restless, I'm sure."

"There wouldn't be any thing in it to make you restless, perhaps," said Mrs. Warren, who was known to all her neighbors and friends as being decided of character and sharp of tongue, "but it's been years now since father's done any thing but sit in the chimney-corner at George's and smoke; so when you come to talk of such a thing as lugging him into court —"

"I don't talk of such a thing at all, madam," said Mr. Stringfellow, whose forte was not patience. "I am not in the habit of lugging people into court. They come when the law summons them — and the law has summoned your father. Now, I'll go in and speak to him."

"The less you say the better, in *my* opinion," remarked Mrs. Warren, as she opened the door.

There was not much to say, and Mr. Stringfellow left very soon, feeling a little uneasy. He did not like old Burnham's appearance, and he said to himself that the sooner the case was

over and his testimony given, the better. That cumbrous machine which we call the law moves slowly, however, and there were several cases on the docket to be disposed of before that of Devereux vs. Carlisle could be called.

The plaintiff in this case, meantime, troubled himself very little concerning it. He went daily to the Lodge without mentioning again the subject on which he had touched, and devoted himself to Mary with all the graceful gallantry which he had acquired during years of social success. Of the result it is scarcely worth while to speak. Madeleine, looking on, saw plainly enough how entirely Mary was surrendering her heart, and that, whenever Devereux chose to put his fate to the touch, it would be all that he could ask. Sunday and Monday passed in this manner, and short as the time was Mary seemed to expand like a flower, gaining color and fragrance with every hour. Her rapid improvement astonished every one who saw her. Even Mrs. Ingram — usually the most obtuse of mortals — perceived it, and Dr. Arthur fairly opened his eyes when he called. "You have done wonders for your patient. Miss Severn," he said, turning to Madeleine. "I never saw her rally so quickly before."

"I do not think I have had any share in the rallying, doctor," replied Madeleine; but Mary impulsively put out her hand.

"You have! you have!" she said. "I should never have got well but for you."

"Take care that you don't get sick again, then," said the doctor. "Remember — no excitement! And I think you had better begin to take a little exercise."

It was on Devereux's arm that this exercise was first taken, that afternoon. With him Mary walked around the lawn and through the garden. Nature was at her loveliest, her pensive beauty seemed to hold the world in a spell, the air was like an elysium, the smoky haze wrapped all the distant landscape in a blue dimness. Devereux, who had a very epicurean element in his composition, thought that the soft autumnal beauty — beauty without the passionate fervor of summer, or the virginal grace of spring — seemed in subtile harmony with his state of feeling, with the quiet pleasure he experienced in Mary's society, and the repose of a well-satisfied conscience.

While these two were pacing along the garden-walks, Madeleine passed out of the Lodge and took her way down to the mills. It was a pleasant walk across the fields, and, if her mind had been a little more at ease, she would have enjoyed it exceedingly. But, in her present mood, there was a sadness in the still loveliness of the afternoon which almost oppressed her. As she paused for a few minutes by a stile, and looked beyond the brown fields and blue woods to the distant horizon, she made a picture that a painter would have liked to idealize. But there was no painter to catch the unconscious grace of the slender figure, the unconscious pathos of the quiet face —

"The mouth with steady sweetness set,  
And eyes conveying unaware  
The distant hint of some regret  
That harbored there."

Only Basil, coming around a curve of the path, saw her and suddenly started.

"Madeleine!" he said, "what odd chance brings you here? I was just on my way to the Lodge to see you."

"Were you?" said Madeleine, starting in turn at the unexpected address. "Well, we have met half-way, for I was coming to the mills to see *you*."

"For any particular reason?" asked he, pausing in front of her, with the stile between them.

"For no more particular reason than I suppose was bringing you to see me," she answered, smiling. "Shall we walk? or will you sit down here? It is very pleasant, and see what a pretty bit of landscape is yonder!"

Basil looked at the landscape absently as he accepted a seat on the stile. There was a shadow on his face which Madeleine was quick to observe. She drew closer, and laid her hand on his arm. "Something is troubling you," she said; "what is it?"

"Only the old story," he answered. "I was coming to talk it over with you once more."

"Do you mean about the lawsuit?"

"Yes, about the lawsuit. It haunts me night and day that Mary may lose every thing because I have listened to Champion and been obstinate about a compromise. Madeleine, it is not too late even yet. Tell me what you think. Shall I take the responsibility of compromising? Champion is as strong as ever against such a step; but it seems to me —"

He was interrupted here, much to his surprise, by a low laugh from Madeleine, not a very mirthful laugh, it is true, yet one which had a certain strain of amusement in it. "Excuse me," she said, as he looked at her. "But you spoke of this once before, do you remember? and have you forgotten what I told you then?"

"You said that you thought there might be no need of a compromise — that you believed that Devereux wished to marry Mary. I believed it too, at first, as you may recollect, but of late—"

"Well, of late?"

"He has seemed to think only of flirting with Rosalind, till, upon my word, I believe that, if he wins the suit, she will marry him."

"I do not think she will have the opportunity," said Madeleine, quietly; "and as for you, dear Basil," she added, with a slight smile, "don't disquiet yourself any more. Let the suit end as it may, Mary's interest is secure, for Mr. Devereux has asked her to marry him."

"Has he indeed!" said Basil. Two months before, he would have received such an announcement with indignation: now an expression of absolute relief came over his face. "Then the load is off my shoulders," he said, "and a heavy one it has been ever since I began to look into the matter for myself! Up to that time I had simply taken Champion's word for every thing. But when Devereux put his view of the matter before me, and when I examined registers and questioned old Burnham, my heart fairly sank into my boots."

"Then you think the case will certainly be decided in Mr. Devereux's favor?"

"I am unable to see how it can possibly end otherwise, though Champion stands as firmly as ever by his opinion that we shall be successful. But, if Mary has accepted him, it hardly matters how the case goes."

"I did not say that she has accepted him, only that he offered himself. He has not received her answer yet, but there is little doubt of what it will be. My poor Mary! It almost breaks my heart to see her — she is so happy!"

"Why should that break your heart?" asked Basil, with a smile. "Surely happiness is a good thing — as well as one of the rarest things on earth — and Mary has never had much of it."

"For that reason I am sorry — oh, sorry to absolute pain — to look at her now," said Madeleine. "Don't you understand? It is not as if she had been like other people, but she has been so cut off from the ordinary lot of women, and now for this to come, and for her happiness to have no real foundation! O Basil, don't you understand?"

"I think I do," said Basil. "You mean that Devereux is not worthy of her. Granted, with all my heart — but, if my opinion of the pending suit is a right one, he cannot, at least, be charged with being a fortune-hunter."

"But who knows that your opinion is right," said Madeleine, "or who knows how he may betray Mary's trust at last? I have no faith in him — none whatever!"

"Take care you don't run into prejudice," said her brother. "You gave me that advice once on the same subject, and now I repeat it. Extreme opinions are generally mistaken opinions. I think the man is honest and a gentleman. Let him have sought Mary for what reason he may, honor will keep him straight."

"I hope so," said Madeleine. "It is the best thing we can hope, now."

After this there was a minute's silence, which was broken presently by Basil's saying, abruptly: "I suppose it would be premature to mention any thing of this in Stansbury?"

"Altogether premature," she replied. "Do not mention it to any one. The affair is yet in uncertainty. Mr. Devereux, when he declared himself, said that he would not press Mary for an answer. He has not done so, and perhaps," added Miss Severn, with unaccustomed cynicism, "if the lawsuit is decided in his favor, he never may."

"In the name of Heaven, why should you think such a thing?" demanded Basil, considerably startled. He was so much in the habit of relying on Madeleine's opinion, that he could scarcely realize that she might be misled by prejudice as well as other people. "You must misjudge him!" said the young man. "No one could be so dishonorable. He would have to answer to me if he were — but you must be mistaken."

"I may be," said Madeleine. "But I cannot like or trust him. Perhaps it is because trouble seemed to come when he came," said she, clasping her hands in her lap, and looking again toward the misty horizon.

"But he is hardly accountable for that if he did not bring, or mean to bring it," said Basil, to whom it occurred that Devereux had nothing to do with Lacy's conduct, or Miss Champion's heartlessness. "Rosalind, now — he certainly had a share in that annoyance; but, after all, was not Rosalind herself greatly to blame? With the best (or the worst) intentions in the world, a man cannot possibly flirt with an engaged woman, unless she has a mind to flirt with him."

"That is true," said Madeleine, answering his remark; and she sighed a little — one of those sighs which indicate, but do not relieve, a heavy heart. "It is easy to make trouble — the least sensible person in the world can do that — but how to end it often puzzles the wisest."

"I don't count myself among that class," said Basil, "but it puzzles me. However, such things are not helped by dwelling on them. What will be will be. After all, there is no better philosophy than that. Now, Madeleine, when are you coming home? I did not say any thing as long as Mary needed you, but she does not need you now, and I miss you."

"I am coming to-morrow," said Madeleine. "You are right — Mary does not need me any longer." She hesitated a moment, then added, "What is Rosalind doing?"

"Going to rehearsals, and preparing theatrical costumes, as far as my knowledge extends," replied Basil. "She expects to 'rob the world of rest' in a certain green silk, of which I have heard a great deal."

"Is that theatrical matter to go on indefinitely?" asked Madeleine. "I wish it were over."

"So do I," said Basil, rising, "and you may be sure that, when the play has been performed, it will be over as far as I am concerned. If it had not been that it would have seemed disobliging, and like going back from my word, I should have followed Champion's example, and left the business long ago."

"How one reads the character even in trifles!" Madeleine thought, as she rose, too, and looked at the erect figure and open face before her. Rather than "go back," as he phrased it, from any thing to which he had pledged himself, rather than disoblige others, or be swayed solely by considerations of self, there were few sacrifices Basil would not make. That he had made no small sacrifice in this instance, she knew well. A constraint about the mouth, a pained look in the eyes, told her all he had suffered, and was suffering yet.

After a few more words they parted, Madeleine going back to the Lodge, Basil returning to his counting-house, and presently — when the day's work was over — mounting Roland and returning home. The intelligence which he had heard regarding Mary bore him company all the way; indeed, it had not left his mind since Madeleine had told him of it. Ever since then, he had felt a sense of relief from responsibility, and yet a distinct consciousness of impending trouble, doubt, difficulty. This was not altogether on Miss Carlisle's account. He would have been something more than man if he had not also considered the matter in a personal light. What change it would make in his fortunes, he could only dimly forebode, but that such a change might be great, he could easily imagine. On this point, however, he would not allow his mind to dwell

— at least, he endeavored to prevent it from doing so. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof!" he said to himself — falling on that well-worn proverbial currency which serves us all in time of need.

When he reached home, dusk had fallen, the atmosphere had grown slightly chill, and a fire shone out cheerfully from the sitting-room, across the hall and portico, when he approached the house. What a friendly, welcoming beacon such a light is, and with what eloquence it speaks of rest and comfort, and all the pleasures of home! It was no wonder that it drew Basil like a magnet, yet, when he entered the room, he was sorry for having yielded to the attraction, for, before the fire sat Rosalind, with a flush on her fair cheeks deeper than could have been caused by the leaping blaze, while Champion stood on one end of the hearth-rug, resting his arm on the corner of the mantel-piece, with an expression of settled determination on his grave, dark face. Basil felt a sensation of storm in the atmosphere, and was, therefore, uncomfortably conscious of being *de trop*, but he avoided an abrupt retreat — that sure resource of awkwardness — and made the best of matters by coming forward.

"Good-evening, Champion," he said. "I am glad to see that you have got away from the court-house, and that dreary office of yours for a little while. I hope you mean to stay to tea?"

"On the contrary, I must go back to that dreary office, as you call it, in a few minutes," answered Champion. "I have a terrible press of business on hand. But I am glad to meet you — I hope you have set your mind at rest about that lease. The case will probably be called for trial on Thursday, and I am more confident than ever that the result will be in our favor."

"Yes, my mind is quite at rest — I leave the matter altogether in your hands," said Basil, smiling in a manner which the other did not altogether understand. Rosalind looked up at her brother in surprise. She had seen a great deal of his anxiety regarding the lease, and had even heard a hint or two of compromise; which had gone far to strengthen her belief that Devereux would succeed in the end. Now to hear Basil speak like that, something surely must have happened to reassure him! This thought, like a flash, passed through her mind, even while Basil went on addressing Champion: "Very likely you are right, you certainly ought to know your trade better than I do. At all events, a man can only act as seems to him best, and accept the consequences."

"Exactly what I told you the other day," said Champion.

"It is better to heed wisdom late than never," said Basil, with the same odd smile. He turned, as he spoke, toward the door. "I must go and change my boots," he said. "I'll find you, I suppose, when I come back."

"That depends entirely upon how long it takes you to change your boots," returned Champion.

Severn, who was in the act of leaving the room, did not hear, or at least did not answer this remark; and after his departure silence reigned for a minute; the only sounds which broke the stillness being the subdued crackling of the fire, and the ticking of a clock on the mantel. The silvery chime of the latter struck six before Champion spoke, for Rosalind remained silent.

"You say — or you imply — that I am harsh and domineering," he said, and his tones, though low and quiet, had a certain vibrating ring which made them strike sharply on the soft firelit stillness. "That may be true enough. I do not deny it. But you knew my character when you engaged yourself to me as well as you can possibly know it now. You knew that I disdained jealousy, but that I would not tolerate any lightness of conduct — such as the world classes under the head of flirtation — in the woman I expected to make my wife. I have borne more from you than I ever expected to bear from any woman. But my forbearance has reached its farthest limit. Your name is the theme of every idle tongue in Stansbury. People say that I am merely held in leash until you are secure of your other lover. Whether this be true or not, the time has come when you must choose between him and me — your flirtation or your engagement must end!"

His lips closed firmly over the last words, the clear, decided voice ceased, but its echo still rang so distinctly in Rosalind's ears that she could almost have affirmed that he continued

repeating, "Your flirtation or your engagement must end!" It will be seen that this was exactly the issue which she had desired and intended to bring about; but it came too soon, and made such a total *bouleversement* of her plans, that she was thrown into horrible uncertainty with regard to what it was best to do or say. She really possessed a diplomatic talent, however, besides a profound conviction that a bird in the hand is worth very much more than even a grander and more desirable bird in the bush. She also knew Devereux's reputation, and, though she did not seriously believe that he was trifling with her, she was not blind to the knowledge that such a thing might be. At all events, he had not declared himself, and his fortune was not secured; therefore it was unquestionably her best policy to mollify and retain Champion. It did not take her more than a minute to balance these considerations. Then she looked up, with the firelight shining on her bright eyes and her lovely flushed face.

"You are unjust and unkind," she said, "more unjust and more unkind than I ever thought you would be! And what you say insults me. I have no flirtation with any one. If gossips choose to talk, can I help that? But I never fancied that you would listen to them."

"Rosalind," said Champion, drawing in his breath, "how can you venture to say to me that you have no flirtation with any one, after what I have heard and seen? Do you mean to tell me that you have not encouraged the attentions of that puppy Devereux?"

"I mean to tell you exactly that," answered Rosalind, who knew that matters were desperate; that she must throw truth to the winds and make out her case as best she could. "I have never encouraged Mr. Devereux's attentions, never! It was not my fault that we were thrown together by the theatricals. If you blame anybody for that, it must be Helen. I do not know whether he likes me or not, but I do know that he has never been more attentive to me than politeness would have required him to be to any woman under the circumstances. You talk of not being jealous, but if this is not jealousy —"

"You are mistaken," said Champion, as she paused, "it is not jealousy but self-respect, and a determination not to suffer you to lower me, if you choose to lower yourself, by trifling with a man whose character is notorious as that most contemptible of contemptible things — a male flirt."

"But I have not trifled with him!" cried Rosalind, really frightened now by the angry sternness of his tone. If he left her once, she knew that she could never hope to whistle him back again, and what if Devereux should be only flirting!

Champion uttered a short laugh. "May I venture to inquire what is your definition of trifling?" he said. "If it does not include flirtation patent to every one on every possible occasion, *t-à-t-à* walks and drives, pictures given —"

"Pictures!" gasped Rosalind. Her heart seemed to stand still. Who had betrayed her? It was the last thing, she knew, that Champion would forgive. His ideas were old-fashioned in their fastidiousness — especially on this point. She had often heard him say that no woman should ever give a likeness of herself to any man who was not a near relative or accepted lover. "What do you mean?" she asked, falteringly. "What pictures have I given or received?"

"I heard accidentally of one," he answered, speaking with difficulty, for it irked his pride bitterly to be constrained to make such complaints as these, "which has passed into Mr. Devereux's possession. If this is so, Rosalind, if you have given him a proof of trust which you never gave me —"

"I have done nothing of the kind," interrupted Rosalind, driven farther and farther over the borders of falsehood. "I had a vignette taken and set in a locket, but it was for you" (this was true in a certain sense!), "and I meant it for your birthday. I haven't it with me now, or I would show it to you. I lent it to Madeleine, and she took it out to the Lodge. Mr. Devereux may have seen it there, but as for its being in his possession —"

"Then it is false? — you are sure that it is false?" said Champion, watching her keenly, and enraged with circumstances, with her, and with himself, that he should be constrained to doubt her for a moment.

"Sure! — how can I help being sure?" she asked, intensely conscious of the flush which burned on her face. "If you do not believe me —"

But he interrupted her impetuously. "Do not say such a thing as that! All would be at an end between us indeed if I did not believe you! But people would not originate such reports if — if you had not given them reason to do so."

"I have been foolish and volatile, no doubt," she said, almost meekly. "But I was always that, you know, and one cannot change one's character in a day. You ought to be more patient with me; you ought to believe that I do not mean any harm or wrong to you!"

She rose as she spoke, and came toward him holding out her hand, the rose-radiance of the firelight falling on the tints of her beautiful face, the exquisite lines of her graceful figure. "See!" she said with a smile, "you have been unkind and unjust, yet I ask you to forgive me for all the pain I have thoughtlessly made you suffer."

Does any one need to be told how Champion answered? The pain of which she spoke, the smouldering resentment, the angry pride, seemed to vanish as he clasped her, for the first time in many days, to his heart, and kissed the lips which had just uttered their first unequivocal lie.

## Chapter II

### Defeat on the Eve of Victory

The next day Madeleine left the Lodge, and came back to Stansbury after a month's absence. This was Wednesday. There was to be a final dress-rehearsal that night of the important play, and the next night — as all the good people of Stansbury were informed by handbills and placards — the long-deferred performance would take place. Rosalind was very much occupied, and her sister saw little of her. In truth, that young lady had no desire to have her wishes and intentions sounded, and she feared that Madeleine might attempt to do something of the kind. The scene with Champion the evening before had warned her what a dangerous game she was playing, but she was still determined to play it to the end. The stakes, she thought, were worth a little risk. If Fortune would only be kind, if Devereux would only come into his own — what a perfect life stretched before her! Surely the price she was paying was not too heavy for that.

While she was considering these things, and adding a few last stitches to the irresistible green silk that was destined to dazzle the audience which would assemble to see her play the emotional, charming coquette, of the sparkling comedy Lacy had translated and adapted from the French, Devereux was startled by the overwhelming intelligence, brought to him by a tall, overgrown boy, who announced himself as Johnny Warren, that old Mr. Burnham had a stroke of paralysis. The young man felt almost as if he suffered a stroke of the same kind himself, as he listened. Surely no calamity is harder than to suffer defeat on the eve of an assured victory! Devereux did not know until that moment how much he had built on success, how little he had anticipated any thing else.

But the blow only stunned him for a minute. Before the boy ceased speaking he was altogether himself again. He wrote a line to Mr. Stringfellow and sent it to that gentleman, then he accompanied the bearer of ill-tidings to the house where the old man lay — helpless, speechless, and distorted. Mrs. Warren received him like an animated glacier, and introduced him to the bedside with something which bore a remote resemblance to grim triumph. "That is what I said would come to pass, and it has come!" said she. "I hope you are all satisfied now."

"Mr. Devereux has reason to be any thing but satisfied," said the doctor, who was standing by. Then he turned to that gentleman with an expression of sincere regret. "I am heartily sorry," he said. "I wish I could give you any hope of the patient's rallying."

"Is there no hope, then?" asked Devereux.

"None whatever. He will never speak again."

When Mr. Stringfellow arrived — and he came in haste — he was more than aghast, he was outraged by the malignancy of fate, and by his own culpable carelessness. "I ought to have taken his testimony down, to be used in case of his death," he said. "But I saw no reason to anticipate any thing so sudden as this. I perceived on Monday that he was giving way very fast, but bless my soul! how was I to imagine that just on the eve of the trial — Arnold, my poor fellow, I shall never forgive myself, but unluckily that won't help you."

"Don't worry over it!" said Devereux, for he saw that the other's distress was genuine. "It cannot be helped. Kismet! as the Arabs say — it is fate! You should not blame yourself for one small oversight, after all that you have done. No one could anticipate this."

"Perhaps he may get over the attack," said Mr. Stringfellow eagerly — but the doctor, to whom he looked appealingly, shook his head.

"No one ever gets over the third stroke of paralysis," he said. "Mr. Burnham has had the warnings before."

"But he may rally enough to sign a paper?" persisted the lawyer desperately.

"He will never rally," repeated the doctor. "From the state in which he now is, only one change awaits him — that of death."

After this decision, there was nothing for Mr. Stringfellow and his client, but to leave the Warren mansion and betake themselves, with what spirits they might, back to their hotel. They said very little as they walked down the street together. Both knew that the lawsuit was virtually ended, and that the Carlisle Mills, and woods, and fields, would never pass into Devereux's possession — at least, not in the manner on which they had so confidently reckoned. That they might, however, come to him in another manner, suddenly occurred to Mr. Stringfellow in the midst of his deep dejection, like an angel's whisper of comfort.

"What an excellent thing it is that you arranged matters with the heiress!" he exclaimed. "For once Quixotism is its own reward! My dear boy, I would rather have lost every other case I have than this: but since it is to be lost — and that through no fault of ours, though my carelessness is in a measure to blame — I congratulate you most heartily on your prospect of coming to your rights by marriage instead of law!"

"I don't know that I care to be congratulated," said Devereux in an indifferent tone. The events of the last hour had changed the aspect of every thing for him. He, too, had thought of Mary Carlisle, but the thought had given him no such comfort as it afforded to his friend. On the contrary, a sudden sense of rebellion against the position in which he had placed himself, came over him. It had been one thing to be the means of generously caring for the interest and shielding the life of the blind girl who had so strongly appealed to his compassion — but it was quite another thing to receive from her fortune and consideration, and to be esteemed by her friends and the world in general a successful schemer and fortune-hunter. This cud of bitter fancy he had been revolving in his mind when Mr. Stringfellow spoke, so it will be seen that he was in no mood to receive congratulations suavely.

He did not go to the Lodge that afternoon. He felt that he could not do so. While the taper of life still burned dimly in old Burnham's breast, all did not seem ended. Perhaps the doctor might be mistaken — perhaps there might be a faint flicker of reviving consciousness before the light went out into darkness. Devereux knew that it was absurd to hope for this, yet he did hope despite reason, and he felt that he could not approach Mary Carlisle again until every thing was settled — one way or another. The case would be called in court to-morrow. When it was decided against him, he would go and tell her that he resigned all hope of winning her heart. If conscience whispered that perhaps he had already won that heart, he closed his ears. Like many a man before, he was intent chiefly on saving his own pride.

He spent the afternoon — Mr. Burnham's stroke had occurred at mid-day — in his own room, smoking a great deal, reading a little, thinking much. With all hope of succeeding in the

lawsuit stricken away, what prospect was before him with his ruined fortunes, his idle habits, his luxurious tastes? He had never made a farthing: in his life — how was he to begin to do so now? He smiled grimly as the question occurred to him. No lily of the field ever bloomed with less knowledge how to toil than this impoverished, fine gentleman. He had good abilities, but they were altogether neglected and untrained, and he knew the world well enough to be aware that whatever is untrained is useless. A feeling of despondent hopelessness, and a scorn of himself and his own life, rose within him, as he sat by the fire gazing into the red embers dreamily. "I am a cumberer of the ground!" he thought. "Why do I live? I do nothing for mankind, either individually or collectively — no human being gains any thing from my life, neither is it necessary for any one's comfort or happiness. I exist simply because I do exist — that is all that can be said for me, and I promise to be very much of a burden to myself when it becomes necessary for me to support myself."

It must not be supposed that Mr. Devereux was in the habit of reflecting on his life and the conditions of it in this manner. Very likely he had never done such a thing before in the course of his thirty years. But just now thought for his future was thrust upon him as an imperative necessity, and he was in a measure unstrung and rendered morbid by the abrupt revulsion from certain hope of success to absolute knowledge of failure, through which he had passed. Those who have ever suffered such a blow know that, however bravely and composedly it may be borne, it seems for a time to unhinge every thing.

As the afternoon was merging into twilight, Mr. Stringfellow made his appearance, and announced gloomily that old Burnham was sinking rapidly. "I have just been to see him," he said. "There is no hope whatever of his lasting through the night. As for any thing like consciousness or speech, that is entirely out of the question. I never knew such luck before!" said the despondent gentleman, sinking into a chair. "The devil must certainly have a hand in it! Champion has accomplished all that he has been aiming at, and he will walk over the course triumphantly tomorrow!"

"If the luck is unalterable, we can at least bear it philosophically," said Devereux, laying his hand on the other's shoulder. "*Ne quid nimium, cupias!* That has been my motto ever since I was old enough to realize that the worst enemies of a man's comfort are his own desires. You have said more than once that I felt too little interest in the fight you have been making for my fortune — now I wish that I had felt even less, and I wish that you, my kind friend, had felt none at all."

"I don't wish any thing of the kind!" replied Mr. Stringfellow, testily. "Confound such cold-blooded philosophy! The man who does not desire any thing is half dead — and I wish to Heaven you could be roused to desire something very strongly! It might be the making of you!"

"Be more charitable in your wishes," said Devereux, with a slight laugh. "I consider myself very well made already."

"If looks were all, you are right enough," returned the lawyer dryly, but with a gleam of partial regard in his keen gray eyes. "I hardly know how I should manage to bear up under this blow at all, if it were not for your forethought with regard to the heiress!" he went on, after a short pause — his mind, as was natural enough, returning to Mr. Burnham's highly inconsiderate conduct in proposing to go out of the world so suddenly — "but, all things considered, it is certainly the most fortunate thing possible that you should have put matters on a right footing with her before the result of the suit was definitely known."

"I am not so confident of its being fortunate," said Devereux, turning away and pacing the room — a cigar between his teeth, his hands in the pockets of his coat. "Every one will think that I anticipated losing the suit, and so addressed her while there was still apparently a chance for me. Now, if that were so, it would have been such an underhanded trick."

"But it was not so!" interrupted Mr. Stringfellow with energy, rising and standing with his back to the fire, so as to face the shadowy figure moving to and fro. "No one with any sense could think such a thing for a moment; and as for dwelling on what prejudiced fools might say —

I should tell them at once to go to the devil! You are morbid and upset — that is what is the matter with you," pursued the gentleman more mildly; "and no wonder, I am sure! Such a blow — coming so unexpectedly — might knock any one down. We'll talk no more about it — and try to think as little as possible! There's that infernal din!" — this complimentary term referred to the tea-bell — "let us go down, and after tea we'll have some punch and a game of whist to raise our spirits. I see Hawley and Roberts here. They are both first-rate players."

"I am sorry that I can't join you," said Devereux, "but I am obliged to attend one of those troublesome rehearsals tonight. If ever I am caught in such an absurdity again! — "

"Pshaw! let the rehearsal go!"

"And have my non-appearance and its probable cause canvassed by every gossip in Stansbury — I don't think I am a coward, but my courage is not equal to that. No, I must face the music, and take care that no one can say that my heart is broken by the loss of my last stake for fortune."

"Not the last, I trust," said the lawyer, hastily. "You have a still better one left."

"Do you think so?" asked Devereux. "Tastes differ greatly."

Stansbury was not a very small place, so old. Mr. Burnham's illness made no stir, nor, indeed, was heard of outside the small circle immediately interested in the event. A rumor of it reached Champion in the course of the afternoon, however, which he immediately took pains to verify, and finding it quite true, sent the following hastily-scrawled note to Basil:

"Set your mind altogether at rest. Old Burnham has had a stroke of paralysis. The other side will probably ask for a delay to-morrow, and the case will eventually end in a nonsuit.

"J. C."

It chanced that there was some delay in the delivery of this missive, and Rosalind was not at home when it was received. She had gone out immediately after tea. "I want to call and see Laura Gresham," she said — this was the young lady who took the second part in the comedy — "before I go to the theatre. Tom Gresham can escort us both, so you need not trouble about calling, Basil; but, pray, be punctual at the rehearsal."

Basil did not say, "Confound the rehearsal!" — for which act of abstinence he deserved a great deal of credit — but he made no haste in his movements, notwithstanding this adjuration. He was established in a low chair before the sitting-room fire, smoking, very much at his ease, a short, black pipe — to which neither Mrs. Severn nor Madeleine objected — when Champion's note was brought. He took in its contents at a glance, then tossed it into his sister's lap.

"Fate fights for us!" he said. "See there!"

Madeleine read, and was shocked. "How dreadful!" she said. "You and Mr. Champion are glad that this old man has a stroke of paralysis!"

"Not at all," answered Basil. "We are only glad that, since he has the stroke, it redounds to our advantage. There is no harm in that."

"Ah! I am not sure — it seems very heartless! Mr. Champion writes in an exulting tone. Poor man! I wonder if he will oblige you both by dying?"

"I hope not," said Basil, cheerfully. "Unless it is the third stroke, it is not necessarily fatal, you know. He may recover and live some time longer."

"And give his testimony at last."

"Perhaps so; but I begin to have faith in Champion's opinion again. You see he says the case will eventually end in a nonsuit."

"What is a nonsuit?" asked Mrs. Severn, looking up from the note which Madeleine had handed to her.

While this matter was being discussed in the Severn domestic circle, Rosalind was taking her way to the theatre, in profound unconsciousness of the blow impending over her. Even when

she reached there no one among the assembled company gave her any information regarding a matter which (in her own opinion) concerned her so vitally. Devereux was rather late, but presently he came, in full evening dress — so handsome, so distinguished-looking, so easy in bearing, so graceful in manner, that Rosalind's heart thrilled with admiration almost akin to the tender passion. She knew that she was looking beautiful in her shining green silk, point-lace, and emeralds; so she swept across the stage and tapped him on the arm with her fan, after the manner of the French coquette she was soon to enact.

"Why are you so late?" she asked, as he turned toward her — he had been speaking to Tom Gresham, who now discreetly moved away — "I have been wondering what detained you, and fearing that perhaps you meant to play deserter at the eleventh hour. I know you are tired of the whole affair, and, honestly, I do not blame you; but there is no help for it now! What would become of me if I had to act without my chief lover?"

She looked at him with a challenge in her eyes which the dullest man must have read, and the coldest would have been likely to accept. Devereux was neither dull nor cold, and just now he felt sufficiently reckless of consequences — sufficiently in need of some moral stimulant — to be willing to flirt to the top of her bent with this enticing Hebe.

"You need not fear that I will desert while I have that part to sustain!" he answered, in that tone of half jest, half earnest, which can be rendered exceedingly effective by one who understands the art of doing so. "If you should depose me now, I will not answer for what desperate thing I might do."

"I have no idea that you would be desperate under any circumstances," said she, meeting his gaze with a thorough consciousness of the admiration it unreservedly expressed. "You are so completely a man of the world — so cool, so quiet! I fancy you have taught yourself to have no emotions which are not altogether comfortable and agreeable."

"And you have not learned better than that in all the weeks that we have known each other," said he, with a great deal of meaning in his voice. "How strange! I fancied that you had learned to know me better, perhaps, than I cared to be known."

Now, this was rather enigmatical, but Rosalind, reading it in the light of her own wishes, thought that it implied much which was agreeable to her. She was scarcely to blame for this. Devereux's voice sank (through force of habit) to a very tender cadence — one which might have misled even a less susceptible listener.

"I should not wish to know any thing which you did not care for me to know," she replied. "But I have been so frank with you, and let you see so many of my little absurdities, that you should not regret any knowledge that I may have gained of your character."

"My character is open for you to read as much as you choose, or can," he answered; "but feelings, hopes, wishes — one likes to keep them as much as possible to one's self. That is, it is generally one's best wisdom to do so."

"Why?" asked Mademoiselle Circe, softly. "Is not sympathy a good thing?"

"As far as it goes, yes; but it does not go very far."

"Perhaps you are mistaken about that: perhaps it would go quite as far as the feelings, hopes, and wishes, are concerned."

He glanced at her keenly, as she stood before him, trifling with the glittering fan in her hand — beautiful, self-possessed, and beguiling. It began to dawn upon him that she had another end than flirtation in view — it was borne to him with a swift sense of amazement, what manner of game she was playing. "She thinks me worth casting her nets about in earnest!" he said to himself. "Shall I let her think so a little longer? It will be instructive to see in what manner she will take the truth."

So, for the rest of that evening Rosalind was gratified by as much incense as one small head could bear without absolute giddiness. Never had Devereux been more gallant, more attentive, more charming. They acted their parts with such grace and spirit — with so much seductive coquetry on one side and so much impassioned ardor on the other — that even the other

members of the company applauded warmly. "If only you will do as well to-morrow night!" they cried.

"As if there was any danger we should not!" said Rosalind, scornfully.

"To-morrow night I shall have a favor to ask of you in memory of our pleasant association," said Devereux, as he wrapped her cloak around her after the rehearsal. She had reluctantly declined his attendance, for Basil was waiting to take her home.

"That sounds quite solemn and formidable — like a farewell speech, or something of that kind," answered she, with a peal of laughter which might have been empty if it had not been so sweet. "I hope you do not mean that our acquaintance is to end as well as our association?"

"That will be for you to say," he answered, pressing the small gloved hand which she held out to him.

"There is not much danger of its doing so, then; pleasant acquaintances are not so common in Stansbury that one can afford to give them up. Good-night."

The soft salutation lingered on his ear, the lustrous eyes looked into his own, then with a rustle of drapery, a faint rush of delicate fragrance, she was gone.

Devereux followed almost immediately, and on the street paused a moment to light his usual companion — a cigar. It chanced that he was standing under a gas-lamp, so that his face was distinctly visible, and a negro boy, who was advancing leisurely along the pavement, walked directly up to him and presented a scrap of folded paper with one hand, while he touched his cap with the other.

"Mr. Stringfellow tol' me to give you that, Mr. Devereux," he said.

"Is it you, George?" said Devereux, recognizing a servant from the hotel. He took the paper and opened it. Within three words were penciled — he read them easily by the light of the street-lamp:

"Burnham is dead."

### Chapter III

#### The End Of The Suit

Fortunately for the peace of Rosalind's slumbers, Basil said nothing of Mr. Burnham's stroke on their way home. He forgot that she had not heard that important intelligence, and for himself he was thinking of something else. It had pleased Miss Champion to be unusually gracious to him that evening, and, like many a lover before, his passion fed upon very frugal cheer indeed. He could not know that this graciousness had its birth in vexation with Lacy', who had been exceedingly changed during the last week. What woman, when she has been slighted by the man she prefers, does not soothe her wounded self-love by encouraging another, if possible, before his eyes? And what man is so wise that he has not, at some period of his life, suffered himself to be tormented by the caprice of a coquette? Miss Champion was a blunderer in the art which she attempted to practise — she understood none of those fine shades of reserve and evasion which heighten coquetry as a veil adds to beauty — and when she encouraged at all she did so with the most unmistakable emphasis. If any one wonders why Basil Severn should have fancied such a woman, it is only possible to answer in Byron's not very complimentary words:

... "Curious fool, be still!  
Is human love the growth of human will?"

Is it not rather the growth of human circumstances, of illusion, of association, of Heaven only knows what, a very mid-summer madness often, to which the cured subject afterward looks back in disgusted amazement?

But who believes this when the madness has drugged the mind, and filled the veins like fever? "To be wise and love exceeds man's strength," said he of the golden tongue three hundred years ago, and men have not increased in wisdom since Shakespeare's day. Basil was a shade more sensible than his fellows, inasmuch as he knew himself, in plain language, to be a fool; but the knowledge did not make him resolute to break his chains. His folly could hurt no one but himself, he thought, a little doggedly; and so he sat (metaphorically) at the feet of his dark-eyed enchantress, and listened to the frivolous words which dropped from her lips as if she had been, indeed, the siren that Lacy called her.

As for Lacy, it is not too much to say that he was heartily sick of the echo of his own absurd verses. It had seemed a very slight thing to go from the presence of a pretty woman, with the whirl of champagne in his head, and, sitting down at midnight, dash off an *impromptu* bit of rhymed flattery, over each line of which he had smiled in a manner that would not have gratified Miss Champion if she had seen him. But it was not a slight thing to one so sensitive to the least breath of ridicule, and who held so superciliously aloof from Stansbury notoriety or praise, for these verses — which, to himself he said contemptuously, did not merit the name of poetry — to be canvassed on the street-corners, and discussed in drawing-rooms. People had scarcely noticed his most artistic efforts when they came forth in print — his personal unpopularity having nearly, if not quite, balanced the pride of possessing a "poet" in their midst. But when he began to write *vers de soci  * and addressed the first of these effusions to Helen Champion, there was a flutter in many dovecotes. "Oh, if he would only write something to me!" sighed more than one young lady in the bosom of her family; but men chiefly laughed. "Lacy is not too much of a poet to have an eye to substantial charms," they said. "La Belle Odalisque — what the deuce does that term mean, by-the-by? — has bright dollars as well as bright eyes."

But when, in addition to this unpleasantness, Lacy found that Madeleine was roused out of her gentle forbearance even to the point of offering him his freedom, he began to consider that amusement and folly had gone too far. He had not the least desire to give up his engagement. Moments of petulant doubt and depression came to him with regard to Madeleine, as with regard to everybody and every thing else; but, these apart, she was still to him the supreme good of his life — the star shining above all his clouds with steady, serene lustre. He felt dimly that the deteriorating change at work within him must go farther yet, that he must sink immeasurably below his present level, before he could willingly suffer her to pass out of his life. So, in an impulsive fashion common with him, he ceased to offer homage at Miss Champion's shrine as abruptly as he had begun to do so; and, disgusted alike with her and with himself, lapsed into his normal condition of social unpleasantness. The revenge she took was one not calculated to affect him deeply. If Basil Severn could have been multiplied twenty times, she might have flirted desperately with each one of the twenty without wakening a thrill of jealousy in Lacy's breast. He was profoundly and unaffectedly indifferent, and, recognizing this, Miss Champion went home on the night of the dress-rehearsal in a very bad humor indeed.

The next morning Basil announced at breakfast his intention of going to the court-house. "I understand that old Burnham died last night," he said, breaking an egg, "and I am anxious to hear what Stringfellow will have to say."

There was a sharp clang on the other side of the table. Rosalind, who had entered a few minutes before, dropped her spoon unheeded into her coffee-cup. She looked at her brother in consternation, the color dying out of her face.

"What do you mean?" she asked, after a second's pause. "Who is dead?"

"Old Burnham — Giles Burnham," her brother replied. "The principal witness, indeed, I think the only witness, on whom Devereux's lawyer relied to make out his case."

"So he is dead — poor man!" said Mrs. Severn, in a tone of kind compassion. "But, then, he must have been quite old — ninety, at least, I should think. One must expect to die when one reaches that age. I forgot that you were not here last night, Rosalind, when Basil received a note from Mr. Champion, telling him that the old man had a stroke of paralysis," she went on, addressing her daughter. "He wrote as if it quite ended the case. Indeed, I believe he said that you might dismiss all anxiety — did he not Basil?"

"I think he did," answered Basil, composedly mixing salt and pepper in his egg.

Rosalind was speechless. Only Madeleine, sending one swift, penetrating glance to her face, understood the meaning of the pallor which had come over it, of the choking motion in the round white throat. When the girl spoke, her voice sounded hard and not like her own.

"Why did you not tell me this last night?" she asked, addressing Basil. "You might have supposed I felt some interest — if it was important."

"Upon my word, I never thought of it," he answered, looking up in some surprise. "It did not concern you at all — I had no reason to suppose that you felt much interest."

What could Rosalind say? Not concern her! It seemed incredible that any one should believe such a thing; that they should not know how it concerned her! She tried to go on with her breakfast as if nothing had happened, but there was a sound as of many waters in her ears. The blow stunned her almost more than it had stunned Devereux the day before. He had realized it, and rallied from it; but to her it appeared like a hideous nightmare, something too dreadful, too overwhelming to be true!

After a while she recovered sufficiently to be able to trust her voice to speak. "Does this end — every thing?" she asked. "Will the case go against Mr. Devereux, now?"

"Champion says that it will," her brother replied. "He is a lawyer, and ought to know. I suppose Stringfellow will still make some sort of a fight, however."

"And you think it honest to take advantage of — of such a thing?" said Rosalind, in a tone which trembled despite all her efforts at self-control. "What is it but a mere accident? — and you know what the witness would have testified if he had gone into court!"

"But we don't know what would have been the result of his testimony," said Basil. "When people go to law, they must make out their case to the satisfaction of the court, or else suffer defeat. One yields no chivalrous advantage to one's adversary. If we had killed old Burnham to put him out of the way, that would have been decidedly unfair, but, since he has died a natural death, we are not accountable for the loss of his testimony — and certainly we cannot pretend to be sorry."

"It looks quite like the finger of Providence," said Mrs. Severn, piously.

"People always believe that Providence is on their side!" cried Rosalind, stung beyond endurance. "But, for my part, I am like Napoleon. He said that it was on the side of the heavy artillery. I think that it is on the side of heavy money-bags."

"My dear!" said her mother. "You don't remember what you are saying!"

"Champion would be touched if he knew how deep an interest Rosalind takes in the success of the case for which he has labored so long and so faithfully," said Basil, rising from table.

This recalled Rosalind to a sense of her imprudence. The chord of self was touched, which, instead of passing in music out of sight, returned a decided warning. She said nothing more, but, as soon as breakfast was over, she went to her own room, and shut herself in with her bitter disappointment.

How bitter this disappointment was, it is hardly possible to express. Last night she had been so certain of accomplishing all she desired, that the revulsion now seemed almost more than she could bear! To be coolly told that hope was over, and that the loss of it did not concern her! She wrung her hands together with a passionate sense of impotent despair. Devereux's words, looks, and tones, came back to her, together with all the dreams she had built on them. Was it not enough to break her heart, she said to herself, that not one of these dreams would ever be realized;

that all the gay, sumptuous, delightful life she had planned receded away forever, and left her with no alternative but that of marrying James Champion!

The gentleman who played the part of *pis aller* in this gratifying fashion was, meanwhile, indulging a restrained but very positive triumph over the discomfiture of his adversary. If he did not exactly affirm, like Mrs. Severn, that the finger of Providence was in old Burnham's death, he felt something equivalent to that, and, when Basil appeared in his office, he met him with a congratulatory shake of the hand. "I told you every thing would come right!" he said.

It is, perhaps, superfluous to remark that the same event, regarded from different points of view, often presents a totally different aspect. It was not surprising, therefore, that the state of affairs which seemed altogether right to Mr. Champion appeared wholly and depressingly wrong to Mr. Stringfellow and his client. They bore a brave front before the little world of gossip around them, but to each other they showed plainly the despondency which possessed them. "I might as well end the matter at once," said the lawyer, mournfully. "There is no good in prolonging the suit. It will only increase the costs, which are heavy enough now. We have not the remotest chance of ever establishing the claim."

"End it, by all means," replied Devereux. "I supposed, of course, that you intended to do so."

When the case was called in court an hour later, Mr. Stringfellow rose, therefore, and stated that he was not ready for trial, owing to the sudden and wholly unexpected death of the only witness to the contract of lease, by whose testimony he expected to make out his case. Then he paused, cleared his throat, and fumbled for a moment nervously with some papers on the table before him. Champion shot an exulting glance at Basil: the other lawyers looked up curiously. Old Burnham's dramatic death, just at the time his evidence was needed, had given the case an interest which it had not before possessed to the legal mind. They wondered if Stringfellow meant to ask that the trial of the case be delayed, in order that he might endeavor to collect other proofs. Stringfellow had no such intention, and, while they wondered, he addressed the court again, stating that he never expected to be ready for trial, since there was no other evidence he could procure in order to establish the validity of the lease. This ended suspense, the court directed a judgment of nonsuit to be entered, the next case on the docket was called, and the lawsuit which, for two years, had cost Basil Severn so much anxiety and Champion so much labor, was finally terminated.

Absolute certainty on the point having been attained, Devereux felt that he must go to the Lodge. The manner in which he shrank from this step was probably natural enough, and, since excuses for procrastination are never lacking when procrastination presents itself in the light of a desirable thing, he decided to wait until afternoon in order that Miss Carlisle might hear the news of her good fortune before he presented himself. "Of course Severn will take it to her at once," he thought.

He was right. Basil left the court-house as soon as the decision of the court was given, and, with the light of victory on his face, went home. When he entered the sitting-room, he found Lacy with Madeleine. The latter sprang up at sight of him, and, before he could utter a word, her arms were round his neck.

"I see!" she cried. "The decision is in Mary's favor — and I am so glad for your sake! She does not care, but I am glad — oh, very glad — that you have kept the trust Mr. Carlisle gave you!"

"Yes, it is all right," said Basil, as plainly as a man could speak who was in process of being choked. "And I am glad, too, though none of the credit belongs to me. The case has ended in a nonsuit, as Champion predicted. I must go at once and let Mary know."

"Accept my warmest congratulations!" said Lacy, offering his hand as Madeleine drew back. "You have had uncommon luck. What a fortunate thing it is that you were so firm in your refusal to compromise!"

"Champion deserves the credit for that, also," said Basil, laughing, as he crossed the floor and rang the bell. "Tell Dick to bring out my horse immediately," he said, when Ann answered it.

Sitting forlorn and disconsolate at her chamber-window, Rosalind saw him mount and ride away, and she knew instinctively on what errand he was bound. His face was offensively bright, his manner offensively triumphant, she thought. "After all, it was only an accident!" she said to herself, and then hot tears rose again in her eyes. Only an accident! and it had altered the whole course and meaning of her life!

## Chapter IV

### Mary's Answer

"That will do, Jessie," said Miss Carlisle, in her soft, languid voice. "Stir the fire a little — I think the room is chilly — and then you may go."

"And leave you all by yourself, Miss Mary!" said Jessie, in a tone of remonstrance, as she looked at the delicate face lying on the cushions she had just arranged. "I don't think that's a good notion. When you stay by yourself so much, you get moped-like. It's true I'm not the best of company, but almost any company is better than none; and Mrs. Ingram has gone to town."

"I should be very unkind if I wanted better company than yours, my dear old Jessie," answered Mary. "But just now I don't want any at all. I have a great deal to think about — I suppose you have heard the news Basil brought me?"

"I met Mr. Basil when he was coming in the gate," replied Jessie, "and he stopped me to tell me that he had won the suit. 'Good news, Jessie!' he says, and I says, 'Thank the Lord!' for I knew in a minute what he meant. Of all villainy," pursued Jessie, "robbin' an orphan is the worst! They thought because you was fatherless and helpless they could do what they pleased, but the Lord raised up friends for you, and thankful I am to Him!"

"You must not talk in that way," said Mary. "Nobody was trying to rob me. If my father had lived, the suit would have been brought all the same. But I am certainly grateful for the friends God has given me," she added with an accent of unmistakable sincerity.

After Jessie had stirred the fire and left the room, the young heiress lay perfectly quiet on her sofa-cushions; fair and fragile as a pale china rose, her long lashes sweeping her cheek, and her lips closed with that expression of gentle serenity which is generally an index of pleasant thoughts. And Mary's thoughts were very pleasant. Yet in their pleasantness Basil's news played only a subordinate part. Notwithstanding the undoubted clearness of her intellect and strength of her character, she had the simplicity of a child where worldly matters were concerned, and it did not occur to her for a moment that any thing had happened which might alter her relations to Devereux. That her inheritance was still her own was agreeable to her chiefly that she—and not the law — might give it to him, and that her generous desire to prove her own disinterestedness might be gratified. Poor Mary! as Madeleine called her, she knew little of the world outside the cloistered home in which she had spent her life, and absolutely nothing of that other, subtler world, the heart of man. It is only when we come in contact with the blind that we realize how necessary is *sight*, even for many things which belong to the moral rather than to the material order.

The pretty Swiss clock over the mantel had ticked away an hour, the stream of gold lying on the carpet had shifted a little, and still the girl lay motionless, wrapped in a trance of calm happiness. She felt no anxiety that the man of whom she was dreaming did not come — that he had not come for two days — her thoughts were busy picturing all that it was in her power to

bestow on him. What she would receive in return, obtained from her scarcely a moment's consideration. That instinct of unselfish tenderness which is strong in almost all women — or at least in a sufficient number of the sex to constitute a large majority — was peculiarly strong in Mary Carlisle. The disturbing influences of passion had no abiding-place in her soul, and her pure, serene countenance mirrored truthfully the purity and serenity of the spirit within.

As the cuckoo darted out from the clock, announcing the lapse of time, she stirred with her first movement of any thing like impatience. It was not impatience, however, but expectation, as the manner in which she turned her head over her shoulder, in the attitude of one listening, plainly showed. She had not remained in this position a moment before the sound of the door-bell echoed through the stillness of the house. She smiled then — a smile that said more plainly than words, "He has come!"

He entered the room a minute later. And, when she heard the step now grown familiar to her ears, she rose, with both hands extended — an impulsive greeting due altogether to instinct and not at all to premeditation.

"I am so glad that you have come!" she said. "Why have you staid away so long?"

For once her blindness was her best friend, since it veiled from her the doubt, irresolution, hesitation on Devereux's face as he advanced. Had she seen his expression, she could scarcely have spoken with such simple sweetness — yet it would have been impossible for the most consummate woman of the world to have thought of any thing better to say.

He took the hands she offered, and lifted them to his lips before he answered, bending his head without any thought of effect — for there was only the mocking-bird in his cage to see — like a cavalier in a picture. Then he said, "I will tell you presently why I have staid away — but first let me thank you for this kind welcome."

"Why should you thank me?" she asked, as she sank back on her couch, and he drew a chair close to her side. "Do you not cheer my solitude by coming? It is I, then, who should be grateful."

"Do not speak of such a thing!" said he, hastily. "I cannot tell you how deeply I feel, how warmly I shall always remember the kindness with which you have, from the first, received and treated me."

"What do you mean?" she asked — a cloud of doubt falling across her face as she turned it toward him. "Why should you speak in this manner? Something has come over you like a change: I feel it in your voice. What is it?"

"Do you not know what it is?" he answered — determined to say at once what he had come resolved to utter. "Have you not heard that the suit in which our interests were opposed has been decided in your favor?"

"Yes, I have heard it," she replied, "but what of that? You speak as if it were a matter of great importance. To me it seems of very little."

"Do not misunderstand me," he said; "do not think that I am not honestly glad, on your account, that it has ended in this manner. But naturally it alters every thing for me. I told you once — here in this very room — what my circumstances were. When I spoke to you later of hopes that I now feel it necessary to put aside, I counted too confidently, perhaps, on success. Instead, failure has come, and now I have absolutely nothing which it is possible to ask a woman to share. Stop a moment and hear me out!" — as she opened her lips quickly to speak — "I scarcely fear that you will misjudge me far enough to think that I anticipated such a result as this when I spoke to you five days ago, but there are others who may tell you that I did. Pray do not believe them. Pray let me keep the thought that I have won your faith, though Fortune denies me the right to win your heart."

She uttered a low, startled cry — strangely like the one he had heard from her lips when he spoke on this subject before — and raised herself quickly to an upright position. He was frightened by the manner in which her color came and went, and by the trembling of the fragile hands that clasped themselves together.

"I suppose I am very stupid," she said, "but I hardly think I understand you — I hardly think you mean that this decision is to make an end of — of all you spoke of the other day?"

If ever Devereux felt himself in a horrible quandary, it is safe to say that this was the moment. He saw what manner of influence he had gained over the mind and heart of the girl before him, and his position, which would have been a difficult one with any woman, was rendered ten times more difficult by the peculiar circumstances which surrounded Mary Carlisle — by the pathos of her blindness, by the danger of her illness, and by the charm of her character. He hesitated, and those who do not understand the movements of a generous, impulsive, rather unselfish, and wholly undisciplined nature, will probably think him altogether weak and vacillating, when it is recorded that already he felt the resolution with which he had entered, wavering. That resolution had been to firmly renounce all attempt to win the heiress's hand; yet when he saw the startled pleading of her face, the childlike quiver of her lips, his heart misgave him. Could he draw back? Would not the consequences be more disastrous than if he accepted the situation in which his own premature folly (so, in the light of old Burnham's death, he now regarded his offer) had placed him? If Mary could have seen the troubled look in his eyes, she might have understood the meaning of his hesitation better than she did. As it was, she suddenly extended her hand.

"You are only trying me," she said. "I feel sure of that. You do not mean any thing so unjust. What! you were willing to offer me the fortune when you thought it would be yours — and now you are not willing to take it when it is mine! Was I right the other day, then? — was it only pity that you felt for me? And now — now that you think I shall not need money— you are ready to go and leave me?"

"It is you who are unjust!" said Devereux, speaking almost mechanically in the tumult of his thoughts. "Pardon me for saying that you do not comprehend — you do not realize how in the eyes of the world I should seem to have taken advantage of your generosity to make my fortune secure in the event of either losing or gaining the suit."

"No, I do not comprehend," said she, slowly. "I do not realize how it can be so important to you in what manner the eyes of the world regard you. If I believe that you never meant any thing of the kind— is not that enough? It only concerns you and me — not the world."

"The opinion of the world is something that no man can afford to disregard," he said. "It is embodied in many ways. Your friends, for instance —"

"I have no friends for whom I care except the Severns," interrupted she, "and Basil, who was here an hour or two ago, told me he felt sure the case would have gone in your favor, but for the death of your witness."

"Yes," said Devereux, "I think it would — but he died, and that ended the matter."

"It should not have ended it, however," said she, with a glow coming over her face. "It was not honest. If that man's testimony would have made the property yours, it ought to be yours as much as if he had given it. That is how I feel. But I did not mind it," she added, "when I thought it would be yours in any event; only now — now —"

Her voice trembled and ceased. Involuntarily one hand went to her heart, as she leaned against the back of the couch on which she was sitting. She was like a child in the ignorance of her blindness, yet a chord of the woman stirred within her, and she felt that she had said as much as it was possible to say. The rest must come from Devereux; the decision rested with him — would he go or stay?

If the moment of silence which followed was one of suspense to her, it was certainly one of conflict and doubt with her companion. To a man of less subtle perceptions, all that she was feeling might not have been so fatally clear — but he not only understood all that she implied, but he read all that she thought as if her mind had been a crystal pool. In that moment he felt that he could not do the thing on which he had resolved when he entered — he could not, to save his own pride, leave this woman whose heart he had won. "It would be brutal!" he said to himself. "I should be haunted by the look of her face as long as I lived! God knows, no one could hate more

desperately to bear the brand of a fortune-hunter, but — one must think of honor before all things."

So, when he spoke, it was with all his usual gentleness in his voice — the gentleness she had learned to know so well. "I cannot bear to give you pain by discussing this matter," he said, "but you must understand that the decision of the court is irrevocable. The property is yours — nothing can possibly take it from you — and you must not say again that it 'ought' to be mine."

"Why should I not say it if it is true?" she asked. "Do you know that you are cruel to talk like this! How can I make you comprehend? — I am blind — I am a woman —"

She could say no more. With a gasp, she lay down on the scroll end of the couch, and buried her face in the cushions. Her heart beat with a vibrating thrill which made itself felt in every fibre of her body, and her whole frame visibly shook with agitation. With a sensation of absolute dismay Devereux saw this, and Madeleine's warning flashed upon him. He felt that this excitement must be ended at once, and, bending forward, he touched lightly the quivering form.

"Forgive me!" he said. "I did not mean to be cruel — I would do any thing sooner. You are right, after all. It does not matter what others say of me, so that you believe in my honesty and faith. And if you do believe in it, and if you will let me ask again the question I asked five days ago —"

She lifted her face abruptly — so abruptly that the motion took him altogether by surprise — and caught quickly the hand which had touched her.

"Stop!" she said, hastily — almost passionately — "stop a moment and listen to me. I do not know much of the world, but perhaps there is some way in which you could take this property that I believe to be rightfully yours, without — without me. If so, it might be better. I am sick, I am blind, I should only encumber you — but if you would take the fortune —"

This was more than Devereux could bear — it ended his last shred of hesitation. The light of self-devotion on the blind girl's fair, spiritual face, seemed to shame his own consideration of self. With a sudden motion he drew her to his heart.

"I will take you," he said, "and thank God for the gift of one so tender and trusting — but do not mention the fortune again. That is more than I can bear. I have no longer concern or interest in it. I almost wish that I had never laid claim to it."

"Do not wish that," said she. "It cannot have been mere chance that drew our interests and our lives together. God must have meant that we should know and — and love each other. See, too, how it smoothes every thing — as you said five days ago! Does it matter now how the suit ended? Ah, if you would only feel with me that it does not!"

"Should you have felt that if it had ended otherwise?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, a thousand times yes," she answered; "only I might have doubted a little if you did not merely pity me. Perhaps I might doubt it yet, if I stopped to weigh and measure all that you have said. But I cannot do that. You would not be unjust enough to seek to win me if you did not care for me a little, and I — I love you, and I am quite happy."

## Chapter V

### Behind The Scenes

As Rosalind made her toilet in the dressing-room of the theatre that evening, it was with a grave face and an anxious mind. She had quite decided what it was that Devereux had on the night before declared his intention of asking her, and she felt that the necessity for avoiding him was very great indeed. The suit having been abominably and unjustly decided against him, there was "no good" in entangling herself any further. Champion would not endure much more trifling — if indeed any at all. "It is easier to avoid trouble than to cure it," she thought. "I must keep out of Mr. Devereux's way."

In accordance with this resolution, therefore, she kept carefully to her dressing-room — delaying her toilet by various devices — until it was time for her appearance on the stage. Then she turned to Madeleine, who had obligingly acted as lady's-maid, and begged that she would keep with her. "I have a particular reason," she said impressively, "for the request. I will tell you about it afterward."

"It may be impossible for me to keep with you all the time," said Madeleine, "but as much as possible I will — Here! let me pin your train a little farther back."

They went out together, and the first person whom they met was Devereux. Rosalind strove desperately to be as usual in her manner, but the effort was a depressing failure. Her disappointment was too recent, too acute — and at sight of him all its bitterness revived! When he spoke, she could almost fancy that she had been dreaming, so entirely was his manner unchanged. Yet it was impossible for her to respond to its ease and lightness. Never before, she said to herself, had she been so awkward and so constrained. Naturally this knowledge did not tend to make her less so, and when — suddenly looking up — she caught his eyes bent on her, full of a certain amused intelligence, her sense of discomfiture was complete. They were standing at the wings, waiting for her cue, and at that moment, to her great relief, it came. With cheeks flushed deeply, and almost ungraceful haste, she swept past him to the stage. At another time she might have been nervously conscious of the critical Stansbury eyes ranged before her, but now she scarcely gave them a thought.

"She has very little of that self-consciousness which is usually the bane of amateur actresses!" said Devereux, following her with his eyes.

"She is always self-possessed," answered Madeleine, quietly. She glanced at him as she spoke — trying to read the riddle of his handsome, careless, yet impassive face. It was not remarkable that, under the circumstances, she should have felt no small degree of curiosity regarding that flirtation which had been so patent to all observers, between Rosalind and himself. How far had it gone? Had it passed over the somewhat indefinite bounds which divide flirtation from absolute love-making? Had they in any manner "understood" each other? Rosalind's mode of receiving the news of the end of the lawsuit had certainly inclined her to think so, yet there was the stubborn fact of Devereux's offer to Mary Carlisle. Had he been playing fast and loose with either — or both?

Every one feels the magnetism of a steady, intent gaze, and before long Devereux's eyes left Rosalind to meet the dark, quiet orbs bent on him. What soft, serene lustre they possessed! — not liquid wells of beguiling light like some other eyes he knew, but crystal depths in which a man might be sure of finding absolute truthfulness, perfect trust, and quiet repose. So he reflected, while he said, with a smile:

"I wish I might venture to ask of what you are thinking. Miss Severn."

"I wish I might venture to tell you," said Madeleine, in her frank voice. "If I thought it could serve any good end, I would; but I fear that is impossible."

He was surprised and interested. "Why should it be impossible?" he asked. "If I can do any thing for you—"

But she interrupted him by shaking her head. "Not any thing," she said. "I was not thinking of myself. There is nothing you can do for me. I was thinking of — others, and wondering — shall I really tell you what I was wondering, Mr. Devereux?"

"If you will be so kind," answered Devereux, altogether at a loss for her meaning, and puzzled by her manner.

Then on the impulse of the moment she spoke.

"I was wondering," she said, "where the amusement of the hour ends, and the earnestness of life begins, with a man like you."

"The amusement of the hour!" he repeated, thoroughly surprised. Then a tide of warm blood sprang to his face. Madeleine's glance — almost unconsciously — passed to Rosalind, and he grasped all that she meant. He hesitated. What could he say? No man with a fragment of

chivalry in his nature cares to exculpate himself at the expense of a woman. "It is my luck!" Devereux thought. It certainly had been his luck before. Women had always had a habit of distinguishing him by their attentions, and he was never able to pass the sirens with closed ears.

"I think you misjudge me, Miss Severn," he said, after a while, a little diffidently. "I am not so thorough an epicurean as you fancy. The amusement of the hour is not by any means the first consideration with me."

"It may not be the first consideration," answered Madeleine, a little coldly — she thought to herself: "He is quite right! Interest is plainly his first consideration!" — "but at least it is enough of a consideration to make you careless of — of things that ought to be regarded." Then, having said this, she suddenly remembered how little right she had to call Mr. Devereux to account for his shortcomings, and she blushed. "Excuse me!" she added, quickly. "I am presumptuous — I have no possible right to speak so to you."

"Let us take it for granted that you have a right," said Devereux, with unmoved courtesy, "and pray be good enough —"

"What on earth is engrossing you two?" demanded Basil, suddenly appearing, play-book in hand. "Didn't you hear your cue?" (this to Devereux). "The play is waiting on you."

"By Jove!" said that gentleman, starting. "I had forgotten all about the play. What is my speech?"

Basil gave it to him, and the next instant he made his appearance before the audience that had good-naturedly waited in silence during a dismal interlude of two minutes.

"What came over the fellow?" Basil asked his sister. "They all seem on their heads to-night. Things are going off shockingly."

"And Mr. Lacy has not been seen or heard of!" said Miss Champion, at that moment making her appearance, with a crimson scarf draped becomingly over her head. "I should not be surprised if he did not come at all — it would be just like him! O! — Madeleine, are you here? I'm sure I beg pardon. But perhaps you know something of Mr. Lacy's whereabouts?"

"I have not seen him since this morning," answered Madeleine, "but no doubt he will be here in time."

"He is not due till the after-piece," said Basil.

"I wish he was not due at all," said Miss Champion, who had plainly lost her temper. "I don't pretend to understand the caprices of poets, being only a plain mortal myself!"

"I don't think you need fear that Gordon's caprices will make him late," said Madeleine, with a slight strain of *hauteur* in her voice. Then she walked away.

"I suppose I have provoked her," said Miss Champion, looking after the retreating figure. "Of course I am sorry, but nobody can deny that Gordon Lacy is literally made up of caprices. He does not know his own mind two consecutive days. I *detest* that kind of person! Now, when I make up my mind, it is made up for good. Nothing ever changes me."

"Are you quite sure of that?" asked Basil, looking at her with his honest, steady eyes. The Spanish proverb did not at that moment occur to him, which says that a wise man changes his mind, a fool never. When do uncomplimentary proverbs, or reflections, occur to a man who listens to nonsense from the lips of a woman with whom he fancies himself in love?

"Oh, quite sure," replied the young lady, who belonged to that large class whose imagination is not vivid enough to anticipate any change in themselves. "What I decide to do I always accomplish in the end, no matter what obstacles interfere, and that is the way I like a man to be."

"But it is hard to persevere without hope," said Basil, who had not the least idea that the sharp edge of her words was due to Lacy's defection. "With hope a man might accomplish any thing, but without —"

"Is there any need for him to be without?" asked she, laughing, and casting down her eyes, conscious of the length and blackness of their lashes.

It was certainly no time or place for a declaration, but Basil's love-fever had reached a point when he knew that he could not endure suspense and trifling any longer. Whatever his fate might be, he must know it.

"May I have hope, then?" he asked, quickly. "I have long wished to ask you that. You know how I love you — is there any hope for me?"

"Mercy, Mr. Severn! — how you startle one!" said Miss Champion, who did not look by any means exceedingly amazed. "Is it possible you expect me to answer such a question as that now — and my head full of the play?"

"Severn, Severn!" said Tom Gresham, advancing from the front of the stage to the side-scene, "where the deuce is that fellow who ought to come on and say that my mother is ill and has sent for me?"

"Where, indeed?" said Miss Champion. "It is Frank Urquhart you mean — what has become of him?"

"He can't get on his boots," said a voice from the green-room. "His feet are swelled."

"Confound his boots!" said Gresham. "Let him come on without them. — Severn, for Heaven's sake —"

Basil did not need the adjuration. He darted away in search of the delinquent Frank, who was vainly and agonizingly trying to draw on his long, red-topped postillion boots. "I can't get them on, Mr. Severn!" he affirmed, half crying — for had not the dream of appearing before the Stansbury public in these boots been the delight of his life for three long weeks? — "I went duck-shooting to-day, and my feet —"

"You young rascal, don't you know that everybody is waiting?" said Basil, wrathfully. "Put on your other boots, and come along!"

But with one final despairing tug the boots came on, and Frank was spared that dreadful alternative. He seized the whip held out to him and fled.

A minute later, Gresham came off highly indignant. "I could hear the people laughing in front!" he said. "They knew as well as I did that there was some hitch, and that I was there behind time. I believe the thing is going to be a *fiasco* after all our rehearsals. There are Miss Rosalind and Mr. Devereux — everybody knows how well they acted last night; to-night I'll be hanged if they are much better than two sticks!"

This was, unhappily, true. Rosalind and Devereux were not doing themselves credit — the former played constrainedly, the latter absently. They were both conscious of the fact, and, when they met in the green-room at the end of the first act, the gentleman made his apologies.

"I fear — indeed, I know — that I am supporting you very badly," he said. "Pray excuse me. I told you that I feared I should murder the part."

"It is I who am murdering mine," said Rosalind. "I think you do very well — though not so well as last night, certainly. But one cannot always be at one's best."

"That is very true," said he. "But there is no reason why I should be at my worst — unless, indeed, it is a case of magnetism."

Rosalind knew well what he meant, but she made no attempt to answer, as she would have done twenty-four hours before. She only said, quietly, "If magnetism explains bad acting, some one must surely have subjected me to it."

"You are not your usual self to-night," said Devereux, curious to know the exact meaning of the change in her. He could not believe that it was indeed — as he had first suspected — owing to his own altered prospects. After all, it did not concern her greatly whether he was eligible or non-eligible as a matrimonial *parti*. Her reserve and constraint must have some other meaning, and he decided to discover what it was. They had the green-room very much to themselves just then — the curtain being down, and the rest of the company on the stage, engaged in a general hubbub.

"Am I not?" said she, evasively. "I do not feel very well. I have had a headache all day. But perhaps you are like one of Charles Reade's characters, and entertain a 'rooted distrust' of feminine headaches. I should not blame you. We often make them cloaks for other things."

"Has yours to-day been a cloak for any thing else?"

"No, mine was genuine — I have it yet. I wish this tiresome business was over. How foolish we were to be entrapped into it!"

"I do not regret my share of the foolishness," said Devereux, not very truthfully. "It has given me many pleasant hours which would else have been dull ones."

No answer, no swift, upward glance of the lovely, blue-gray eyes. "If I utter one word, there is no telling *what* he will say!" thought Rosalind. "Where is Madeleine? She promised to keep with me. If, by some ill-chance, James should come, he would be certain I was flirting!"

"I told you last night," said Devereux, sinking his voice a little, "that I meant to ask a favor of you to-night, in memory of our pleasant association. May I ask it now?"

"I am afraid I must beg you to defer it," said she, quickly. "Is not that the curtain going up? Excuse me! — I must see Madeleine for a moment. O Gordon! — is that you?"

"I have some reason for believing so," responded Lacy, into whose arms she very nearly ran, as she turned abruptly. He wore a light overcoat over the faultless costume of Sir Edward Ardent and looked out of sorts, and altogether unlike that very gay and gallant cavalier. "Is Madeleine here?" he asked. "I want to see her."

"She ought to be here," said Rosalind, in an aggrieved tone. "I was just going in search of her. Perhaps she is in the dressing-room. I will see."

The two men, left together as she passed away, had very little to say to each other. "The play is going on heavily, isn't it?" asked Lacy. "I have just arrived, but it strikes me the company seem rather demoralized."

"I think the first rehearsal was better, on the whole," replied Devereux.

The second act was in progress by this time, and the latter was summoned on the stage at that moment. Almost immediately afterward, Madeleine appeared. "I was arranging Rosalind's costume for the third act," she said. "So, you have come at last, Gordon! I am glad of it — Miss Champion has been very uneasy for fear you did not mean to come at all."

"I was almost tempted to stay away," he replied. "Madeleine, my darling, such horrible luck! — Come out of this uproar a little, and let me tell you."

"What is it?" asked she, slipping her hand into his arm, as they made their way to a corner. "Nothing very terrible, since you are here."

"Ah, I am not sure of that. It is something terrible when one's hopes and toil go for naught. My publishers are bankrupt."

"O Gordon!"

"It is a fact. I saw a newspaper rumor to that effect a few days ago, and I wrote at once for information. The mail this evening brought me the news. They owe me heavily, and I shall probably obtain but a moiety of the amount — if that."

"How sorry, how sorry I am!" she said, with a quiver in her voice — for she knew how deeply this blow struck. "Forgive me for speaking so lightly — I know this is terrible, after all your labor! Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing whatever. I must share with the rest of their creditors. What castles in the air it ends! — How much farther off it puts you! Now I must begin afresh, with what hope I may."

"With all hope!" said she, earnestly. "You have a name, which you did not have before, greater art, and a more facile power of working. Ah, Gordon, have faith in yourself!"

"I have not the least — not one grain!" said he, impetuously. "I am unstable as water, shifting as sand. If it were not for you, Madeleine, God only knows where I should drift. But *with* you, I feel strong; you give me repose, faith, patience. Promise me that this shall make no difference — that you will wait and trust —"

"Gordon!" said Madeleine, in a tone of keen reproach. She lifted her hand and laid it over his lips. "Hush!" she said. "How can you wrong me by such words? Can you think it would make a difference? Can you think I shall not wait and trust — to the end?"

"Did some one tell me that Lacy was here?" asked a voice near at hand. "By George! — here he is! *Sir Edward Ardent*, you fascinating dog, *Mrs. Chillington* wishes to speak to you."

"Stay here till I come back," said Lacy to Madeleine, with an impatient contraction of the brows. "I shall not be gone long. It is impossible that Miss Champion can have any thing of importance to say to me."

Whether she had any thing of importance to say or not, Miss Champion managed to detain her unwilling knight some time, and Madeleine had left her corner to arrange some stray locks of Miss Gresham's hair, when Devereux next came off the stage. He waited till that young lady was summoned away, then he addressed Miss Severn.

"Pardon me for neglecting to tell you earlier," he said, "that I saw Miss Carlisle this afternoon, and she asked me to say that she will send her carriage for you to-morrow morning, and that she hopes you will go to the Lodge. She wishes very much to see you."

"Of course I will go," replied Madeleine. She glanced up quickly, and something reminded him of the look she gave him once before, in this very place. "I hope Mary is well," she added.

"She was quite well when I left her," Devereux answered. "But I have feared since that she may have been too much excited. I am glad, therefore, that you are going to her."

"But you should not have excited her," said Madeleine, almost indignantly. "I warned you — I told you that it was no slight danger you incurred! Her life hangs on a thread."

"I regretted as much as possible the necessity for exciting her," he answered, "but it was something unavoidable. I was forced to speak of the business which was ended to-day."

"There is nothing very exciting in discussing a lawsuit," said Madeleine, regarding him suspiciously.

"True — but the discussion of a lawsuit may lead to the discussion of other matters. It did so with us."

"And it might have led to consequences much more serious," she said, feeling slightly ruffled by his cool self-possession.

"I should have been inexpressibly sorry," said he, quietly, "but I could not have blamed myself — neither, I think, could you blame me, if you knew all the circumstances — though you are a severe judge."

"I!" said Madeleine, coloring. "You are the first person who ever thought so."

"Perhaps I am the first person who ever had reason to think so. At all events you cannot deny, Miss Severn, that you are disposed to judge me severely."

"I have not the faintest reason to judge you at all, Mr. Devereux."

"That, if you will excuse me, is an evasion which I hardly expected you to make. Be frank, please — frank as you were an hour ago when we were interrupted — and tell me what it is that prejudices you so deeply against me. One or two things I know, and those things I should like to explain if you will give me an opportunity to do so."

His limpid eyes met her own — eyes which looked as if candor ought to dwell in them — and between surprise and hesitation, Madeleine felt at a loss what to say. It was a relief that she was spared the necessity of saying any thing, for Champion appeared at that moment and came up to her.

"I am afraid Rosalind is not well," he said, after exchanging a stiff salutation with Devereux. "I have been watching her for some time, and I have come to propose that she shall go home immediately after the play. My mother's carriage is at the door."

"Probably she will be glad to do so," answered Madeleine. "I do not think she is very well. Here she comes to answer for herself."

Rosalind answered for herself to the effect that she would be very glad to go as soon as her part ended. "I am sick of the whole thing," she said. "I — I have made a complete fool of myself! Are not people laughing at me, James? I give you my word, I feel hysterically inclined."

"Everybody says that you are looking exceedingly pretty," replied Champion, who had tact enough to administer the only consolation in his power.

"Oh, that is notion!" said she. "The woman who would not look pretty in point lace and emeralds, had better go and hang herself. But I thought I should make a great success as an actress, and I have been no better than a stick. Last night I did act splendidly — you ought to have seen me last night, James!" Here she stopped and colored — strongly conscious that it would not have afforded James any great satisfaction to have seen her last night.

"Once is enough for me," said Champion, with disgust. "I have had enough of seeing other men playing at making love to you. I will never tolerate such a thing again — not for a moment."

"I shall never ask you to tolerate it," said Rosalind, who felt very much depressed.

In this manner the comedy proceeded, and, after many misadventures, finally ended. "The Morning Call" went off with a little more spirit, but if the appreciation of the audience had been tested by vote, it is likely that the opinion would have been unanimously returned that the long-expected dramatic entertainment was a decided failure. Questioned respecting the cause of this, after it was all over, Tom Gresham delivered his mind as follows:

"The cause of the failure," said he, "was flirtation — or whatever else you might choose to call the dramatic entertainment behind the scenes."

## Chapter VI

### Rosalind Makes A Request

The events of this night did not altogether end with the ending of the play, for Madeleine. Lacy accompanied her home, and remained an hour or more discussing his affairs in all their details, and receiving consolation. That the cheeks of his consoler were pale, and her eyelids heavy, did not occur to him — such trifles rarely occur to the masculine mind when it is well entertained. If the price of a virtuous woman is above rubies, what gem shall represent the value of a considerate man? He is certainly one of the rarest of phenomena, and, let us add, one of the most agreeable. But among the characteristic virtues of the stronger sex, unselfishness has not yet taken its place; and Lacy was no more inconsiderate than the majority of his fellows. Besides, Madeleine gave no hint of her weariness. When he went away at last, however, she sat looking into the dying embers on the hearth — almost too tired to rise and go up-stairs. Then it occurred to her that Basil had not yet come in, and she leaned her head against the deep back of her chair, thinking that she would wait for him. So leaning she fell into a light sleep, and waked suddenly to find Basil standing over her.

"Why, Madeleine," he was saying, "what are you doing here? Don't you see how late it is? You had better go to bed."

"I thought I would wait for you," said Madeleine, rising. "What makes you so late? Where have you been?"

She looked up in his face, and, as she looked, something struck her — some change there. His eyes were shining, his lips under their brown mustache slightly smiling. When happiness touches us, it leaves an impress that not even the most careless glance can mistake — and Madeleine's glance was not careless.

"Basil!" she said, quickly, "what is it? Something has happened to make you glad."

He laughed as he bent and kissed her — laughed with a sound which reminded her, for the first time in many years, of his boyhood.

"What a close observer you are!" he said. "I don't know whether or not any thing has happened to make me glad — that is, I don't know that there is any reason in my being glad. But all the same, you are right — I am!"

"Why?" she asked, breathlessly. "You are not going to be glad and not tell me what it is about? Where have you been? What has happened?"

Basil did not answer. He was evidently averse to speaking — even to her. It was not only that some things are too intangible to be put into speech, but he had always with regard to his deeper feelings been shy as a girl. That some deep feeling was stirred now, Madeleine perceived, and suddenly comprehension flashed upon her.

"Basil," she cried, "you have been with Helen Champion, and she has said or done something to make you glad! O my dear, my dear, don't let her play with you! don't let her amuse herself by breaking your heart!"

Many a man would have answered such an appeal sternly, for, when the thrall of Circe is over them, men generally care little how deeply they wound those who have always been most tender and true. But Basil did not belong to this class. He saw his sister's love shining in her passionate eyes, and he knew that nothing which Helen Champion had yet given him could equal the value of the affection which had been his stay through life. So he made answer quietly, but kindly:

"I think you are a little unjust, Madeleine; or, at least, a little prejudiced. Why should you take it for granted that Miss Champion means to amuse herself by breaking my heart? You wrong her by such a suspicion, and you wrong me. I shall never sink into a plaything for any woman's caprice."

"Has she promised to marry you, then?" asked Madeleine, eagerly. She did not believe that Helen had given such a promise, or that, if she had given, she meant to keep it, yet she would have found it difficult to explain the cause of her settled incredulity.

A flush came over Basil's face. "Not — exactly," he replied, "but I have every reason to hope."

"What does that mean?" asked Madeleine. "O Basil, remember —"

He lifted his hand with a silencing gesture. "Hush!" he said, gently, "you don't understand — you cannot tell. There is no definite engagement yet — that would be premature — but I have not only every ground for hope, but every ground for certainty. You must not ask me to say more. I am pledged not to do so. I only say this to you — in confidence."

Madeleine did not speak when his voice ceased. She sat, with her hands clasped in her lap, gazing into the fireplace at the red coals, the soft gray ashes. If her heart was full of bitterness, who can blame her? She saw the end as clearly then as she ever saw it afterward — for she had not lived with closed eyes up to the year of grace 1870. She knew — as who, alas! does not know? — how many women in these days seem to hold their honor at less than a farthing's value, how lightest of all light things is that promise given and held which stands charged with so much meaning: in the sight of God and man, and how careless — nay, even how ruthlessly cruel — are those who should remember that she who, for pleasure or triumph, tramples on a human heart with all its infinite capacities for suffering, has often a sterner account to render than he whose hands are red with the blood of his brother. O for some voice brave enough and strong enough to reach the multitude of ears now closed by vanity, frivolity, and heedlessness, and preach to them the old evangel which tells how a woman's chief jewels are purity, tenderness, and truth; how she should be gentle and yet strong, gracious in her courtesy, considerate in her kindness, and firm in her constancy! Nothing is more true than that she who lowers herself in man's esteem, lowers for the time her whole sex with her. The instinct of reverence for womanhood is planted deep in every true man's heart, and, so long as women are worthy of honor and respect, honor and respect will never fail them. But when instead come scoffing and contempt, the hour which is dark for

man is darker still for them. With their own hands they have torn the crowns from their brow, and descended from the thrones where God himself placed them.

These thoughts came to Madeleine, as they had come often before — not connectedly, but tumultuously and dimly, with the sharp pang of personal sorrow stirring through them. She knew Basil's nature so well — knew it by its very likeness to her own — and she felt that there was no material in him for the light and careless lover who is fit subject for a coquette's amusement. But there was nothing to be said or done. He must "dree his weird," as the Scotch say; and learn, as many a man has learned before,

"How much is wasted, wrecked, forgot,  
On this side heaven!"

"God bless you, dear!" she said, presently, rising and laying her hand on his shoulder. "You know I wish you all happiness — you know there is nothing I would not do to win happiness for you! I hope Helen will be true. If she plays you false, it will be hard for me to forgive her!"

"Wait until she has played me false before you speak like that," said Basil, smiling. "Now God bless *you*, and good-night. It is time you were in bed."

But Madeleine was not destined to attain that desirable place of rest for some time yet. She had scarcely entered her own chamber, and turned up the gas dimly burning by the side of the toilet-table, when without any warning the door suddenly opened, and Rosalind — attired in a blue dressing-gown with a cloud of brown curling hair about her shoulders — stood on the threshold.

"I beg your pardon for not knocking," she said, advancing, after closing the door behind her, "but I thought mamma might hear, and want to know to-morrow why I was wandering about this time of night. What kept you down-stairs so long? I have been waiting and waiting for you! I thought Gordon was never going, but he left an hour ago, and still you did not come."

"I have been talking to Basil," said Madeleine. "Why are you not asleep? You must be tired."

"I am tired, dreadfully tired!" answered Rosalind, sinking into a chair. "I have not been to bed, either, for I dared not lie down lest I should fall asleep and not hear you when you came up-stairs."

"And why were you anxious to hear me?" asked Madeleine, who was tired herself, and naturally averse to conversation at such an hour of the night.

"Because I have something important to say," replied Rosalind. "I want to say it to-night and be over it. There is no telling whether or not I shall have an opportunity to speak to you privately to-morrow."

"It is very likely that you will not, since I am going to the Lodge in the morning."

"To the Lodge! — are you?" said Rosalind, starting in a manner which that very simple and common occurrence did not seem to warrant. "Do you think you will stay long?" she asked, quickly.

"I cannot tell. It depends upon how much Mary needs or wants me," answered Madeleine.

The other was silent for a moment — looking down with brows slightly drawn together as she traced with the point of her slippered foot a pattern on the carpet. Then, without glancing up, she said, abruptly, "Do you think you are likely to meet Mr. Devereux there?"

"Where? — at the Lodge?" said Madeleine. "It is very likely; but why do you ask?"

"That is what remains to be told," answered Rosalind, with a faint sigh. "But tell me first why does he go there? Do you think that he will marry Mary now that the fortune is hers?"

"I would rather not speak of that," said Madeleine — who felt just then as if she could not do so — "Mr. Devereux's hopes or intentions do not concern either you or me."

"Do not be too sure of that," replied Rosalind; and despite her honest (because selfish) anxiety, a smile of gratified vanity dimpled the corners of her mouth. "Perhaps Mr. Devereux's hopes and intentions concern me very much — that is, if I choose to let them do so."

"Rosalind," said her sister, in a tone of pain, "I should be sorry to hear that, although bound by your honor to one man, you have been trifling with another."

"Call it what you like," said Rosalind, who saw no further good in secrecy, and who knew that she could trust Madeleine to the last extremity. "What I mean is the simple fact that, if Mr. Devereux had won his suit, I should have married him."

"And you — you are not ashamed to say so!" cried Madeleine, shocked, revolted, yet not surprised. "Call it what I like! What can I call such conduct but utter want of principle? I suspected, I feared, but to know —" She stopped short, not because words failed her, but because she felt how useless they were. Who can explain the fine essence of honor and faith to those who are morally obtuse? It would be less waste of time to talk of light and color to the blind.

"Why should I be ashamed?" demanded Rosalind, quietly, "Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and to do the best that one can for one's self — is not that self-preservation? It is not worth while to discuss the matter, but I certainly meant to do the best for myself. Of course it is all over now. I know too much of poverty to think for a moment of marrying a ruined man — and Mr. Devereux, no doubt, will console himself with Mary Carlisle."

"Don't mention her!" said Madeleine, with sudden and most unwonted passion — passion so unwonted, indeed, that her companion looked up amazed at the startling energy of those words. "Have you no sense of contempt for the part you have played, and that which you were willing to play?" she went on, with a ring of scorn in her voice which vibrated even through Rosalind's indifference. "Think for a moment of all that we owe to Mary; think of her darkened life, her generous heart! Then think that you were ready to profit by her great loss, to break faith with the man who had been true to you for so long, to — Ah, I cannot speak of it all! It is too much — too much!"

"If I had imagined that you were going to indulge in heroics," said Rosalind, "I should have been more guarded in my admissions. Consider my conduct what you please, I know that I have only acted as any one else would have acted in my place. To come to the point — for all this is pure waste of time — I want you to understand that I now intend to marry James Champion, and that it is necessary for me to see as little as possible of Mr. Devereux."

"Why should it be necessary for me to understand any thing about it?" asked Madeleine.

"Simply because you may do me a great service, if you will," her sister answered. "I see that you are about to say that you will not, but wait and hear me out. I take it for granted that you wish me to marry James Champion."

"You take too much for granted," said Madeleine, in whom indignation still burned hotly. "As far as I know any thing about Mr. Champion, he is an honorable man. I should, therefore, wish him better fortune than to marry a woman who has acted so deceitfully!"

A flood of bright crimson sprang to Rosalind's fair face. It is one of the strangest traits in this strange, complex human nature of ours, that we shrink from hearing that characterized which we *do* without compunction.

"I did not come to be lectured," she said, rising haughtily. "My affairs are my own altogether. I am sorry I thought of asking your assistance. Good-night."

She crossed the floor before Madeleine uttered a word. It was only when her hand touched the door that the elder sister's voice sounded.

"Stay a moment," she said. "I spoke too severely — for courtesy. Excuse me. Let me hear what you came to say."

Rosalind had her own reasons for accepting this very slight apology. Madeleine's assistance just then was almost absolutely necessary to her. She turned and walked back. But she did not sit down again — which to Madeleine seemed an encouraging sign.

"I came," she said, "to ask you to assist me out of a difficulty in which I find myself. Of course it is my own fault that I am in it; but that, unluckily, does not help matters. As I have already said, I intend now to marry James Champion; but he is jealous and suspicious of my flirtation with Mr. Devereux, and if he has the least idea that I was ever seriously entangled with him, he — James, I mean — will certainly break off the engagement. Very likely you are ready to say that it would serve me right if he did, but would it serve any good end besides? I should be left on Basil's hands for Heaven only knows how long. Helen Champion would spread the story to the four winds — and should you like all Stansbury to hear and talk of it? People have always said that the Severns kept their word. For the sake of family pride, I thought you might help me to keep mine."

"Family pride is a good thing in its way," said Madeleine, "but there may be other things to consider." Then she paused to consider those things. As it chanced, they all seconded Rosalind's appeal. Champion's long attachment, Mary Carlisle's engagement, Basil's entanglement — all would be more or less affected if that of which Rosalind spoke came to pass. "What do you wish me to do?" she asked, after a minute. "I cannot assist you in any further deception, but if you simply wish to draw back —"

"That is all," said Rosalind. "The favor you can do me will be very slight to you, though important to me. It is only to obtain from Mr. Devereux a picture which I was foolish enough to give him. James heard of it — how I cannot imagine — and I was forced to deny that he had it. I said I lent it to you, and you took it to the Lodge. Pray remember this, in case the matter should be mentioned before you."

She spoke with emphasis, but Madeleine was literally incapable of reply. Those to whom that branch of polite fiction known as white lies is thoroughly familiar, cannot realize how this upright spirit recoiled from her first personal introduction to falsehood. It seemed incredible that Rosalind could really have meant what her words implied! "You told him what was not true?" she said, like one who only half comprehends.

"Yes," answered Rosalind, who read all the meaning of her tone, "I told him what was not true. You can scarcely think worse of me than I think of myself for having done such a contemptible thing; for, though I don't consider morals as much as you do, I feel that a lie is contemptible, chiefly because it is cowardly. Now, I am not a coward, generally. But just then every thing hung on yes or no. James was ready to leave me at a word, and, if he had gone, I should never have won him back. I knew that, just as I know now that if he learns that I deceived him, and that Mr. Devereux has my likeness, he will never forgive me."

"Try him!" said Madeleine, impulsively. "O Rosalind, for Heaven's sake, turn back! You do not know what a road it is that you have entered upon! How can you endure for an hour the consciousness that you are deceiving one who trusts you? A lie is cowardly, as you say. Be brave: tell him the truth! I am sure he will forgive and respect you."

"Such advice proves how little you know James Champion," said Rosalind. "He would never forgive or trust me again, even if I had courage for the step, which I have not. I have always been afraid of him, I suppose I always shall be, and it is nonsense to speak of such a thing. All that I desire of you is to ask Mr. Devereux for my picture. Leave the rest to me."

"But why not ask him yourself?"

"Is it possible I have talked all this time and you do not understand yet that I specially wish to avoid him? But there is no reason for you to do so, and you have abundant opportunities for seeing him at the Lodge. Pray, therefore, get the likeness! It is a small vignette set in a locket. Even if James were not likely to speak of it again, I should not wish it to remain in his possession. I do not feel as if I could trust him not to show or talk of it."

"And yet you gave it to him — a man whose sense of honor you trust no more than that!"

"I did not think any thing about his sense of honor at that time. I only thought how charming he was, and that he was likely to obtain the Carlisle estate. If the suit had gone right

— if that horrid old man had not died just when he was needed — there would be none of this trouble. It would be James whom I should discard."

"That will do!" said Madeleine. "Don't say any more if you wish me to help you! It is chiefly for the sake of others that I promise now to do what I can. I will ask Mr. Devereux for your picture, little as I like such a task. Is there any thing that you specially wish said to him?"

"Nothing at all — simply I want the likeness. He will understand the rest. Now, I will leave you to go to bed. I suppose, since you are doing this 'for the sake of others' — no doubt that means Mary and James— it is not worth while to thank you?"

"Not at all worth while," answered Madeleine. "Are you going? Good-night."

## Chapter VII

### "Try Not to Think The Worst Of Me."

Rosalind betook herself to her virtuous slumbers with a mind satisfied and at rest. From her earliest childhood she had known that whatever Madeleine engaged to perform was sure of accomplishment; and now, as often before, she felt the convenience of possessing such a sister. If her vanity still smarted a little at the recollection of the humiliating admission she had been forced to make with regard to her falsehood to Champion, she salved it by the thought that after all it was no such terrible thing, and that, in any event, Madeleine was altogether to be relied upon. Tortures would not wring from her any thing that was told her in confidence! thought the young epicurean, laying her head on her pillow; so with one last sigh to the vanished castle of her dreams, she closed her fringed lids and floated away into unconsciousness.

That Madeleine did not find repose so easily was according to the nature and probably the fitness of things. To the selfish and egotistical, nothing is easier than to dismiss all troubles which do not immediately concern themselves, but there are others who seem born to bear through life the weight of vicarious as well as personal suffering, and Madeleine was one of these. We all know how it is that the world runs away, but many of us do not know — perhaps never will know — what burdens have been borne by tender hearts that watched, indeed, while others slept.

The next morning the carriage from the Lodge came, as Devereux had said, together with an urgent message from Mary — delivered by Joe, hat in hand, at the sitting-room door. Mrs. Severn and Madeleine were there together; Basil had gone to the mills; Rosalind, having breakfasted in bed, had not yet made her appearance. "Shall you go?" asked the elder lady, glancing at her step-daughter. "You are looking pale, Madeleine!"

"I was awake late last night," said Madeleine. "Yes, I must go; the fresh air will do me good."

The fresh air did her good in a measure. It revived her spirits, and brought a faint tinge of color to her alabaster cheeks, but it could not lighten the weight of trouble lying heavy at her heart. Should she tell Mary the truth, or should she not? That had been the refrain of her thoughts all night, and was their refrain still. It is all very well for easy-going people to talk of ignorance being bliss: Madeleine's proud spirit rose up and said that ignorance was not bliss when it meant the love of a true heart squandered, loyalty given in return for falsity, passionate generosity for mercenary calculation. "How is it possible for me to stand by and see that man touch Mary's hand," she said to herself, "when I think of the dishonorable part he has played? Yet how can I speak the truth, to break her heart and kill her?"

It was a difficult question to answer, and, when the Lodge-gates were reached, Madeleine was no nearer answering it than she had been hours before. She stopped the carriage and told the coachman to set her down. "Take the carriage to the stable," she said. "I will walk to the house."

This was in order to gain a little longer time for reflection. But Gilbert touched his hat, and remarked that he had to go back to Stansbury for Mrs. Ingram. "She's been staying at Mr. Waldron's for two or three days," he said, "and Miss Mary tol' me to go for her, after I brought you out, ma'am."

"Very well — go, then!" said Madeleine, carelessly. She did not give a moment's thought to Mrs. Ingram, as the carriage, after a sweeping turn, rolled away. Her mind was still intent on her problem. Should she speak, or should she not? There was a rustic seat under a beech that bordered the drive, and she sat down on that to reflect at her leisure. So sitting, she made a picture worth admiring — the hazy gold of the sunshine streamed, the delicate shadows flickered, over the graceful, quiet figure, the somewhat sad, yet altogether gentle and resolute young face. She was near the gates, beyond which stretched the open country, with the tall chimneys of the mills in the distance, a tender sky arching over purple woods, a blue mist wrapping every thing. Her gaze being turned in this direction, and her thoughts deeply absorbed, she did not see, through the almost leafless trees, a figure advancing from the house, nor hear a quick step crushing down the gravel-walk, until it gained her side — when she started, turned, and faced the man of whom her thoughts were full.

"Mr. Devereux!" she said.

"Good-morning, Miss Severn," said Mr. Devereux, a trifle surprised. "Is it possible you have walked from Stansbury! I thought the carriage —"

"I came in the carriage," answered Madeleine, "but it has gone back for Mrs. Ingram. I merely sat down here — to think a little."

"Miss Carlisle was expecting you when I left her a few minutes ago," said Devereux, looking as if he thought the last assertion rather a singular one. "But the morning is very beautiful, and tempts one to enjoy it."

"I was not thinking of the morning at all," said Madeleine, quietly. Then she paused and hesitated. Here was her opportunity to execute Rosalind's commission. Should she take advantage of it? After a second's reflection, she decided to do so. "It is intensely disagreeable, but there is no good in deferring it," she thought. Whereupon, she lifted to Devereux's face the grave, beautiful brown eyes, with which he began to feel familiar — drawing back a portion of her drapery from the seat.

"Will you sit down?" she said, with the courtesy which never deserted her. "I am sorry to trouble you, but I have something to say — that is, to ask — and it is fortunate that I met you here."

With another woman Devereux would certainly have replied that the good fortune was on his side, but he felt instinctively — had felt, indeed, from their first acquaintance — that such empty compliments were ill-suited to Madeleine. He bowed, and sat down at once. "I am at your service," he said. "Whatever you wish to ask I shall be glad to answer."

"It is not a question, but a request," she said; and, as she uttered the last words, deeper color came into her cheeks. She began to feel that this request was awkward for her to make, and might be awkward for him to hear. But a timely recollection of his duplicity came to her, and she went on coolly and steadily enough. "It is one with which I am charged by my sister. She wishes me to ask you for a likeness of herself, which is, I believe, in your possession."

"There is such a likeness in my possession," replied Devereux, so much astonished that he could do no more than merely assent. "What next?" he said to himself, mentally. "I understood that Miss Severn was kind enough to give the picture to me, else I should not have retained it so long," he added, after a moment. "No doubt my stupidity was in fault. I shall return it to her, of course."

"Pardon me," said Madeleine, "but if you would return it to me, it might be better. Rosalind specially requested me to obtain it."

"Certainly," he answered, with perfect composure. "Unfortunately, I have not the locket with me at present. Shall I send or bring it to you?"

"There is no immediate haste," she replied. "I shall probably be here for several days. If, when you come again —"

"I will bring it," he said, as she paused. "I am sorry that Miss Severn should have felt any anxiety or annoyance respecting it. If she had only spoken a word to me last night, or the night before, I could have restored it to her then."

"Straightforward modes of dealing with difficulties seem to me best," said Madeleine. "But many people do not think so. Perhaps, also, you are aware why Rosalind might have hesitated to speak to you?"

"No," he replied, regarding her curiously — as if he wondered a little what was the meaning of all this — "I have not the least idea why she should have hesitated to speak to me on that or any other subject."

"You do not know then that, although she is engaged to another man, every gossiping tongue in Stansbury has been busy with her name — and yours?"

"I had no concern with the first fact," he answered, quietly, "With regard to the last, I hope you will forgive me for remarking that it has not seemed to concern Miss Severn very much, while I am thoroughly well seasoned to gossip — and thoroughly indifferent to it."

"You are a man — you can afford to be so," said Madeleine, with a half-indignant accent in her voice.

He looked at her with a slight smile. "True," he said. "I am a man, but since your sister has more than once explicitly said that she was indifferent to it also, was I greatly to blame for ignoring gossip on her account as well as on my own?"

"She had no right to be indifferent to it," said Madeleine. "No woman should be — and she was bound in honor to think, not only of herself, but of the man to whom she was and is engaged."

"Do not consider me as meaning to offer an excuse for any thing which you may think culpable in my conduct, when I say that I was led by Miss Severn to understand — though again my stupidity may be in fault — that she was not absolutely engaged to Mr. Champion," said Devereux, with a quietness which almost verged on indifference.

"I am sorry to say, then, that she led you to understand what was not true," answered Madeleine. "You probably know that some women hold that falsehood on that subject is less falsehood than on any other. But if she deceived you," the speaker went on, yielding to an impetuous impulse, "did not you in turn deceive one who deserved better things at your hands? Did you not offer yourself to Mary while you had already made Rosalind believe that, if the lawsuit was decided in your favor, you would offer yourself to her?"

"Good Heavens, Miss Severn!" said Devereux, completely confounded by this most unexpected charge. "Do you know what you are saying? Do you know that you force me to declare that I have never, for one moment, entertained the idea of offering myself to your sister in any event?"

"You did not!" said Madeleine. The words were almost a gasp. What was true? — what was false? This new world of assertion and denial bewildered her, so little was she used to any thing save the one direct road of honor. For a moment she was silent — then she turned to him almost passionately.

"If you did not entertain the idea," she said, "you cannot deny that you made her think that you did!"

"Pardon me, but I am forced to deny any thing of the kind," he answered — and his usually pleasant voice, though still courteous, was very grave — "you do me great injustice; you charge me (I am sure unwittingly) with most grossly dishonorable conduct; I have a right, therefore, to ask what possible grounds you have for such a belief?"

A burning blush came to Madeleine's face. She had gone too far to recede, however, and of evasion and equivocation she knew literally nothing. So she answered the plain truth: "The impression was left on my mind by Rosalind's manner of talking when she asked me last night to

obtain her likeness from you. She made no direct assertion, but she spoke as one might speak of a thing explicitly understood."

"Miss Severn did me too much honor," said Devereux, "or you must have misunderstood her greatly. It is impossible she could have meant to imply that I was ever her suitor."

It is doubtful if a man ever lived to whom such a denial could have been more unpleasant — he almost hated himself at that moment for the idle folly which had placed him in a position where it became necessary. But that it *was* imperatively necessary, could not be gainsaid. The charge was too serious for him to let chivalry hold his tongue. If he had not been engaged to Mary Carlisle, it would have been another matter; but now — yet the glow which came into Madeleine's eyes did not look as if he had won her belief.

"Probably I did misunderstand," she said, coldly, "probably Rosalind did not imply that you were ever absolutely her 'suitor.' But you forget that I have seen — that every one has seen — your conduct; and every one has drawn the same inference from it. I suppose a man of the world does not consider his honor bound unless he has said in plain words, 'Will you marry me?' — perhaps, indeed, not even then — but it is impossible for you to deny that your flirtation with Rosalind has been constant and open."

"It is certainly impossible for me to deny that I have passed many pleasant hours with Miss Severn, that I have admired her beauty, and no doubt talked a great deal of nonsense to her — but I had not the faintest reason for supposing that what was amusement to me was earnest to her. Had I imagined such a thing for a moment, I should have been more guarded in my conduct and manner, since I have long intended to marry Miss Carlisle, if she would marry me."

"And yet such an intention did not keep you from meeting and flirting with Rosalind *here!*"

Her voice was full of scorn, but again, as on the night before, he felt the absolute impossibility of reply. How could he say that he had merely responded, in very idleness, to the invitation held out by the woman of whom they spoke?

"If you knew all," he said at length, "you might not judge me so hardly. One cannot throw off the habit of a lifetime in a day. I meant no harm, certainly no dishonor."

She made a slight gesture of disdain. "That is an old excuse," she said, "and, pardon me if I add, a worthless one. To mean no harm and yet to do it — is any thing more common? But it is useless to talk of this" — she rose as she spoke — "of course you see no reason why you should not have amused yourself with Rosalind (who in turn was betraying the trust of an honorable man), even while you were endeavoring to arrange a marriage of convenience with my poor Mary. If one does not see these things, they can hardly be made clear. Good-morning, Mr. Devereux."

"May I detain you for a moment?" asked Devereux. He, too, had risen and stood by the side of the road, with the sunshine falling in patches of gold on his uncovered blond head.

"Is there any reason why you should do so?" answered Madeleine, pausing reluctantly.

"I think I may say that there is a reason, unless you have forgotten that I asked you last night if I might not hope to explain some of the things which prejudice you against me."

"Why should you wish to explain them? — what does my prejudice matter to you?"

"It matters more than you think, perhaps. I should like to win your good opinion: I should like you to believe that I am neither the dishonorable flirt nor the mercenary adventurer you fancy me to be."

"I should be very glad to believe good of you — on Mary's account," she said, a little wistfully. "I told you, when you found me here, that I had sat down to think. My thoughts took the form of a question — I was debating whether I should or should not tell Mary what I conceived to be the truth with regard to your character."

"Meaning your own opinion of it?"

"Yes, my own opinion — together with the apparent testimony of circumstances."

"And what was your decision?"

"I had formed none. You may understand that it was not a question easy to decide."

"I understand that it might be difficult to say to Miss Carlisle, 'You are about to give your heart to a man who seeks you only for your fortune — after having failed to obtain it in any other way — and who I have every reason to believe would have married another woman if he had succeeded in winning his suit.' Was not that the form that your warning would have taken?"

She was looking at him steadily, trying to detect satire in his eyes or tone. But there was not the least trace of it in either. The eyes met hers frankly and clearly, the tone was composed and earnest. She returned candor for candor.

"Yes," she said, "that was the form my warning would have taken. If I hesitated to utter it, my hesitation was due to the fact that I feared to break Mary's heart, or end her life."

"You would never have uttered it," he said, quietly. "Of that I feel sure. You never will utter it. Miss Severn; you will be just enough to give me the benefit of a doubt, and to pardon me for reminding you that, when I asked Miss Carlisle to marry me, I had every reason for believing that the suit would end in my favor. My witness was not then dying or dead, and even your brother felt sure of my success."

Madeleine knew that this was true. Almost at the eleventh hour Basil had been ready for compromise, but then — there was the entanglement with Rosalind! Had the latter been altogether wrong? Had it really never passed beyond the idle amusement of empty days, which the society of the nineteenth century has agreed to call flirtation? She looked at the hero of this flirtation doubtingly, and while they were so standing, the roll of approaching carriage-wheels was heard. Glancing round, she spoke quickly:

"I must go. Yonder is the carriage returning from Stansbury with Mrs. Ingram. Mary will wonder what keeps me. If I have judged you too hastily or too harshly, I am sorry. But I was thinking of her — altogether of her! I know her so well, I love her so dearly. Ah, if I could make you feel how kind and generous she is!"

"Perhaps I know already," he said. "Not as well as you, it may be, but still in a measure. Try not to think the worst of me — that is all I ask of you. I do not deny that I am an utter good-for-naught, that for years amusement has been my end and aim in life, that I am scarcely worth shooting if one is to be valued by the good one has done in the world; but still, I could sooner shoot myself than betray such a trust as Miss Carlisle has given me, or try to win the love of a generous heart as a matter of sordid calculation!"

Clang went the iron gates behind them. "I hope you are in earnest," said Madeleine. "I will try to believe in you, for Mary's sake. Again, good-morning."

She bent her head and walked away, her slight, graceful figure framed for a moment by the evergreen shrubs and leafless trees, then passing out of sight around the curve of the path. Devereux watched her meditatively as long as she was in view. When she disappeared, he, too, turned, and with a bow to Mrs. Ingram — who bowed to him out of the carriage-window — took his way to the gates.

It was naturally to be expected that two horses would reach a given point before one woman, saying that they started from the same place, and that the woman in question had no more advantage in the matter of distance than Madeleine possessed. Mrs. Ingram therefore disembarked on the steps of the piazza, and waited there several minutes for the pedestrian whom she had passed. The eyes of this worthy lady were sharp, and she had recognized the violet dress, the cloth jacket, the pretty velvet hat, which made up Madeleine's out-door attire, before she reached the Lodge-gates. Immediately thereupon she had interrogated Gilbert. The dialogue was somewhat after this fashion, for it has been already remarked that Mrs. Ingram was not popular with the Lodge servants:

*Mrs. Ingram* (tapping sharply on the glass through which her charioteer's broad back was visible). "Gilbert, Gilbert! isn't that Miss Madeleine Severn yonder, just inside the gates?"

*Gilbert* (who makes it a cardinal principle to afford Mrs. Ingram as little information on any subject as possible). "I don't know, ma'am. My eyes ain't what they used to be."

*Mrs. Ingram* (indignantly). "You do know! It is Miss Madeleine, and Mr. Devereux with her. What are they doing? I suppose you can see that!"

*Gilbert*. "No, ma'am; I can't see that." Then *sotto voce*: "'Tain't everybody's eyes gets sharper as they gets older, like your'n does!"

*Mrs. Ingram*. "Then you must be as blind as a bat — and I never heard that before. They are standing there talking — and they've been sitting down. Now, didn't you tell me that you brought Miss Severn out to the Lodge before you came back for me?"

*Gilbert* (a little doggedly). "Yes'm; I told you so because you axed me."

*Mrs. Ingram* (irritably). "Did I say I didn't ask you? Such impertinence! Well, did she go in the house?"

*Gilbert* (with an obstinate look on his face, which fortunately his interrogator did not see). "I can't tell you, ma'am. I didn't stay to watch her."

*Mrs. Ingram* (quite as obstinate). "Where did she get out of the carriage?"

*Gilbert* (conveniently deaf). "I brought the carriage right straight along after you, ma'am."

*Mrs. Ingram*. "Are you stupid as well as blind? I asked you where did she get out of the carriage?"

*Gilbert* (sulkily). "Somewheres between the gate and the house. I disremembers exactly where."

*Mrs. Ingram*. "Ah! And talking, no doubt, to Mr. Devereux all the time! But people say Miss Madeleine Severn don't flirt. I hate such slyness!"

*Gilbert* (whose deaf ears these words, not intended for them, reached). "You ought to hate yourself monstrously, then, for you is as sly as an old cat!"

This remark, of course, was muttered confidentially to Rattler and Racer — the two handsome bay horses — and a moment later the carriage entered the gates. Mrs. Ingram's face was wreathed in smiles when she bowed to Mr. Devereux, and it preserved the same benevolent aspect as she stood on the piazza steps waiting for Madeleine.

"Such a lovely day!" she said, when that young lady came up. "I suppose you have been enjoying it. Miss Madeleine?"

"Not particularly," answered Madeleine — to whom, as we are aware, this was the second time that the beauty of the day had been suggested — "I have been thinking of other things."

"Oh, indeed! I thought you must have found something pleasant to engross you when I saw you still at the gate after Gilbert had told me that he brought you out before he came for me."

"I found something to engross me," replied Madeleine, quietly; "but whether it was pleasant or not is another matter. I suppose you enjoyed your visit in Stansbury? I hope Katie Waldron is well again."

They entered the house together, and were met in the hall by Mary, who had heard her friend's voice.

"O Madeleine, how long you have been!" she cried, reproachfully. "I have been expecting you for more than an hour. What has made you so late?"

"I made Gilbert put me down at the gate, and there I met Mr. Devereux. I have been talking to him," answered Madeleine. "I am sorry you have been expecting me. O Mary, how well and how pretty you look!"

"Do I?" said Mary, blushing. "I am glad to hear it. But Aunt Ingram is here, is she not?"

"Yes, my dear," said Aunt Ingram, cheerfully. "Here I am — like the tortoise, you know, that overtook the hare. Though Miss Madeleine was set down at the gate before Gilbert started to Stansbury for me, I reached the house in advance of her."

"The drive to Stansbury is a short one," said Mary, "and if Madeleine was talking to Mr. Devereux, no doubt time passed very quickly to her. If I had known that, I should not have been

impatient," said she, turning to Miss Severn. "I want you to know and — like him. I am so glad you are here! You have come to stay with me for several days, have you not?"

"If you want me," said Madeleine, while Mrs. Ingram turned majestically and went upstairs.

"One would think that I was nobody!" she said to herself.

## Chapter VIII

### Mr. Devereux Explains Himself

Madeleine soon heard all that Miss Carlisle had to tell. She was the only person in the world on whose love and sympathy the blind girl could rely, or to whom she ever laid bare the thoughts of her mind or the desires of her heart. She told every thing now with a simplicity that touched Madeleine deeply. As she listened, the latter thought how right Devereux had been when he said that she would never have uttered the warning which a few hours before she had felt impelled to deliver. If she had come to the Lodge without meeting him, the first tone of Mary's voice, the first glance at her face, would have ended all doubt, and showed her that, no matter what the need might be, the time for warning had passed. A little earlier it might have served some purpose: it could do nothing now save bring bitterness and struggle in the place of peace and happiness.

As for Mary, she suspected nothing. The troubled look in Madeleine's eyes was veiled from her, and in the voice that spoke words of tender affection and sympathy, there was no echo of the disquieted heart. Yet indeed this heart was not so disquieted as it had been before that encounter at the Lodge-gate. Despite every apparent reason to doubt Devereux's sincerity, Miss Severn found herself recalling his tones, his words, his manner, with an odd inclination to trust him. After all, Rosalind might have been mistaken — or she might have mistaken Rosalind. Putting aside the flirtation which could not be denied — which he had not attempted to deny — there might have been nothing worse on his side, there might have been no deliberate intention to betray Mary's trust, no more mercenary calculation than many men make, and take no shame to themselves in making.

Yet, notwithstanding this partial consolation, as Madeleine sat by Mary's side listening to the words in which, half unconsciously, the young heiress showed all the depths of her heart, a sense of the perplexing nature of that problem which we call life weighed heavily upon her. Few are so light of soul that such hours do not come to them — hours in which we are tempted to ask if every thing, save indeed that which is given to God, is hopelessly wasted — but more than her due share of these hours had come to Madeleine of late. Only last night she had been made to realize how Champion's faith had been rewarded, how Basil's love, which might have been the crown of a true woman's life, was poured, like water on sand, at the feet of a shallow coquette; and now, with Mary's hand in hers, she heard what seemed to her like the same story — passionate devotion, generous loyalty given for naught.

For naught? So Madeleine thought, as many others have thought, and then it came to her to ask if any thing, which in its own nature is noble, is ever given for naught? Love may be wasted, lives may be sacrificed, talents may be buried — but the love may purify the heart in which it exists, the lives may, in their pain and obscurity, be like a sweet incense in the sight of God, and the talents which are dwarfed and crippled here may rise to heights of full accomplishment in "the white radiance of eternity."

It was long before she forgot the hour which was full of these reflections, and of Mary's sweet, low voice telling her story. The dusk gathered over the world outside; the rose-bloom of the firelight within bathed pearl-tinted walls, leaning picture-frames, carved bookcases, and

sweeping curtains. They dined late at the Lodge, but tea was generally served here, and presently Albert brought it in. Having placed his tray on a small table near the fire, he walked to one of the windows to close the blinds. As he did so, he turned and said, "Mr. Devereux is coming. Miss Mary."

"Very well," said Mary, quietly. "Ask him in."

Every one about the Lodge knew by this time the position which Mr. Devereux occupied; so it was with a great deal of *empressement* that Albert met that gentleman and conducted him into the library.

"Don't think me a visitor entirely without conscience," he said, as he took the hand Mary offered, "but my visit this morning was scarcely a visit at all — merely a call of inquiry — so I could not resist the temptation of coming again this evening."

"Stansbury must be very dull," said Mary. "We are very glad to see you — Madeleine and I. Don't think it necessary to apologize for coming."

Devereux looked at Madeleine. It was a glance half-amused, half-appealing, which said plainer than words, "How do you like the welcome bestowed in your name?" She gave a faint smile, a gentle, gracious bend of her head in reply. "Since he is here, since the engagement is an accomplished fact, I might as well make the best of it!" she thought. Then she rose and walked to the tea-equipage. "I hope you have not been to tea, Mr. Devereux," she said.

Mr. Devereux replied that he had not been to tea, and that he was glad to say so. He had the gratification, therefore, of drinking some of that fragrant beverage out of a cup not much thicker than an egg-shell, with the most beautiful roses painted on it, and of eating some of the lightest of curled wafers — besides other things more substantial. Mrs. Ingram made her appearance, and rather to his surprise cordially shook hands with him. This good dame had no intention of being behindhand in paying her homage to the rising sun.

"Is there any news in Stansbury?" Mary asked, after a while. "What are the people talking about?"

"The failure of our dramatic entertainment, chiefly," Devereux answered. "Miss Severn, did you ever know any thing so complete as that failure? The cause puzzles me — unless it was owing to the fact that raw troops, no matter how well drilled, will not always stand fire."

"I think the cause was complete demoralization," said Madeleine. "All the performers seemed to have something on their minds more important than their business on the stage."

"What was on your mind?" asked Mary, turning to Devereux. He glanced at Madeleine with a smile, which Mrs. Ingram — watching narrowly from her shaded corner of the chimney, a place good for knitting and nodding — noted down in her memory, a dismal kind of receptacle where she stored many things which, as a rule, were produced exactly when they were not wanted.

"Miss Severn knows," said Devereux, in his pleasant, careless voice. "At least it was in talking to her that I forgot all about my part, neglected my cue, and kept the audience waiting fully two minutes — a tolerably long time when one has nothing to do but wait."

"It was worse for Rosalind than for the audience," said Madeleine. "She had nothing to do but walk up and down the stage, and show off her train."

"Which she did admirably, every one says — while poor Gresham, having no train to exhibit, could only fidget nervously, and direct imploring glances toward the side-scenes."

"Well, I thought there was something the matter," said Mrs. Ingram, suddenly speaking — somewhat to the surprise of the company — "I told Mr. Waldron so, but he said he supposed it was part of the play. And you say it was because you were talking to Miss Madeleine, Mr. Devereux. How interested you both must have been!"

"I was interested," said Devereux. "I am afraid to answer for Miss Severn."

"You are very modest," said Madeleine, "but, if I had not been interested, I should probably have noticed that you were needed."

Here the conversation dropped. Neither of them volunteered an account of the subject which had interested them, and, though Mrs. Ingram would gladly have obtained further information, she did not venture to ask it.

Talk flowed idly back and forth a little longer. Then Madeleine rose. "Should you like some music, Mary?" she said. "I feel in the mood for playing."

"I should like it very much," Mary answered. "Ring and have lights taken into the drawing-room. "If you will leave the doors open, I can hear perfectly."

"I will come and open the piano for you," said Devereux, rising also.

Knowing what he meant, Madeleine did not refuse. "It is not necessary," she said, "but you can come if you like. — Lamps in the drawing-room, Albert!" — as the latter appeared at the door.

Lamps having been taken into the drawing-room, and the fire pushed into brightness, Madeleine crossed the hall and entered the room, attended by Devereux. It looked large, and ghost-like shadows hung in the farther corners, since the lights only made a circle of radiance in their immediate neighborhood. Having lifted the glossy lid of the piano, and run his fingers over the keys as one who tests the tone of an instrument, Devereux turned to where Madeleine stood.

"I will stay and hear one piece," he said, "if you will allow me. I do not like listening to good music across two rooms and a hall."

"How do you know that my music will be good?" she asked.

"I know it by your eyes and by your fingers," he replied, glancing at the last — the slender, lissom fingers of the born pianist.

"Perhaps I had better convince you that you are wrong as soon as possible, then," said she, seating herself before the instrument. "Give me an idea what music you like best."

"I wonder if I may venture to say Chopin's?"

"Ah!" — a glow came to her face, a light to her eyes — "do you know the Polonaise in F sharp minor?"

"Perfectly, and should like of all things to hear it."

At once she began to play. The "beautiful cold keys" answered back splendidly to the white fingers that dwelt on them with that magnetism of touch which, before all things, is needed to interpret the subtle beauties lurking in the harmonies of this great composer. It is, of course, unnecessary to say that Madeleine did not render the divine composition as a trained artist would have done. Her technique was defective, but she had that which is as far above technique as the soul is above the body — expression. Devereux, leaning back in a large chair and listening silently, forgot to wonder at a skill greater than he had imagined, in the sense of absolute enjoyment which rapt his spirit in that partial trance known to all passionate lovers of music.

When the strains at last died softly away into silence, he looked up, and met the eyes of the musician. "I knew I was right," he said. "I knew you would play exquisitely. I suppose I may thank you for so much pleasure, though you did not play for me. Now — must I go?"

"Your appreciation is so pleasant, that I feel inclined to play one more strain for you," she said; "a favorite one of mine. So few people care for this kind of music — not any one whom I know, except Basil — that I rarely play except for him or for myself. It is true Mary likes my music sometimes — but she prefers dreamy nocturnes, and songs without words. I like the massive harmonies of the old masters. I am going to play for you the Largo Apassionato from Beethoven's Second Sonata."

"Of course, I felt sure that Beethoven was a god of your idolatry."

She smiled without answering, and turned back to the keyboard. Who that loves Beethoven, does not know the strains which poured out in the rich, bell-like tones of the piano then? Who that has heard, can ever forget that delicate *scherzo* and brilliant *rondo*? Devereux had heard it often before, but he was charmed afresh, and when silence fell again, he said:

"If you would only go on! I could never tire of listening to such music."

"That is enough for the present," she said. "Now you must go back to Mary. Tell her I will play some of Mendelssohn."

"Before I go," said he, rising, "let me give you this picture, for which you asked to-day. Pray, make my excuses to your sister for the misapprehension under which I have kept it so long. I was on the point the other evening of asking her to accept a likeness of myself, in memory of our pleasant association, but we were interrupted, and I had no opportunity afterward to do so. I presume it is scarcely worth while to offer it now?"

"I do not think she would or ought to accept it," said Madeleine, "though in these days the giving and receiving of pictures has come to have very little meaning."

"I do not like the custom," he said — apparently forgetting the locket hanging from his finger, in which Rosalind's fair face was set — "one's taste, I think, revolts from multiplying caricatures of one's self — for are not almost all photographs cold, hard, utterly hideous? — and scattering them broadcast. How much better were the old days of portraits and miniatures!"

"But so few people could afford those."

"And do you think that the majority of the human family are worth reproducing by means of photography?"

"Not in an artistic point of view, perhaps. But if it affords them satisfaction —"

"Ah!" shrugging his shoulders lightly, "that is another question. Still, if any thing could reconcile one to the existence of photography, it would be such a face as this," said he, opening the locket and handing it to her.

"Miss Madeleine," said Mrs. Ingram's voice at the door, so unexpectedly that both Madeleine and Devereux started, "Mary says will you please play the 'Lorelei' for her?"

"Certainly," answered Madeleine. There was not a shade of annoyance in her tone, but she felt tempted to characterize Mrs. Ingram very much as Gilbert had done. What was most vexatious, this inquisitive lady came forward, instead of retiring.

"I can't hear the music so well as I should like in the other room," she observed. "Is that your likeness, Miss Madeleine?"

"No," said Madeleine, closing the locket and dropping it into her pocket. — "Thank you, Mr. Devereux," she added. Then she turned and struck the first chords of the melody for which Mary had asked.

When Devereux went back to the library — which he did immediately, leaving Mrs. Ingram comfortably established in his vacated chair — he found no shadow on Mary's brow, such as would have been on the brows of many women. "I was glad you were enjoying Madeleine's music," she said, "and I tried to keep Aunt Ingram from going to disturb you; but she would go! It is a misfortune to be curious, is it not? If two people are talking, she cannot bear not to know what they are talking about. As soon as the music ceased she grew restless, and when I said I hoped Madeleine would play that lovely 'Lorelei,' she volunteered at once to go and tell her so."

"Mrs. Ingram did not disturb me," said Devereux. "I was just coming back. — But Miss Severn plays charmingly."

"What does not Madeleine do well?" said Mary, in her kind, loyal voice.

Now and then, in this rugged, up-hill journey which men call life, there come pleasant breaks in the toilsome way; we leave the dusty road for a while, and our path lies through some green valley or stretch of sunny meadow, to which we look back afterward, with the fair light of memory shining across it. We know — those of us who have passed that first youth in which one expects all sunshine and flowers — that this cannot last, that the dusty road awaits us again, that there are hills to be climbed, and dark forests to be traversed, but all the more for this knowledge do we enjoy the rest and refreshment while it lasts; all the more do we cry, "Linger, O gentle Time!" and hoard the flying seconds as they pass.

Such a time came to Mary Carlisle now. The days which followed were to her full of that rare and perfect happiness which, in its very nature, must be briefest of all the brief things that make up the sum of our existence. The serene depths of this happiness almost awed Madeleine,

and she was moved to say as much to Devereux one day, after she had been at the Lodge nearly a week. It chanced that they were alone. He had entered unannounced, as was now his familiar custom, and found Madeleine in the library. Mary had gone up-stairs to rest after a drive from which she had just returned: Mrs. Ingram was happily absent. Miss Severn was sitting with a book in her hand, but she was not reading; and when she saw Devereux at the open window — for December had come with the air of May — she bade him enter.

"I am glad to see you," she said. "I was just thinking of something I should like to say to you. I don't know that it will serve any good purpose, but still —"

"Still you will give me an opportunity to show you whether or not it may serve a good purpose," he answered, advancing. "You said that once before — do you remember? Are you going to tell me again that I care only for the amusement of the hour?"

She looked up, meeting his gaze frankly with her grave, sweet eyes. "No," she said. "I was not thinking of you — at least not directly. I was thinking of Mary. I was wondering if you realize how great a power over her happiness — I might almost say over her life — you possess."

A shade of gravity came across his face instantly. "I think you may set your mind at rest," he said, leaning one arm on the mantel as he stood before her. "I realize the fact of which you speak, with startling force — with a force, indeed, which almost oppresses me. It is not that I doubt myself" — as she glanced at him quickly — "that I am not sure of my own good intentions; but I am so conscious of that which you have just stated that it makes me what a woman would call 'nervous.' I am haunted by a sense of responsibility, by a fear lest something — some inadvertence or ignorance — should be the cause of pain to one who trusts so absolutely."

"But why should you feel this if you are sure of your own good intentions?" asked Madeleine, anxiously.

"Ah, why, indeed!" said he, smiling a little. "Do you never puzzle yourself? Perhaps not; I cannot imagine such a thing. But the sooner you realize that you are formed on no common model, Miss Severn, the better. You must not judge your wavering fellow-creatures by yourself."

"That is nonsense," said Madeleine, with an attempt at severity which was not very successful. "And why do you talk of wavering? People have no right to waver where truth and honor and the happiness of others are at stake."

"That is very true; but the best-intentioned, the wisest of us, may blunder, may we not?"

"What do you mean?" asked she, with slight impatience. "Why are you trying to divert my attention by these surface metaphysics? Of course, people must blunder now and then; but the blunders of those who are well-intentioned and wise — as you imply that you are — will not be likely to be very serious."

He laughed. "I did not mean to imply that I was very well-intentioned," he said, "and certainly not very wise. I only wanted to explain to you why I feel the anxiety which you seem to regard with distrust. If I were mere obtuse, I might not feel it so much; if I did not realize with such painful clearness all that rests upon me —"

He broke off abruptly, and for a minute there was silence in the room. Madeleine did not look at his face; she gazed down at the hands clasped together over the book in her lap, and felt that she was as far from understanding him as ever. But, almost unconsciously to herself, she began in a measure to trust him. "He is volatile and careless, and mercenary, perhaps; but still I think there are good elements in his character," she said to herself; and she almost started when his voice suddenly broke in on these thoughts.

"It is likely that we may never speak of this subject again," he said; "therefore I am tempted to ask you to listen to a history so personal that I should not dream of relating it to any one else. But, since to clear your mind of one or two misapprehensions may make you more easy with regard to the trust which has fallen to me, I scarcely think you will blame my egotism very severely."

"I shall not blame it at all," said Madeleine, looking up again. "I shall be very glad to listen to any thing you wish to say. You will not feel inclined to doubt my sincerity when I tell

you that my interest in you is very deep. How could it fail to be so? No sister could be dearer to me than Mary; and day by day it grows upon me that her happiness is entirely in your hands."

"I feel it!" he said, with something almost akin to emotion in his voice. "I feel it so keenly that, as I told you a few minutes ago, it haunts me. I am possessed by such a fear as might beset one to whom is intrusted something inexpressibly fragile and costly. Perhaps, if you heard how it came into my hands — shall I tell you?"

"Yes, tell me," answered Madeleine, pointing to a chair near her own. At that moment she almost forgot Mary: she was interested in this man whom she distrusted, yet who appealed to her with such candid eyes and persuasive tones. It was a study of character such as had never before come into her rather narrow life. Was he worthy of belief, or did he deserve only contempt? Perhaps Devereux read this question in her glance. He certainly smiled as he began to speak.

It is not worth while to follow him. He took up the thread of his story when he first came to Stansbury, and told with marked simplicity all that affected in the least degree his relations with Miss Carlisle. Madeleine listened with close attention. She knew all the story as it appeared from the other side, and she was prepared to detect the least equivocation or discrepancy; but none appeared. It was only the reverse of that wonderful tapestry of human events which was presented to her. It was strange, as Basil had once said, it was "staggering," to hear that with which she had fancied herself familiar told from a new stand-point. And was it that Devereux was plausible, or was it the power of truth which so impressed her? Whatever it was, she found herself listening not only with attention, but also with credence. When he finished, she met his eyes not doubtingly, but sadly.

"My poor Mary!" she said, under her breath.

He understood her instantly, and a flush such as one seldom sees on a man's face, dyed his. He rose quickly and walked away.

Then, again, there was silence in the room, unbroken by human voices. The cuckoo broke it by darting out and announcing four o'clock, while Madeleine looked at the tall figure outlined against the light of the window, and thought that she had been inconsiderate. When Devereux turned presently and came back, she did not wait for him to speak.

"Forgive me!" she said, in her soft, frank voice. "I fear you misunderstood me. I appreciate the chivalry of feeling which has made you act as you have done, and I believe all you have said of your motives; but — but Mary —"

"I know," he said — speaking as if by a strong effort — "I understand; but I think you may trust me. Under no circumstances could I be base enough to deceive or pain her — knowingly. On this I do not hesitate to pledge my faith and honor."

"And I do not hesitate to trust you," said Madeleine, as with one of the impulses which occasionally carried her so far, yet were always full of grace and gentleness, she held out her hand — for the first time since they had known each other.

Devereux, who was easily touched by kindness, felt this unexpected though somewhat princess-like concession very much; and being rather given to impulses himself, there is no telling what he might have said or done, if Mrs. Ingram's voice had not at that moment made itself heard in the hall.

"It is a good thing that you are coming down, Mary, for Mr. Devereux has been here so long that he must have grown tired of waiting for you. He and Miss Madeleine are in the library."

"I did not know that he was here," Mary's tones replied; "but he could not have missed me very much if he had Madeleine to talk with."

"There's such a thing as too much modesty, my dear," said Mrs. Ingram, solemnly, "and that's your fault. Miss Madeleine is a very nice young lady, but you are — you."

"I am very well aware of that," said Mary, with something between a laugh and a sigh.

She crossed the hall as she spoke — in her own home she never needed a guide — and the next instant stood in the library-door.

It was a picture which neither Madeleine nor Devereux was likely to forget. The low, level December sunlight streamed behind, so that her figure stood against a background of gold, like a mediaeval saint. The delicate outline of form, the lovely, pathetic face, the fair hair, brightened by the glory falling over it — these things seemed for the moment rather of heaven than of earth to those who looked.

## Book IV

### In Which The Web Is Cut

#### Chapter I

"For Better, For Worse."

It may be remembered that at the time of Rosalind's engagement to James Champion, Mrs. Severn had declared that she would not think of allowing the marriage to take place under twelve months. Rosalind had submitted without protest to this edict, not only because it served her purpose just then admirably, but also because she knew that it could be reversed at any time she saw fit. Her mother had never in her life opposed any thing which she desired, and it was not likely that she would begin to do so in the present instance. The event justified her expectations. When Champion said with almost stern decision, "I will have no more of this! — you must marry me at once, if you mean to marry me at all," she replied, "I am ready to marry you at once," and she told Mrs. Severn that it was folly to talk of deferring the matter longer. Mrs. Severn submitted in her usual fashion, the day for the wedding was appointed, and preparations were begun immediately.

In these preparations Rosalind was absorbed, according to the custom of young ladies at such times, and heeded little how the world went, so entirely were her days taken up by dressmakers and seamstresses. Six weeks is a short time in which to prepare a trousseau, but "James" had been imperative, and what must be done generally can be done.

Devereux she had not seen since the unfortunate dramatic entertainment. He left Stansbury ten days later for his own home — promising Mary to return in a month or two at farthest. During his absence he wrote constantly, and perhaps the keenest pang Mary ever felt, connected with her blindness, was when his first letter was placed in her hands, with all its thoughts hopelessly sealed away from her. She bent her head over it and burst into tears. What could she do? It seemed to rob love of all its sacredness to bring a third person here — for other lips to repeat what he had written, for her answer to be uttered to other ears! "If I had a mother," she said to herself, "it might not seem so hard!" At that minute her isolation pressed upon her as it had never done before, and she sobbed to herself like a forsaken child.

So, she was still sobbing, absorbed in the bitterness of this new form of an old grief, when arms, than which no mother's were ever tenderer, went round her, and a voice which thrilled like music said, "Can I do nothing?"

"Madeleine!" she cried, with a gasp — for she had no idea that Madeleine was nearer than Stansbury. Then she threw her arms around the bending neck, and clung there almost convulsively. "You are my good angel!" she said, "God sent you to me long ago to comfort my darkness, and you have done it — O Madeleine, you have done it! Do you feel when I want you most? You always come — I never wanted you that you did not come. And never, never have I wanted you so much as now!"

"What is it?" asked Madeleine. Then she suddenly saw the letter, and guessed all. "Do you want a secretary?" she asked, with a quiver of what the French call *larmes de la voix*, "You know I am always ready."

Mary answered by putting the letter into her hand. "Read it to me," she said. "I cannot read it myself, but — God knows best. And your voice will make even his words dearer."

So the duty of reading and answering Devereux's letters fell to Madeleine as a constant thing. She learned to know the days when one could be expected, and those days — no matter what the weather might be — always found her at the Lodge. To dictate to an amanuensis when one has never been accustomed to such a thing, is very likely — in fact, is almost certain — to fetter one's thoughts, and place a curb on one's tongue; but Mary had always been accustomed to it, and she was, moreover, so entirely secure of Madeleine's love and sympathy, that her thoughts flowed freely into expression. The beauty and sweetness of these thoughts scarcely surprised — though they often touched — Madeleine, as she transcribed them. No one knew so well as herself the strength of the blind girl's mind, or the nobleness of her heart. It may be added in this connection, that Devereux's letters impressed her very strongly. That he wrote with a certain degree of reserve — knowing whose eyes would read his words — was, perhaps, natural enough; but, notwithstanding this drawback, it must have been an exacting woman whom these letters did not satisfy. They satisfied Mary fully, and Madeleine read them over and over again to her, until she smiled, sometimes, to think how much of her own life Devereux began to occupy. Unconsciously, she found herself recalling his thoughts and forms of expression very often. Without possessing Lacy's facile grace of style, he wrote an admirable letter — polished, yet frank and easy; personal, without being egotistical; full of a delicate spirit of tenderness, which was always subordinate to good taste; and finally, showing that rarest of all rare qualities, a tact which was perfect. "It is not an easy task which he has," Madeleine said to herself more than once. "To write to one woman, knowing that another, with eyes entirely unblinded by partiality or passion, will read his letters, to satisfy Mary's heart, and yet not offend my taste — how few men would be able to accomplish it!"

She said as much one day to Lacy, who shrugged his shoulders in a superior manner. "I read somewhere, not long ago," he answered, "that a great painter had remarked, 'the amateurs run us very close so long as they confine themselves to sketches.' What is true in one art may be also said of another. In literature, as in painting, amateurs run us very close, so long as they confine themselves to letters. If they attempt any thing beyond that, however, they make — not to put too fine a point upon it — consummate fools of themselves."

"I do not think Mr. Devereux has an idea of attempting any thing beyond letter-writing," said Madeleine, who was not pleased by the tone of this remark.

"It is to be hoped not," said Lacy, rather superciliously. "I am inclined to think that his triumphs will begin and end on drawing-room carpets."

"I think you misjudge him," said Madeleine. "I really think he has more in him than that."

Her companion looked at her amused. "Pray when did you make the discovery?" he asked. "In these remarkable letters?"

"No — yes — that is, not altogether," she replied. "Before he left I began to think that I might have been prejudiced, and judged him too harshly."

"I have heard that few women can resist his fascinations," said Lacy, dryly — for he was one of a large class to whom the praise of a neighbor is by no means honey.

Madeleine flushed under the imputation. It was one not easy to bear with equanimity. "You must know me better than to suppose that a mere attraction of manner influenced my opinion," she said.

"I did not seriously mean to imply such a thing," said Lacy. "But as for these letters, you may be sure he regularly composes them."

Madeleine felt that she knew better than this, but she made no reply, and never mentioned Devereux's letters to her lover again.

In truth, during these days she did not see a great deal of Lacy. The blow of his publishers' bankruptcy threw a cloud over him which did not lift as time went on. Every one noticed it, and Mr. Lacy senior expressed his opinion thereof in the domestic councils. "The boy is finding out his mistake," he said. "I knew him better than he knew himself. He has a fitful kind of impetuosity, but no stability or perseverance whatever. Now, I know enough of the world to be aware that to succeed in literature a man must drudge, Gordon never did that in his life, and he never will. Take my word for it."

Without being aware of this opinion, Gordon was acting in a manner which verified it. After having seen all the first-fruits of his toil shipwrecked, he seemed to lack energy to begin afresh. He did a little desultory work for the magazines, but the poem on which he meant to stake his fame lay untouched in his desk.

"A man cannot be expected to make his best efforts when he has no higher object than that of getting money," he said impatiently to Madeleine. "It is folly to talk of it. An artist's mind must be at rest from sordid cares. Every day I am more certain of that. To make one's fine conceptions mere slaves of the lamp, to turn ideal beauty to sordid uses — could any degradation be greater?"

"It is hard," said Madeleine, with her wistful look, "but I should not call it a degradation. Intellectual culture is not the highest good of life."

"There we disagree," said Lacy, positively. "I hold that it is the highest good. And what manner of culture can a man possess, whose life is bound in a treadmill of labor for bread? Can he be faithful to his art, and aim only for a high ideal, when he has the horrible question staring him in the face, 'What will this bring? How will that aggregated mass of stupidity, called the general public, like it?'"

"You are complimentary to your readers," said Madeleine, trying to smile.

"My readers — bah! Does any one out of twenty understand any thing of the canons and requirements of art? Yet the man who writes for bread must write to be popular. Good Heavens, popular! In that case the sooner I begin composing verses in vulgar dialects, and, if possible, with a little bad spelling, the better!"

"Gordon," said Madeleine, "you break my heart! Why do you talk like this?"

"Because I see — feel — realize it all!" answered he, beginning to pace up and down the room in which they were. "It is pressed upon me, if not for the first time, at least more clearly than ever before. Instead of broadening my life, expanding my faculties, cultivating my tastes, and altogether rising to greater heights of mental development and intellectual culture, I am to sink into narrowness and drudgery; the mere idea haunts me like a nightmare. Again I say that an artist's life should be free from such necessities as these."

There was a mist in Madeleine's eyes so that she could hardly see the work — some delicate embroidery for Rosalind — which she held in her hands. There was a pang at her heart which put a quiver in her voice when she said, "I wish that you were rich — I wish that I were rich, for your sake."

"Riches I should not ask," said he, still pacing the floor, and too much absorbed to notice her tone. "Of course wealth would be agreeable — what doors of pleasure and culture does it not open? — but a competence would content me. That is absolutely necessary for true artistic production. One should never spur the mind to effort. It ought to be able to command leisure and repose."

"Do you not think there might be danger of its lapsing into indolence?" Madeleine suggested timidly, an idea promptly repulsed by the disciple of that new "religion of culture" which one or two ardent apostles have preached so eloquently to the world.

Those who are aware that the chief article of their creed defines the first duty of man, or at least his first privilege — the progressionists have abolished duties — as that of cultivating his aesthetic faculties, will not need to hear the rest of Mr. Lacy's argument. Madeleine heard it oftener, and at greater length, than she liked. The more she heard, the more her soul revolted,

until at last she spoke — greatly to Gordon's surprise, who had taken her assent to all his propositions entirely for granted.

"I agree with you," she said, "that it is bitterly sad and painful to see an artist forced to make his ideal conceptions mere money-getting drudges, but I think there is something even worse, and that is the exaltation of the intellect above every thing else. Culture is not the chief good of life. It widens the life, as you say, and educates the appreciations, it makes people accomplished and graceful, and prepares them for the keenest and subtlest emotions of pleasure, but it does not touch or elevate the spirit. It does not make them unselfish and brave, gentle or pure. It is the gate to a new earthly paradise which is barred to the many and open only to the few. But I am sure that, if one will, one may learn in self-sacrifice, yes, even in hard toil for what you would call sordid ends, better things than are taught be all the aesthetics in the world."

A dark cloud came over Lacy's brow, the darkest which Madeleine had ever seen there. His lips curled in impatient scorn. "I never expected to hear you talk so like a moral barbarian," he said, "or with so little regard to logical sequence. As if culture makes people selfish or cowardly, cold or sensual!"

"I did not mean that for a moment," she said.

"I fancy you hardly know what you did mean," he answered, walking abruptly away.

From that hour the constraint which had existed between them once before came back, deepened and intensified. There was no possible room to doubt that this was Lacy's fault. The sense of an alienated sympathy embittered him, he felt wounded in his self-love by Madeleine's depreciation of that which was to him the chief good of life, and there were besides other causes which he shrank from naming. He did not absolutely say to himself that he had made a great mistake, that he had been foolish and hasty in tying his life down to narrow possibilities; but the consciousness was at work within him, like a slow poison. Stansbury and every thing connected with it began to oppress him. He longed to leave it behind, and take his way to the great centres of intellectual culture, the great world of intellectual strife. Yet he shrank from owning this desire to Madeleine. To go away, leaving her indefinitely bound, to wear out her youth in waiting for a success which might never come to him — he felt the folly and selfishness of this. He could not resolve to propose such a thing, he could not brace himself resolutely to work, and so the days went by, finding and leaving him steeped in apathy, depression, and morbid gloom.

These days, meanwhile, were not filled with sunshine to Basil, though he bore himself cheerfully as he had always done. No one save Madeleine suspected that as he came and went, with the frank sunshine of his smile undimmed — the smile with which he had faced danger, death, adversity, and toil — that his heart was aching as only the strongest and bravest hearts know how to ache. That the woman who caused this pain was not worth one throb of it, did not matter. He had taken her to his heart, and it would be her own fault if she lost that loyal shelter. Yet there is no denying that she tried him hardily. Her caprices and flirtations, her eager reception of other men's admiration and attention, her absolute refusal to allow him to make their engagement public — these things irked Basil bitterly, irked his pride as well as his love. He was fastidious, to a point of sensitiveness, with regard to what a woman should be, and those who wondered that, in spite of this fastidiousness, he fell in love with Helen Champion, knew little of that inconsistency which is a much more prominent point in men's characters, generally speaking, than their consistency.

Of his enchantress there is little to be said. If she had been seriously interrogated with regard to her intentions, it is probable that she would have laughed, and replied that she was "amusing" herself. Not even her mother could draw from her any thing more definite than this. She belonged altogether to that large and far from estimable class of young ladies who make it the business of their lives to attract and deceive as many men as possible, who are spoken of by their friends with an indulgent (sometimes an exulting) smile as "dreadfully fast flirts," and of whom the American people have the mournful satisfaction of possessing a monopoly.

Why Miss Champion had drawn Basil Severn so far into her toils is not difficult to guess. He was a conquest whom her vanity was bent upon making secure. For years he had piqued and puzzled her by his evident admiration, and still more evident reserve. She was determined to subjugate him completely, and she felt a throb of sincere satisfaction when this subjugation was accomplished. What was to be the end of the matter she did not pause to consider. Why should she? The society in which she lived looked most leniently on such trifles as jilting, and her own conscience was not likely to assert itself on the subject. If he had been rich, she would not have minded marrying him. The Severns had been "good people" for a longer period of time than the Champions, and, even in the South of 1870, blood counted for much. On Basil's personal character there had never been a breath of reproach. A brave soldier, and one who in peace as in war —

"bore without abuse  
The grand old name of gentleman" —

this, and this only, men could say of him. Yet how little this counts when arrayed against the golden calf of the world's idolatry! It certainly counted little with Helen Champion. "Why should I marry him?" she said to herself. "He has nothing that I want — neither money nor reputation!" Yet he was a subject worth parading before the eyes of Stansbury, and so poor Basil's weird did not seem likely soon to end.

Rosalind's marriage was appointed to take place early in January. "I don't know how I can possibly be ready!" she said on an average five times a day; but when the appointed time arrived she was ready, and looked as lovely in her bridal array as the heart of woman could desire. The marriage was very quiet — for Champion did not like a parade, and Rosalind yielded gracefully to his wishes, probably anticipating some future occasion when he could be thereby moved to yield to hers — but, to indemnify society for this quietness, there was a brilliant reception at the Champion house when the newly-married pair returned from a brief bridal journey.

How beautiful Mrs. James Champion looked on this occasion, it is difficult for an uninspired chronicler to tell. To those who came from the gray, overcast winter's day into the rich drawling-room, blazing with gas, and filled with the fragrance of flowers, she seemed a vision fitted to dazzle, in her pearly silk, rich laces, and flashing diamonds. For the glow on her fair cheeks, the light in her lovely eyes, there was reason enough. The thorns and struggles of poverty were over for her now — ease, wealth, indulgence, all the material goods of life for which she had longed, surrounded her. She might have done even better for herself, perhaps, if circumstances had been less adverse — of that she did not like to think — but it was undeniable that she had every reason for content in her present position.

At this reception a vague rumor, which had been floating about for some time and meeting only with general discredit, received authoritative confirmation. Miss Carlisle intended to give a ball. The announcement was like an electric shock, and Stansbury was absolutely stricken dumb with amazement. Such a thing had never been known before; and so much of a recluse was the blind mistress of the Lodge, that no other event could have agitated society so deeply. The simultaneous elopement of all the young ladies in the town would have been a trifle in comparison. And it was true that Miss Carlisle certainly intended to give a ball — an intention, it may be added, which had astonished her nearer as well as her remote friends. They all expressed astonishment, and a few hinted disapproval, but occasionally Mary could be obstinate, and she was obstinate now. "There is nothing too great for me to do," she said, "in order to show my love and gratitude to the Severns. Rosalind is not my cousin, but she is the sister of Madeleine and Basil, and I will not let any thing keep me from paying her this attention."

Even Madeleine remonstrated, and found her remonstrances unheeded. "I think of your health," she said, "and how bad the excitement may be for you."

But Mary only smiled. "You don't know how little I shall have to do with it," she answered. "I shall leave you and Aunt Ingram to receive the guests, and see to every thing. Of course I can do none of that. My excitement will be limited to listening to the music, and talking to a few people. I don't think you need be anxious about me — my health is excellent."

"Then there is all the more reason for keeping it so," said Madeleine. But she saw that there was no good in arguing the point; Mary's resolution was taken. Soon Jessie, with a corps of subordinates, went to work, carpets were taken up, floors were waxed, a band of music was engaged, and all those in Stansbury who had a claim to such a distinction were bidden to the Lodge in honor of Mr. and Mrs. James Champion.

## Chapter II

### "Thy Face Across His Fancy Comes."

There could be no doubt that such a compliment as this which Mary proposed to pay, was appreciated by the Champions. It was the first time that the Lodge-doors had been opened to Stansbury society, in its collective form, since the death of Mrs. Carlisle, twelve years before. "Miss Carlisle feels how much she owes to James," said Mrs. Champion, majestically, to her friends. "If he had not defended her interest so well, all that great manufacturing property would have passed away from her." As for Rosalind, the faintest possible sense of shame stirred at her heart. It was not sharp enough to cause her discomfort, but was only a throb of the same sensation that she had felt when the set of jewels, which was Mary's beautiful bridal present, had been brought to her. Certain poignant words of Madeleine's had flashed back upon her memory, but she had the happy faculty of putting uncomfortable reflections aside; so she wrote a charmingly affectionate note in acknowledgment of the jewels, just as she now prepared to wear her most elegant toilet to the ball. After all, she had not done, nor wished to do, any thing for which she needed to reproach herself. Only Madeleine's overstrained ideas could have seen any reason why she should not have decided to marry Mr. Devereux if he obtained the Carlisle property.

That was all over now — but how charming he has been! So she thought, smiling a little as she glanced up and saw her loveliness reflected in a large mirror opposite the luxurious chair in which she was reclining; Rosalind admired herself as calmly and dispassionately as an artist could have done. She regarded, with a gaze of thorough appreciation, the brilliant fairness of her complexion, the exquisite outline of her half-turned throat and chin, the rich sheen of her hair, the grace of her features. That a man could forget these charms in a day or a month, she held absurd. Devereux had thought it best to offer himself to Mary Carlisle, with a view to making that very useful arrangement called *mariage de convenance*, but it was folly to think of his being in love with a woman who was scarcely pretty, and blind. That his sentiments did not concern her in the least, Mrs. James Champion was fully aware; nevertheless she amused herself by speculating upon them, and felt that it would be pleasant to exhibit her beauty, her wealth, her satisfaction and happiness before the eyes of the man who had been so wretched as to lose her.

It chanced that while these thoughts were passing through her mind, the man who had suffered this bereavement left the Stansbury Hotel, and took his way down the street with an elasticity of step and healthfulness of general appearance which did not indicate any very serious disorder of the heart. He walked for three or four squares before he came to a corner where the streets diverged — one leading in the direction of the Lodge, the other toward the Severn house. Here he paused for an instant, seemed to debate a question in his mind, then turned sharply, like one who has decided a point, and took the latter direction.

A further walk of less than two blocks brought him to the Severn gate. Here he was met by a member of the family who always made a point of meeting strangers and escorting them to

the house. This was Lance, the great St. Bernard dog. Dogs have a finer instinct than people, with regard to those who like them, and when Devereux said, "Lance, old fellow! how do you do?" Lance responded by leaping and fawning upon him, as if he had recovered a dear and long-lost companion of his youth. "By Jove!" said Devereux, to himself, "it is pleasant to be greeted affectionately even by a dog. Now that I think of it, you were my first acquaintance in this household, Lance! How well I remember that first evening when I stopped and patted you over the gate!"

Lance seemed to remember it also, for, with many demonstrations of cordial feeling, he accompanied his friend to the house, and stood by while he rang the door-bell.

It was answered by Ann, who, wondering within herself what had brought Mr. Devereux back now Miss Rosalind was married, received his card, answered his inquiry for Miss Severn by saying she was at home, and ushered him into the drawing-room.

Left here, with the door closed so that Lance could not enter, he looked around, half unconsciously, for some traces of Madeleine. They were not difficult to find. Everywhere signs of her habitual presence were manifest, and the whole room was pervaded by that grace of arrangement which with some women is at once a gift and an art. On a book-covered table stood a tall, slender glass containing a small bouquet of those flowers which are the first heralds of spring. Devereux had forgotten that February was at hand, until their delicate beauty and still more delicate fragrance attracted his attention. Half a dozen white hyacinths, a white narcissus, two or three Fair Maids of February (iris), violets, crocuses, some golden, others daintily stippled with purple — a bit of early honeysuckle, and a spray or two of pyrus-japonica, with its deep crimson buds and blossoms — these were all, but no gorgeous array of hot-house flowers could have seemed more fair. He appropriated several of the violets, which he was endeavoring to pin in his button-hole, when the door opened and Madeleine entered.

How fair she was! what gracious sweetness in her eyes and smile! These were the thoughts that passed through his mind as he turned, and she came forward.

"This is a very pleasant surprise, Mr. Devereux," she said. "When did you reach Stansbury, and how do you do?"

"I reached here on an early train this morning," he answered, conscious of a well-defined pleasure in clasping her hand and meeting the full, serene lustre of her glance. "I am glad to see you again. I hope you have been well."

"I? — oh, yes," she replied. "Very well indeed, and Mary? Have you seen Mary?"

"Not yet. I am on my way to the Lodge, but I stopped to see you — thinking you might tell me all about her."

He added the last clause rather in the tone of one who had meant to say something else, but, if Madeleine noticed this, she gave no indication of having done so. As she sat down, she answered:

"Mary is as well as possible, and in better spirits than I have ever seen her. She will be very glad that you have come — all the more glad because she is not expecting you. In your last letter you did not speak of coming so soon."

"No — I changed my mind after writing that letter, and decided to come at once. There was nothing in particular to detain me away, and I thought I might as well be here as elsewhere."

"In that case, perhaps a little better here than elsewhere," said Madeleine, smiling, "since at least you may feel that your society is a great pleasure and satisfaction to Mary."

"Yes, that is something," said he. "Indeed, it ought to be a great deal to one so good-for-nothing as myself. I wonder if you would despise me. Miss Severn, if you knew how idle and aimless my life is — and has been for many years?"

"Despise you — surely not!" said Madeleine. "But why should your life be idle and aimless? why should any one's life be so in a world full of work to be done?"

"Do you not know that such a question is far more easily asked than answered? There are some fortunate people who have no difficulty about their vocation in life. They have a marked

talent or aptitude for something in particular. There are others who are a puzzle to themselves and their friends, and who have no special gift for any thing whatever. To that class I belong."

"People do not always find out their gifts at once," said Madeleine. "Nothing is more marked, I think, than the ignorance which many of us display with regard to our own capabilities. We stumble into the right path at last, after many blunders and failures."

"I doubt if I shall ever stumble into mine," said Devereux. "I shall probably go on to the end of the chapter, idle, aimless, useless, as I am now! There was but one chance for me — that was the chance of becoming a poor man."

"Which you never will become."

"Not likely." He spoke with what seemed an accent of honest despondency. "But if it could be — shall I tell you what I would do then?"

"Yes, tell me by all means. I like castles in the air, even though I have my doubts as to the wisdom of building them."

"I should go to the West — to Colorado — and practise my profession. You look surprised. Perhaps you never suspected that I have a profession? I have, however, studied law, and not long ago a friend who obtained his license at the same time that I did — one of the most brilliant men I know — wrote to me from Denver, urging me to come there, and offering me a partnership in a practice which is already large and lucrative. You see while I have been idling in drawing-rooms and ballrooms, he has been working, and, hearing of my reverses of fortune, he wrote, making this kind and generous proposal. It is one which I should accept at once, if it were not for Mary. I have even thought of accepting it under present circumstances. You will pardon me, I am sure, when I say that I came here principally to ask you what you think of my doing so."

This statement did not seem so singular to Madeleine as it might have appeared to many women. In fact, it did not seem singular to her at all. She was so accustomed to serving as counselor-in-chief to Basil, Lacy, and Mary Carlisle — not to speak of any one else — that she felt unconsciously that it was quite natural for Devereux to seek her advice. She looked at him as if she had been threescore, and gave it simply.

"I am sorry, but I feel sure that you ought not to think of such a thing. Your first duty is to Mary, and you would make her wretched by such a proposal. Besides, you forget that, when you marry, all her property will be in your hands; and the care of it will, or ought to, keep you here and give you occupation."

"It will never be in my hands at all," said he, quickly — almost impetuously — "I shall have no more to do with it than I have now. On that I am resolved. It is the only way by which I can avoid feeling 'shamed through all my nature' by the position I shall occupy."

"Nay," said Madeleine, "that is morbid. Will you forgive me if I say that it would also be foolish and unkind? In saving your own pride you would wound Mary very deeply. But yours is no uncommon frame of mind. Many of us feel that we could give without stint when we are altogether unwilling to accept." She paused for a minute, then in her soft voice added:

" ' I hold him great who for love's sake  
Can give with earnest, generous will,  
But him who takes for love's sweet sake,  
I think I hold more generous still.' "

"Thank you," said Devereux, touched by her manner even more than by her words. "You are always right and always kind."

"What formidable flattery!" said she, smiling. "'Always right;' if I did not know better, how vain you would make me! Generally speaking, I am wrong as often as my neighbors; but in this instance I know that I am right."

"I feel sure that you are," he answered. He did not say any more, and Madeleine took his words for a simple assent. In fact, they had two meanings. He said to himself that to accept for

"love's sweet sake" might be very easy, but that without love it was very much the reverse of easy to do so.

"I scarcely know how to apologize for having thrust so entirely personal a question upon your consideration," he went on, after a minute. "Such an offense would be wholly unpardonable if it were not that you must be conscious how differently you impress one from — from other women. Then you owe me some share in your good offices for having misjudged me once."

"Granted with all my heart," said she. "But even if I had never misjudged you, you would have every claim to my good offices, for Mary's sake."

A slight change came over his face — of what kind she could not exactly determine — but he was silent, and there followed a short pause. Madeleine thought he ought to go to the Lodge, but it was clearly impossible to make such a suggestion, and the idea did not seem to occur to him. He had not yet spoken, when voices suddenly sounded in the hall, and Madeleine, rising quickly, said:

"Why, there is Mary now!"

As she spoke, Ann opened the door, and ushered in Miss Carlisle, saying, "Here's Miss Madeleine, ma'am."

"Yes, here I am," said Madeleine, advancing, "and very glad to see you. It is surely a wind of good fortune which has brought you just now."

"I needed a little fresh air, so I thought I would drive in and ask you to go back with me and see if things are as they should be," answered Mary, smiling. She was looking better than she had ever looked in her life, and Devereux was struck by her appearance as he had been struck when he saw her first. There was so much gentleness, purity, and good sense in the face, and the same pathetic, introspective look in the lovely, sightless eyes. She was dressed as became her wealth, in silk, velvet, and costly furs, and Ann cast an admiring look on her costume before closing the door.

Then Madeleine said: "There is some one here with me, Mary, who has just come and was on his way to see you. Can you guess who it is?"

"Ah!" said Mary, turning her face round, with something like a quivering glow passing over it. The next instant she held out both her hands. "It is Mr. Devereux, is it not?" she said.

Devereux came forward to answer for himself, and having said, "I will be back presently," Madeleine passed out of the room and left them together.

An hour later it was Devereux, not Madeleine, who accompanied Mary to the Lodge. Miss Severn excused herself from going. "I will come out to-morrow," she said. "To-day I cannot leave home."

Mary did not press the point: well as she loved Madeleine, it was pleasant to think that she would have Devereux for the drive, and perhaps for the day, "all to herself." So in the same pony-carriage in which he had once had the pleasure of driving Rosalind, they bowled down the Stansbury streets, observed by all who were fortunate enough to see them, and reported to those who were not. "Devereux has come back," the former class said to the latter. "I saw him driving Miss Carlisle to-day. He has made a good thing of his lawsuit after all — but how little sense women have, to play into the hands of a fortune-hunter like that!"

The man thus judged, with that charity, justice, and general good sense which distinguish popular opinion, was meanwhile exerting himself to repay the affectionate sympathy and interest on the tender face turned toward him, and for the first time finding this a little difficult. But he succeeded in so far that Mary did not suspect the difficulty, nor how much his thoughts were wandering while he talked to her. That the fault of this lay in himself he was perfectly aware. What was Madeleine Severn to him that her soft, brown eyes, her caressing smile, her low, sweet voice, should haunt him like a spell? He said to himself that he thought of her chiefly because he could not understand the influence she had acquired over him. He had been "in love" too often in the course of his thirty years not to be thoroughly familiar with the signs of the tender passion, and this bore no relation to them. It was something strange, new, and so subtle that he failed

altogether to analyze or class it. Was it because Madeleine was (as he had told her) altogether different from the vast majority of other women, that she interested and pleased the taste which had been rendered fastidious by much intercourse with coquettes of all classes, from the emotional and pensive to the audacious and sparkling? The question was more easily asked than answered, but it was certain that, in the course of a long and varied social experience, he had never before seen — he had never even imagined — a woman so free from coquetry.

It was after they reached the Lodge, and were in the library which wore to him such a familiar seeming, that it occurred to Mary for the first time to wonder why she had found him in the Severn drawing-room. So mere a trifle as the violets in his button-hole led to this consideration — or, at least, to the expression of it. They were standing together before the fire, when she put out her hand and touched them. "How sweet!" she said. "I have been noticing the fragrance for some time. I am so fond of violets! Will you give them to me?"

"Certainly," he answered, beginning to unfasten the frail stem, "but you will find them few and faded. They rightfully belong to Miss Severn, too — that is, I took them without leave from a glass of flowers while I was waiting for her."

"Perhaps you would like to keep them, then," she said.

"No," he answered. "Why should I? I only wish they were better worth giving to you."

"I only wanted them because you had worn them," she said; simply. "Thank you," as he laid them in her hand. "There are plenty in the garden, if you would like some more. Jessie brings me a bouquet every morning."

"You shall give me some before I go. In that way I will make a profitable exchange."

She smiled a little, and lifted the violets to her face, but when her hand dropped, she said, "Had you been long at the Severns? You cannot tell how much I was surprised to find you."

"I do not think I could have been there more than half an hour — if so long," he answered. "I was on my way here when it struck me that I could hear something about you from Miss Severn even before I saw you. That is how you chanced to find me with her."

"And you were really on your way here?" she asked — not doubtingly but wistfully, laying her hand on his coat.

"Did you fancy otherwise?" he asked, taking the hand in his own. "How could you do me so much injustice? It was merely for a few minutes that I stopped."

"I am glad you have learned to like Madeleine — as I was always sure you would," she said, and after this she did not allude again to the visit.

When Devereux heard of the projected ball he, like every one else concerned, regarded it with decided disapproval. Had he arrived in Stansbury a fortnight or even a week earlier, this disapproval might have proved powerful enough to nip the matter in the bud, but now it was too late. Arrangements were made, invitations were issued, every thing was in train; and it was with that grim sense of disgust, common to the masculine mind when not inclined for social festivities, that he faced the necessity of bearing his part in the entertainment. "If I had known of this, I should not have come until it was over," he said to Mary.

"You would have been very unkind, then," she answered, "for I know that you are not, like some men, afraid of or averse to society. I count on you to aid in making the matter a success. And have you no curiosity to see your old acquaintance, Rosalind Severn transformed into Mrs. James Champion?"

"Not the least," he answered, with a tone of contempt in his voice which would not have pleased that charming and self-satisfied lady, had she been unfortunate enough to hear it. "Pretty women are common enough," he added, after a minute; "and besides her beauty, I do not know that Miss Rosalind Severn, now Mrs. James Champion, possesses any attraction whatever."

"Did you not formerly find some about her?" asked Mary, smiling. "It seems to me that I remember hearing something of that kind when you were acting together."

"She served, like thousands of others, to help one pass time," he said, carelessly. "Beyond that I never gave her a thought — and never shall."

### Chapter III.

#### Mrs. Ingram Utters A Warning.

"Mary," said Mrs. Ingram, solemnly, "there is something I should like to say to you if I were sure you would take it in good part."

"Why should I not take it in good part. Aunt Ingram?" said Mary. She did not stir as she asked the question, but lay quite still on the blue couch that threw her figure into relief, her face turned toward the open window by her side, through which spring-like air and golden sunshine came. She was in her own room, whither Mrs. Ingram had penetrated uninvited, and after a little desultory conversation, had uttered the above remark.

"Well," said that lady in reply, "there are a good many reasons why you might not take it in good part. People are not always obliged to one for giving an honest warning. It's a thankless duty at best, but what is my duty I was never known to shirk."

"What are you talking about?" asked Mary. She turned her face now with a slight contraction of annoyance on her smooth brow. It required no small exercise of patience to bear with this unpleasant interruption to her thoughts. As she lay, bathed in sunshine, listening to the sweet twitter and soaring notes of the birds which congregated on a cedar-tree just outside the window, she felt, though she could not see, the beauty of the day, and her soul seemed to rise up to God in thanks for the happiness He had vouchsafed her. It is not everybody who thinks of thanking God for happiness. Many of us are like ungracious churls, taking it as our right, and never lifting our voices save in repining or reproach. But there had been long years in which happiness never came to Mary, and now, when it burst on her like a heavenly aurora, the gentle, devout spirit was full of gratitude for this most rare and precious of earthly gifts. "If it is any thing about Jessie or the servants," she went on, after a minute — for Mrs. Ingram's warnings were chiefly on this score — "I am sorry to seem discourteous, but I would rather not be troubled by hearing it."

"It is not about Jessie or the servants," said Mrs. Ingram, "though I do think that the manner in which you trust every thing in their hands is dreadful! It concerns some one, however, with whom you are almost as much infatuated, and that is Miss Severn."

She brought out this name with spiteful emphasis, but, well as she knew Mary's "infatuation," she was not prepared for the amazement and anger which flashed instantaneously over her face.

"Madeleine!" she said, in a tone divided between surprise and haughtiness. "Are you in earnest, Aunt Ingram? Do you mean to say that you venture to connect such a thing as warning with Madeleine Severn?"

"I venture to speak the truth in season and out of season, my dear," returned Aunt Ingram in a very sharp tone; "and being your father's sister — though you seem to forget that, and prefer everybody else to me — I feel it my duty to tell you, who can't observe things for yourself, that Miss Madeleine Severn is flirting in a very marked manner with Mr. Devereux. I saw it before he went away, but I couldn't make up my mind to trouble you by speaking of it; I hadn't the faintest idea, either, that you would believe me, but the thing is so manifest now that I can't be silent any longer."

"I think you must be mad," said Mary, "or — or more malicious than I have ever dreamed of your being, to come and say such a thing to me. Madeleine flirting with Mr. Devereux! You might as well tell me that there was no such thing as truth or honor in the world."

"You may think me mad, or you may think me malicious," said Mrs. Ingram, who was deeply incensed, and whose very cap-strings shook with indignation, "but I know that you are

blind; and therefore I pardon your language. You may believe me or not, as you like: my conscience is clear when I have warned you. I didn't expect to be thanked, but it was more than I could stand to watch those two deceiving you before your very eyes, because they knew you would not see them. Haven't I found them in the grounds together? — haven't I seen them looking and smiling at each other, with you sitting by? — didn't I surprise Mr. Devereux giving Miss Severn a likeness in a locket of which I know you never heard? — didn't he go to see her as soon as he came back to Stansbury, before ever he thought of coming to see you? — wasn't she here with him all day yesterday? — and aren't they coming yonder together now, walking like two snails and talking to each other? Ah, I may be mad, or I may be malicious, but my eyes are worth something, and, as for seeing such duplicity and saying nothing, I could have died first!"

"You had better have died first," said Mary, with a passionate energy in her voice such as the other had never heard before. "It would have been bad enough to take such a story to any one, but to bring it to me — me who am blind — oh, it is base and cruel! But I do not believe it, not one word of it! Remember that. I would trust my life, my honor, my love, all to Madeleine, and I have trusted them to Mr. Devereux. Go. I do not wish to hear any more. You talk a great deal of your Bible, but I wonder if you ever read it! If so, it is strange that you have forgotten that our Lord says, 'Blessed are the peace-makers,' and it follows that those must be cursed who destroy peace."

"Well, upon my word," said Mrs. Ingram, rising, "if this is not thanks for doing my duty, to be told to my face that I am cursed! Go? I should think I would go, and I hope — I hope that when it is too late you may remember my warning, and blush to think how you received it."

The last words were shrill with anger; the next instant there was the whisk of departing skirts, followed by the sharp banging of the door, and Mary was left alone with the sunshine and the birds.

Alas! out of the sunshine had fled its warmth, out of the notes of the birds their music. That terrible discord which one human spirit, one human tongue, can make in human life, had replaced the happy serenity of less than an hour before. For a little while Mary felt stunned. What was it that had happened? It seemed beyond realization that such a charge, against those whom she loved best in the world, should have been brought to her; that anybody could have been cruel enough to breathe suspicion into the ear of one whose eyes God had sealed. "It is not as if I could see for myself whether it is true or false," she murmured with a moan, but then the generous spirit rose up and scorned even this admission. "I do not need to see, I know that it is false!" she said; and as she uttered the words, through the open window Madeleine's sweet, gay laugh came borne to her, together with Devereux's voice.

She remembered then that Mrs. Ingram had said they were approaching. Yesterday it had been the same thing: Devereux had met Madeleine as she was leaving Stansbury, and walked with her to the Lodge. She had spent the day there, superintending various arrangements for the ball, and in the evening he had accompanied her back. To Mary it had all seemed natural and very pleasant; she was glad that those who were so dear to her should learn to know and like each other. Now the serpent had entered her Eden and suggested a thought which she disowned, but could not forget.

She was still lying in her white cashmere draperies on the blue couch, with her face turned upward to the sunlight, when Madeleine entered the room. The latter had knocked, but since no voice spoke — for Mary did not hear — she opened the door. It was a lovely picture which greeted her, but one which made her heart for a moment stand still. The doctor's warning had never left her mind, and the immobile attitude, the hands clasped on the breast, the fair pale face, all looked like death. It was only for a second that the impression lasted; then, feeling the draught from the door, Mary turned and spoke.

"Is that you, Madeleine?" she said. "I heard your voice below."

"Yes, it is I," answered Madeleine, advancing. "I did not hear you speak, so I came in. Do you know that you look like 'the lily-maid of Astolat' as you lie there? I have often felt inclined to call you Elaine, but never so much as now."

"Do you mean I look like her after she was dead?" said Mary, with a quickness of comprehension for which her companion was not prepared. "But I should never have had my body sent down to the palace as she did. It seemed like reproaching Lancelot, and it was not his fault that he did not love her. One's own pain one cannot help, but we can always refrain from giving pain to others."

"Do you think one always can?" asked Madeleine, wistfully. "I am not sure of that." She was thinking that only the night before she had pained Lacy by failing to surrender her own opinion in one of the discussions he had of late so often thrust upon her.

"I mean voluntarily," said Mary, with a sigh. "It is an awful thing to cause pain voluntarily. It seems to me I would rather deprive any one of life than of the peace which makes the best part of life."

"What has put such thoughts into your head?" said Madeleine. "You never pained any one voluntarily. Of that I am quite sure. And no one could be heartless enough to pain you."

She knelt by the couch — a very common attitude with her — as she spoke, but she was not prepared for the manner in which Mary drew her cheek down till it touched her own, saying, almost passionately, "Not you — not you! That I know!"

The day which began thus inauspiciously was that of the ball. If consideration had obtained the least hearing in Mrs. Ingram's mental councils, she would certainly have deferred her warning twenty-four hours at least. But no thought of the unusual excitement and fatigue which awaited Mary weighed with her for a moment. It may be said that she honestly believed that which she uttered, though how far dislike to Madeleine in the first instance, and dislike to Mary's engagement in the second, influenced her belief, is another question. There are few who can afford to analyze their motives too closely. At the bottom of virtuous indignation seeds of envy, jealousy, and uncharitableness, too often lurk.

Some people may think that Mary might have dismissed what she had heard from her mind, without giving it any weight, or allowing it to trouble and disturb her. But the mind is an unruly servant at best, and often refuses absolutely to obey. With the best will in the world to the contrary, Mary could not help being troubled and disturbed. She did not believe, but she could not forget. Her old passionate desire for sight came back to her. "If I could only see!" she thought. When Madeleine and Devereux spoke, she yearned to watch their faces, to look into their eyes. It was not that she doubted them, but she longed to be sure. Mrs. Ingram's tongue had done its work: Mary's peace was slain.

To realize this, it must be understood that the pillars which upheld her world were shaken. She had nowhere to turn, she had no one to whom to appeal. She was left, as it were, in darkness to wrestle single-handed with that demon of suspicion which has poisoned many noble natures and broken many tender hearts. "I will forget all about it," she thought; but the resolution was made in vain. The old story — story familiar from personal experience to most of us — that it is much easier to raise a fiend than to put him down again, was exemplified here. Poor Mary's fiend had been raised for her, but to put it down passed her power. Yet it cannot be said too often that she disbelieved utterly, though she could not banish from her memory, Mrs. Ingram's story. Now and then she smiled to herself over the folly of it. Madeleine, of all people! "Aunt Ingram ought to have chosen a likelier heroine for her romance!" she thought.

That those around her suspected nothing of this struggle spoke much for the inherent strength of her nature. She was altogether her usual self during the day, and, when Madeleine spoke after dinner of going back to Stansbury, she said at once:

"You must take the pony-phaeton. I will not hear of such a thing as your walking after all that you have been doing to-day. You must be thoroughly tired. Mr. Devereux will drive you, I am sure."

"I will take the phaeton gratefully, but I will not trouble Mr. Devereux," answered Madeleine, before that gentleman could express his willingness to play cavalier. "I am an excellent whip, you know, and I want to go by the mills and speak to Basil. I shall come back early, Mary, in order to give a finishing touch to your toilet."

"And to receive the people," said Mary. "Don't forget that you are to play hostess. I leave every thing to you. Be sure to send word to Gilbert, when the phaeton returns, what time you want the close carriage to come for you."

When the phaeton appeared at the door, Devereux attended Madeleine out and placed her in it. Then, as she gathered up the reins, he said: "Since you are so thoroughly independent that you will not let me drive you, I suppose we shall meet next at the ball. Will you promise me a dance, then? I shall need some oasis of pleasure in the melancholy desert of boredom before me."

"Dance with you? Yes, of course — if I dance at all," answered Madeleine. "But I am not sure about that. I am tired, and I shall have a great deal to do."

"Must I content myself with your sister?" he asked, in an almost boyish tone of petulance.

She looked at him gravely and doubtfully. Remember this," she said, in a low voice — for Joe was still busy about the horses' heads — "it is easy out of mere levity and idleness to make trouble that nothing can cure."

"How can you think such a warning necessary?" he said, flushing under her regard. "I see I have not won your trust even yet."

"Prove that you deserve it," she answered. After which — nodding with a smile as Joe sprang to the rumble — she drove away.

Three or four hours later it was a very charming reflection that Miss Severn's mirror gave back, as she stood before it with her toilet complete. Full evening-dress is like a revelation of the beauty of some women, and though Madeleine did not belong to this class, it enhanced her fair looks as it enhances those of every woman who possesses any fair looks at all. Out of diaphanous draperies of white and silver, her graceful sloping shoulders rose, and her slender neck bore her head as a stem bears its flower. Around this neck and on her white arms she wore a necklace and bracelets of pearls, in an old-fashioned setting — their soft, cloudy lustre harmonizing admirably with the rest of her costume. If her face lacked color, it was hardly possible to find fault with it on that score, so delicate and refined were the outlines, so clear the pure complexion, so limpid the brown eyes, so flexile in their sweetness the red — yet not too red — lips.

Her toilet made, Madeleine spent no time in "last touches," but having received from Ann the complimentary assurance that she looked "almost as pretty as Miss Rosalind," she threw her shawl over her arm and went to Mrs. Severn's room, where that lady had begun her toilet.

"I am going to the Lodge now, mamma," she said. "I will send the carriage back in about an hour for you and Basil; you will not want it before that time?"

"No, certainly not," answered Mrs. Severn, "and that will be early. How pretty you look, Madeleine! Your dress is a great success, and who would fancy that you made it yourself! I wonder what Rosalind means to wear? — I forgot to ask her."

"Whatever she wears, Rosalind is always beautiful," said Madeleine. "Now is there any thing I can do for you before I go? Ann is but a clumsy lady's-maid."

"Yes, my hair," answered Mrs. Severn, helplessly, as the small white hands that had never been accustomed to such labor, dropped in her lap. "I cannot arrange it."

Madeleine's gloves were not yet on. She took the refractory tresses in her deft fingers — fingers good for much besides playing sonatas — and in a few minutes the coiffure was arranged, and Mrs. Severn looked at herself and was satisfied.

This over, Madeleine went down-stairs and lingered a few minutes with Basil, who was reading newspapers in solitary state by the sitting-room fire. Perhaps she expected to find some one else with him, for her glance swept round the room as she entered, and an expression of disappointment came into her eyes. She said nothing, but Basil must have divined what she was thinking, for after he had taken her out to the carriage, seen that she was well wrapped, and

promised to change his dress at once, he muttered as he went back to the house, "What the devil does Lacy mean?"

## Chapter IV

### "A Sound Of Revelry."

It was not remarkable that out of all the invitations issued for the ball at the Lodge, scarcely one "regret" had been returned. People were not only convinced that it would be a grand affair — for Miss Carlisle's wealth was popularly spoken of as "immense" — but curiosity was also rife. Every one was anxious to see Mary in her capacity of hostess, and not a few wished to observe Devereux in his new position. One or two sentimental young ladies — a class nearly extinct in the present day — remarked that the engagement between the young heiress and the defeated claimant of her inheritance was "like a romance;" but the majority displayed their acute worldly wisdom by saying that the romance was altogether one of interest. "What will not people do for money!" they exclaimed.

When Madeleine reached the Lodge, already blazing with lights, she was met by Jessie, who looked grave and foreboding. "I never have liked the notion of all this to-do. Miss Madeleine," she observed, "and I likes it now less than ever. You take my word, the end of it is going to be that Miss Mary will be sick."

"I have been afraid of it myself," said Madeleine, "but there was nothing to be done. What is the matter? Is she not well?"

"She won't own that any thing ails her," said Jessie, "but I know her better than she knows herself, and I see that she isn't at her best. If you could persuade her to be quiet. Miss Madeleine, and not excite herself to-night — "

"I will do what I can," answered Madeleine, passing up the broad staircase. When she entered Mary's room, she found her sitting in a chair near the toilet-table, already dressed, though her maid was still hovering near. "Isn't she pretty, Miss Madeleine?" said the latter, stepping back, with her head admiringly on one side.

"Indeed she is!" answered Madeleine, coming forward. "You are more like the 'lily-maid' than ever, Mary."

"Do I really look well?" asked Mary. "I am so glad if it is so — if you are not saying it merely to please me."

"I should like a picture of you just as you are," said Madeleine. "You are lovely! Every one will tell you so. Has Mr. Devereux come? You must go down and let him see you."

"I don't think he has come," said Mary, "but there is time enough. I cannot see how you look, Madeleine," she added, "but no doubt you are beautiful."

"I beautiful!" said Madeleine. "What an idea! I am rather more inclined to prettiness than ugliness, but that is all that can be said for me. Turn your head a little, Mary. Let me give a touch to your hair. Stella has made it a trifle too fashionable. To such a face as yours a coiffure which is too much in the style is not becoming."

Judicious touches reduced the fashionable appearance, and gave more of that simplicity which is essential to grace to the soft masses of fair hair. A few beautiful pansies starred it here and there. As the young heiress rose, she certainly might have stood for a picture of Elaine — gentlest and most pathetic of modern heroines. The rich white silk which she wore clung to her slender figure in the sculpturesque folds that silk of such a texture naturally assumes if left to

itself. The V-shaped corsage was filled with lace, and around the arching throat ran a chain of yellow gold, from which was suspended a cross set with brilliants — her only ornament.

"You would make a sensation anywhere!" said Madeleine, kissing her with delight. "Whenever you think of yourself to-night be sure to think, 'I am looking as lovely as a woman could possibly desire to look.' It makes one much more comfortable to feel that one is pretty. But you must promise me not to overexert yourself. I am so afraid that all this will make you ill."

"I do not think so," said Mary, "but I promise to be as quiet as possible."

When Devereux saw her, he indorsed all that Madeleine had said. His admiration and praise brought a tinge of color to her cheeks, and a sense of happiness to her heart. "You are very kind," she said, with her sweet, gracious smile. "I feel now as if I could face the people who are coming without shrinking very much and feeling that they will pity you."

"Pity me!" he repeated. "What do you mean by such an expression? How could any one in his senses pity me, who am far luckier than I deserve to be?"

"You know what I mean," she said. "Are not those carriage-wheels? I suppose the people are beginning to come."

She was right. The people were beginning to come. Carriage after carriage crashed along the gravel-drive, and deposited its freight before the door, out of which streamed a flood of light. Party after party entered the spacious drawing-rooms, now thrown into one, and were received by Mrs. Ingram or Madeleine, in the name of the young hostess. Everybody agreed that "things were beautiful." The floors were waxed to the smoothness and almost to the slipperiness of ice; flowers were everywhere in abundance, the band in the conservatory were playing that enchanting dance-music which makes the soberest pulses tingle, and the staidest feet stir.

The rooms were well filled before the Champion party arrived. They were among the number of those who were taken at once to Mary, and with a light, perfumy kiss, Rosalind made her graceful acknowledgments for the compliment paid her. Champion made his less gracefully, but perhaps more sincerely, while his wife turned with a smile to Devereux.

"It has been a long time since we met," she said. "I am glad to see you again."

"And I am glad to have the opportunity to offer my congratulations on your change of name and state," answered he, bowing over the daintily-gloved hand which she extended. "May I be permitted to say that matrimony seems to agree with you? I never saw you looking better."

"Thanks — I am very well indeed," she answered, with a deepening flush on her cheek, a brighter lustre in her eyes, for she knew that "better" stood for "more beautiful."

"Will you give me a place on your ball-book for old acquaintance' sake?" he asked then — thinking, as he had often thought before, that it would be difficult to find a more exquisite face, or a manner more full of arch coquetry.

"My ball-book is void of engagements as yet," said she, handing it to him. "So you can take your choice of the dances."

"I will be moderate," he answered, scribbling his name down for a quadrille and a waltz.

After a few more words, Rosalind floated away on her husband's arm — dazzlingly lovely in salmon-pink, point-lace, and diamonds. A little later, Miss Champion came up to speak to Mary. She wore a rose-colored silk that lit up her brunette complexion admirably, but was regarded with disgust by Rosalind, because it "killed" the delicate tint of her dress. "You must not come near me," she had said. "We cannot even dance in the same set. Our dresses swear at each other horribly."

"Mine makes yours look fade, but yours does not harm mine," said Miss Champion, complacently.

This young lady was leaning on Basil's arm when she appeared. He had been waiting for her at the foot of the stair-case as she descended from the dressing-room, and in this way secured the honor of sharing the sensation which her appearance created. A woman to make a sensation in a ballroom was Miss Champion — a woman fitted to shine by gas-light and utterly eclipse fairer beauties. Besides, she was an heiress, and — now that Rosalind was married — preeminently the

belle of Stansbury. On her ball-book Mr. Devereux — mindful that Mary had begged him to do all he could to make the entertainment a success — also had the honor of inscribing his name. He did not ask for more than one set, having long since discovered that the best point of the "fair Odalisque" was her appearance, and owning a mild partiality, as he now and then remarked, for a woman with a little sense.

Fortunately for Miss Champion's empire, few men shared this uncommon taste. "By Jove, what a splendid-looking woman!" they said to one another, as she swept down the room. Strangers (of whom there were a few) asked to be presented, old acquaintances begged for a dance. She was soon holding a court at one end of the ballroom — admirers thronging round her, her eyes like stars, her color rivaling the roses in her hair, her white teeth flashing, her empty laugh sounding continually, her fan in constant motion. It was impossible to deny that her manners were a trifle "loud," but what else could be expected? She had been out in the world, and formed them on the most approved models.

In this manner Lacy found her when he sauntered up presently. "What have you kept for me?" he asked, taking her ball-book, and glancing over it.

"Two waltzes," answered she, pointing to them. "That is, you may have them if you like. If not —"

"There are plenty of other candidates for them, I do not doubt," said he, coolly. "I will take them with thanks, and this redowa down here, and — this unengaged lancers, though I detest quadrilles as a rule."

"Are you crazy?" demanded she, in a tone indicating any thing rather than displeasure. "Do you think I shall let you monopolize my ball-book in that fashion? You shall have your two waltzes and no more."

"Too late, *ma belle!*" said he. "My name is down for the others, and if you give them to any one else, I shall have a fair excuse to challenge the fortunate man."

He returned the ball-book, bowed, and passed away. It was one of his arrogant peculiarities — well known in Stansbury society — never to share a divided attention, and Miss Champion was not surprised, therefore, to see him go. She meant to give him the dances he wanted — and any thing else to which he had a mind — but she did not say so, being of the opinion that, in order to render a favor valuable, it should be reluctantly granted.

"Mr. Lacy is frightfully spoiled," she said to her court. "He believes that he has only to ask and to receive! Upon my word, I think his self-conceit needs a lesson."

"Is that Mr. Lacy the poet?" asked a stranger standing by — a gentleman whom one of the Stansbury families had brought in their train. "I have felt a great curiosity to see him. I think he promises to be the Morris of America."

Miss Champion turned her starry eyes on the speaker. She had the faintest possible idea of any thing concerning the author of "The Earthly Paradise," but she knew that a compliment to Lacy was intended, and in that moment she decided to keep him in her train as much as possible during the evening. Mr. Lacy the poet! The words had a sweet sound in her ears. Not that she had abstractly any liking for poetry; but she admired whatever commanded social homage and respect.

When the first quadrille was forming on the floor, Lacy went up to Madeleine. She had been so occupied, that he had not, before this, been able to do more than merely exchange a greeting, and utter a gracious approval of her costume. Now he made his appearance, with the air of one ready for the sacrifice.

"You intend to dance, do you not?" he said, offering his arm. "I presume I may have the pleasure —"

"You mean the boredom," she interrupted, with a smile. "No, I will not immolate you on the altar of duty. I have promised this set — the first, isn't it? — to Mr. Devereux."

"Indeed!" said Lacy. He opened his eyes in sudden and not well-pleased surprise. A slight of any kind was something quite new to him — and from Madeleine! He recovered himself in a minute, but she saw that he was vexed. "I suppose you mean this for a rebuke," he said. "No

doubt I should have asked you when I first came in if you would dance with me, but I took it for granted the first set was mine."

"I could not know that you had taken it for granted," she answered, gently, "but I assure you the idea of a rebuke did not occur to me. Before you came Mr. Devereux asked me to dance this set with him, and I promised to do so. Yonder he comes now! Will you have the next?"

"I am engaged for the next," he replied, and turned away. He cared nothing about the dance — quadrilles always bored him — but he was in a chronic state of discontent with Madeleine, and every trifle added to the feeling.

While the music was swelling out on the air and the dancers were "dancing in tune," he betook himself to Mary Carlisle, who, sitting in an alcove — "Like some marble saint, niched in cathedral-wall," was talking to two or three of her elder guests. It chanced that it had been some time since she met him last, but with the quick memory of the blind she recognized his voice at once, and made way for him on the seat by her side.

"I am glad that you have come to talk to me, Mr. Lacy," she said, kindly; "but do you not dance? You must not let me detain you if you have any engagement —"

"I have none at all," he answered. "I am not fond of dancing for dancing's sake, though I meant to tread this measure with Madeleine; but she has thrown me over for Mr. Devereux."

"Madeleine thrown you over!" said Mary. "I cannot imagine that."

"It surprised me," returned he, candidly, "but it is true. No doubt she has made a good exchange. I am rather out of sorts, and Mr. Devereux seems very fascinating."

"Why should you be out of sorts?" asked Mary, with the simple directness which characterized her. She looked grave, and his last words brought neither smile nor blush to her face. She lowered her voice a little. Those around were talking among themselves — comparing opinions of the toilets in the shifting throng before them — and the music was pealing over all. "You have every thing, it seems to me, that any one could ask," she went on — "youth, talents, reputation and — Madeleine."

"Did it never strike you that it is very easy to sum up our neighbor's blessings and prove entirely to our own satisfaction that he ought to be the happiest dog in the world?" asked Lacy, with a strain of bitterness in his voice which her ear was quick enough to detect. "Personal discussions are never in good taste, or I might convince you that I do not in reality possess one of the things you have enumerated."

"Not even Madeleine?" asked she, in amazement.

The devil surely prompted Lacy when he answered, "Not even Madeleine. An engagement is an uncertain thing at best — and ours is peculiarly uncertain because my prospects are so indefinite. I have suffered a heavy loss lately, and the reputation of which you spoke does not help me much. Then I am conscious of — of a change in Madeleine. Don't think that I mention it to complain. It is of course not her fault that she has seemed to drift away from me in sympathy of late."

The question "How?" was quivering on Mary's lips, when one of those interruptions occurred which count so heavily in the sum of human vexations.

"My dear Mary," said Mrs. Severn's placid tones, "here is an old friend of your father's who wishes to know you — Mr. Heriot. He happened to be in Stansbury, and came with Colonel Mitchell, feeling sure you would be glad to receive him."

"And remembering that when I saw you last, I had the pleasure of holding you on my knee," said Mr. Heriot — a frank, middle-aged gentleman — taking the blind girl's hand, and gazing with compassionate interest on her face.

She responded with her usual gentle courtesy, while Lacy — relapsing into boredom — resigned his place to Mr. Heriot and strolled away. He would probably have been surprised if any one had indicated to him the mischief which he had worked in these few minutes, but there are few things from which we need pray more earnestly to be delivered than from the consequences of our idle words.

After the ball fairly opened, dance followed dance in quick succession. Madeleine waltzed once with Lacy — with no one else — and walked through two or three more quadrilles. Rosalind, meanwhile, in brilliant beauty divided the homage of the room with her handsome sister-in-law. Had it been before her marriage she would have monopolized public attention, but married belles belong to an order of civilization which had not yet reached Stansbury. I am compelled to say, however, that there was much of the old spice of coquetry in Mrs. James Champion's manner when Devereux claimed her hand for the first of the dances for which she was engaged to him. As they took their places in the set — with due care that Miss Champion's rose-colored dress was not near the salmon-pink — she handed her ball-book to him.

"See there!" she said, with a laugh, indicating the waltz for which he had written his name. Through it, and all the other round dances, a broad black pencil-mark was drawn, "Mr. Champion has had my book for revision, you perceive," she added, as Devereux glanced up interrogatively. "That is what comes of giving a man a right to regulate one's actions and curtail one's enjoyments. Oh, miserable fate to be a woman! You ought to imitate the Mussulmans who thank God that they are neither women nor dogs."

"You must forgive me if I cannot sympathize with you," said Devereux. "I have always thought that I agreed with the Frenchman who said he should like to be a woman till he was thirty — a beautiful woman, of course, understood. And I cannot blame Mr. Champion very much, though he has deprived me of a great pleasure. In his place I should probably act as he has done. Nothing is more strong in man's nature than the instinct of monopoly."

"Oh, that is all very fine," said Rosalind, whose annoyance was greater than she cared to show, "but it is not you who are condemned to these stupid things" (quadrilles evidently meant), "with such music and such a floor! I must go away before the German. I cannot sit by and see that! Gordon Lacy always leads it, and I suppose he will ask Helen to dance with him. Pray, observe the difference between a sister and a wife. James cannot make her give up round-dancing."

"And this is the only dance you can give me, then?" said Devereux, looking again at the ball-book. "I see your list of engagements is complete."

"I am sorry that I cannot give you any other dance," she replied. "But there is our waltz. If you care to come and bear me company, we may take an ice while it is going on, and my feelings need not be hopelessly lacerated. We have not met in so long, and I have several things to say to you."

"I shall come with pleasure," said he, wondering a little what was the meaning of this, and what Madeleine might think.

So when the others were floating over the polished floor to the strains of the sweet Strauss music, Mr. Devereux made his way to where Mrs. James Champion sat surrounded by two or three gentlemen. Her husband was not among them — for she had persuaded him to go and play whist; by no means a difficult task, since he liked whist exceedingly, and altogether abjured dancing. When Devereux drew near, she rose, took his arm, and bending her head gracefully to the others in a manner which signified, "I have an engagement," moved away.

To this same waltz-music, meanwhile, Miss Champion was floating round the room on Lacy's arm. He was the best waltzer in Stansbury, and she liked dancing with him on that account, but if he had been the worst she would probably also have liked it — conscious that all eyes were upon them, and people were remarking to one another the devotion of her companion. It was a trifle altogether beneath her consideration that among these eyes were those of the woman to whom he was engaged, and of the man whom she had induced to believe that she would some day marry him.

The latter felt a growing conviction of his own infatuation as he watched the flying pair, and the perfumes, the lights, the whole bright scene, seemed to him full of weariness and depression. His heart was sore with pain as he stood, talking to a pretty chestnut-haired girl — a new *débutante* — who was telling him how much she liked the convent-school from which she had just returned. "I have to thank Miss Madeleine for having been sent there," she was saying.

"Mamma said she could not ask any thing better than the school that had formed *her*. Some of the sisters reminded me of her — they have such sweet, gentle manners. And they all remember her so well! I must go to see her and deliver all the messages with which they charged me."

"She will be very glad to see you," said Basil, looking at Madeleine with a glance of pride in his honest eyes. He could not help wondering, as she moved here and there, playing her part of deputy-hostess with the manner of which his companion spoke, what she thought of Lacy's conduct. If it cost her a pang, the fair, brave face kept its own secret. It may seem strange, perhaps, to those who are accustomed to think only of themselves, but Madeleine was at that moment wondering how Basil bore Helen Champion's reckless flirtation.

After a while he left the room, and then she made her way through the crowd and followed him, touching his arm with her fan when she found him at the open hall-door. He started when he turned and saw her standing by his side in her gauzy dress of white and silver.

"What are you doing here?" he said. "Don't you know you are too lightly clad for this draught? I came for a little fresh air."

"And I to speak to you," said she. "Do you know where Rosalind is? Have you seen her lately?"

"No, not particularly lately. Why do you ask? She is enjoying herself, you may be sure, wherever she is."

"That is very likely," answered Madeleine, a little dryly, "but whether her husband would approve of her mode of enjoyment is another question. I saw her enter that alcove behind the conservatory some time ago with Mr. Devereux, and I have not seen either of them since. Please go and find them, and send him to me."

"You talk as if I was a policeman," said Basil. "But if I can find them, and if either of them is to be sent to you, I think it better be Rosalind. Flirtation before marriage was bad enough, but flirtation after —"

"No," she said, with a quick gesture of dissent, "I don't want to see Rosalind. There is no good in it. I can make no impression on her whatever; but on Mr. Devereux I think I can. Send him to me. I am going to the library."

## Chapter V

### "Evil Is Wrought By Want Of Thought."

Basil departed on his errand, and found the two culprits where Madeleine had supposed they would be found, in an alcove next the conservatory. It was unquestionably a charming nook for flirtation. Flowing curtains of silk and lace gave partial seclusion, a large window overlooking the greenhouse opened down to the floor, and a scent of orange-blossoms came in with the cadenced rise and fall of music. Rosalind was a fit goddess for such a scene. No artist could have desired a prettier picture to illustrate a society-idyl than she made leaning back in a luxurious chair, with her delicate silken draperies sweeping the floor, and a glass of water-ice in her hand. Immediately in front of her Devereux was sitting — on the low ledge of the open window, with the glossy leaves of an orange-tree, laden with fruit and blossoms, touching the back of his head. He looked lazily amused and content. What man owning his tastes and habits would not have been, with so fair a face before him, and the music of so gay a tongue in his ears?

On this pleasant scene Basil broke somewhat like the policeman to whom he had likened himself. In the opening of the curtains his tall figure appeared, and his voice when he spoke was so cold that it sounded unlike itself.

"I am glad to find you, Rosalind," he said. "Your partner for the next set is looking for you" — this was quite true, he had met that neglected person in crossing the room — "and one or two people have asked me where you were."

"And you have taken the trouble to search for me on their behalf?" asked Rosalind, arching her brows. "Thank you very much, but I am very comfortable and do not think I shall dance any more just now."

She evidently did not mean to stir, her face said so as plainly as her voice — and Basil therefore was forced to fire this second shot.

"You must allow me to take charge of you, then," he said, "for I have been also commissioned to find Mr. Devereux. — My sister," he added, turning to that gentleman, "asked me to tell you that she wishes to see you. She is in the library."

Devereux rose at once — rose with an alacrity which surprised and displeased Rosalind, since nothing piques a woman more than for a man to show that he is willing to leave her society. "In that case," he said, "if Mrs. Champion will excuse me —"

"Oh, certainly!" answered Mrs. Champion, retaining self-command enough to smile. "I cannot expect you to disregard such a summons."

He only answered by a bow, and passed out of the alcove, leaving her in the enviable position of being *tête-à-tête* with her own brother. The latter sat down on the vacated window-ledge and looked straight into the lustrous eyes before him.

"See here, Rosalind," he said, gravely, "this will not do! Coquetry before marriage is no credit to a woman, but after marriage it is a disgrace. If you imagine that Champion will tolerate such conduct, you know him less than you might. Take my advice: stop in time, before you shipwreck your happiness and his trust in you."

"What perfect nonsense!" cried Rosalind, angrily. "Stop in time indeed! What is there to stop? I never heard before that it was coquetry to go into a cool place to eat a water-ice. Oh, how full the world is of prudish, uncharitable people! I will venture any thing that Madeleine sent you here to say this."

"She did nothing of the kind," returned her brother, sternly. "What I have said has been altogether unprompted. You may make what evasions you like, you know that you came here to flirt, or try to flirt, with Devereux ; but I warn you that if you do not wish to cause such mischief as many a weak, volatile woman has caused before, mischief that an angel could not heal, you had better not play with edged tools. Now I think you should go back to the ballroom."

"There is undoubtedly no inducement to remain here," said Rosalind, rising and shaking out her train.

In the ballroom she soon met her disconsolate partner, and Basil was released, to find his way to Miss Champion's side. He had danced with her only once — the first quadrille — and he now came to claim the next set, which chanced to be the lancers for which Lacy had expressed a desire.

"I am sorry, Mr. Severn," said Miss Champion, whose head was by this time completely turned with incense and flattery, "but I am engaged for the lancers."

"Engaged!" repeated Basil. "Certainly you are engaged, to *me*! Excuse my persistence, but I asked the dance early in the evening."

"You did not write your name on my tablets, then," said she, looking annoyed, "and I cannot be expected to carry such things in my memory. Indeed, I make it a rule to give a dance only to the person whose name is down for it."

"I shall not ask you to break your rule on my account," answered he, a little haughtily. "But may I be permitted to inquire whose name is on your tablets?"

She blushed crimson, she could not help it, but her eyes met his defiantly. "Mr. Lacy's," she replied.

"Are you in earnest?" asked Basil. Such an answer seemed to him almost incredible. "Do you really mean that you will refuse this dance to *me* in order to give it to Lacy, with whom you have already danced oftener than with any one else?"

The black eyes flashed. Miss Champion had the temper which usually accompanies orbs of that color. "I mean," replied she, emphatically, "that I will dance with whom I please, without submitting to dictation from any one."

"Pardon me," said Basil, "but if you think that I wished to dictate, you are mistaken: I only wished to understand. I comprehend now thoroughly, and I have the honor to wish you good-evening."

He drew back — never had she seen him look so nearly handsome, or so absolutely haughty — bowed, and turned away. At that moment he was almost a free man. The beauty which had enthralled him seemed to vanish, and the dwarfed, misshapen soul looked at him out of those "midnight eyes" which Lacy had rhymed. "It is over!" he said to himself. "If I go back to her again, it must be because she sends for me, and that is not likely."

While this little scene was in progress, Devereux made his way to the library, where Basil had told him that he would find Madeleine. He smiled a little as he did so, smiled at himself for the pleasure he felt in being so summoned, and at the curious sense of detected guilt which accompanied him. "How can I make her understand that it was not my fault!" he thought.

By what he felt to be a fortunate chance, he found her alone. All the straggling couples who at intervals during the evening had wandered into the library for flirtation or cards, were happily returned to the ballroom, and she was sitting by the fire — rather in the shade, yet with enough light falling over her to show that she looked pale and weary.

He advanced and stood before her, gazing down into the eyes which were uplifted to him with a very reproachful expression. "You sent for me?" he said.

"Yes, I sent for you," she answered. "You will forgive the liberty, will you not? There seemed no other way of ending what should never have been begun. And yet this afternoon you told me to trust you!"

"I tell you so again," he answered, smiling at her tone. "Why will you not believe that there is nothing which could tempt me to deserve your distrust?"

"That is easily said, and no doubt you mean it, but, though you may not intend harm, you may make harm. Do you understand the distinction?"

"Perfectly, but I must say once more that you misjudge me. To make harm, one must be either weak or badly-intentioned, I do not think that I am either."

"I do not believe that you are badly-intentioned," said she, looking at him steadily, "but I am not sure about the other. I am inclined to think that you are weak — in a certain way, that is."

"Thank you for the qualification," said he, flushing a little — for who likes to be called weak? — yet still smiling at the candor and simplicity of her manner.

"I mean," she went on, "that you have probably always been accustomed to doing that which was most pleasant — and it never occurs to you to resist an agreeable temptation."

"In other words, you think me a hopeless epicurean."

"Not exactly: I only think that you regard your own amusement as of more importance than any probable consequences."

"You could not believe any thing much worse of me," said he. Then he drew a chair in front of her and sat down. "Come, let us reason about it. I do not think I have a great deal of vanity, but I cannot submit to such shameful injustice. May I speak to you frankly? — may I tell you exactly how it chanced that I was found by your brother in such a suspicious position?"

"Yes," she answered, "you may speak as frankly as you like."

"Then I am compelled to say that it was by Mrs. Champion's own request that we went into that alcove to take a water-ice. I feared at the time that you might think I had forgotten your warning of the afternoon, but what could I do?"

She fixed on him the grave, gentle, brown eyes, which he knew so well, and propounded this leading question, "Were you not willing to go?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Willing— yes. Anxious — no. Mrs. Champion is a very beautiful woman, but (apart from her beauty) she is not a woman whom I admire or like. I hope you will pardon this candor — I am constrained to it in self-defense."

"Yet," said Madeleine, with a flash of sudden indignation, "you have flirted with her in the past, and are ready to flirt with her in the future!"

"Again permit me to say — no. I have flirted in the past, perhaps — though never to the degree of which you once accused me — but with regard to the future, I know whereof I speak when I say that nothing could induce me to do the same thing again. I suspect more than I care to tell you of the part which Mrs. Champion played, or desired to play, while she was yet Miss Rosalind Severn."

Madeleine knew what he meant, but her lips were sealed. How was it possible for her to deny that Rosalind had indeed played a most unworthy part? After a short pause, he went on, with tone of subdued eagerness in his voice :

"I wish most earnestly that you would trust me! I wish you would believe that not only is my honor bound in a manner which would of itself make me abstain from such idle folly — folly often ending, as I am well aware, in grievous harm — but you have more influence over me than you know. I could not voluntarily do any thing to lower myself in your esteem, or which would cause you pain and uneasiness."

"You are very good to think of me," said Madeleine, surprised and touched. She looked at him with something of gratitude in her kind, sweet glance. It did not occur to her for a moment to suspect that he might be paying merely an empty compliment. There was no suggestion of flirtation in the eyes meeting her own, and the sincerity of the last words was almost passionate.

"Think of you!" he repeated. "How can I help —" Then he stopped short. There was another pause. Across the hall, the swell of music came borne, together with the tread of dancing feet. How many of the tragedies of life occur in just such scenes! This was not a tragedy, but at that moment a truth which he had suspected, but not before known, came and stared Devereux in the face. It was a revelation, and not a pleasant one. Boys and girls like to play at love, to nurse sentiment and encourage fancy, but men and women who have been scorched by the fires of passion, and to whom experience has taught the almost overwhelming might of this tyrant of human nature, shrink away from that which brings little pleasure to recompense much suffering.

"But you should not think of me," said Madeleine, after a moment. "I mean that I am of small importance in your life. You should do right for the sake of right. You should think of your own honor and of Mary's trust."

"I do think of these things," he answered, in a low tone. Was he not, indeed, thinking of them at that moment?

"Then it seems to me," Madeleine went on, with the bravery which sometimes made her say and do things that no one else could have attempted, "that if I were a man, I should scorn to lead a woman into folly. The best of chivalry is not only that which defends the weak from others, but from themselves. A gentleman should be a knight, and we know to what they pledged themselves."

He looked up — the soft, brown eyes were shining like stars out of her fair, pale face. Gentle thoughts, noble impulses — are they not flowers of the soul? And sometimes we see and feel their beauty, which is greater by far than any beauty of flesh and blood.

It has been said that under all his *laissez-faire* indifference, Devereux veiled a nature originally prone to impulses. One of these impulses carried him away on its tide now. He took Madeleine's hand and kissed it. "If I am ever a knight" he said, "you will be my inspiration."

The tone was more significant than the words, and made his listener draw back with a dignity all her own. "You have forgotten the motto of the knights," she said. "It was 'God and

Our Lady.' The best of them had no mortal for an inspiration. If you cannot aim so high, at least remember that, speaking for this world, a gentleman's best inspiration is his honor."

"Surely you do not think that I am likely to forget it?" he said, with a pained look on his face.

"No," she answered, kindly. "I am sure you never will: I am sure you will remember — all that you ought. I only feared you might be thoughtless. That was all."

"You must not think better of me than I deserve," he said, after a moment's silence. "I have no fixed ideas or principles of any kind — one feels no need of them, you know, in such a life as I have lived. There is only one thing about which I have ever troubled myself, and that is — my honor. I could not readily support the idea that in any way I had forfeited that."

"*Noblesse oblige!*" said Madeleine, smiling. "Whoever feels that, is not likely to go very far wrong."

He looked at her, but did not answer immediately. There was a subtle sense of sympathy and comprehension between them which he felt to be very pleasant. He said to himself, "If only it could last!" — but who does not know that the happy hours of life end quickly, while the sad ones are leaden-footed?

This hour ended while the reflection was in his mind. Mrs. Ingram's pearl-gray moire and uncheerful face suddenly appeared at the door. "Oh — you are here, Miss Madeleine!" she said. "I thought perhaps it was Mary. Do you know where she is?"

"I have not seen her for some time," answered Madeleine. "Is she not in the drawing-room?"

"Not anywhere at all," answered Mrs. Ingram in a portentous tone. "I will send up-stairs and see if she is there. I'm afraid something may be the matter. She hasn't looked well this hour or two past."

"I will go and see if she is up-stairs," said Madeleine, rising quickly.

She passed out of the room, crossed the hall, and sped up-stairs — vaguely uneasy, though she knew that Mrs. Ingram belonged to a class characterized by Jessie as "croakers."

Miss Carlisle's chamber-door was closed. Madeleine knocked, but no answer came. She turned the handle, but the door resisted her efforts. Plainly it was locked.

Her surprise and alarm were great, as she stood for a moment motionless. No one but Mary could possibly have locked the door, and why did not Mary give some sign of being within? She knocked again, and called her name, but there was no reply. Again, and yet again, with the same result. Then, full of consternation, yet resolved to make no scene, she turned and ran down-stairs. After all, she thought, Mark might not be within — she would go and look for her.

At the foot of the staircase she found Devereux — evidently waiting for her. Thoroughly as she commanded herself, he knew in an instant from her face that all was not well. "What is the matter?" he asked, quickly. "Is Mary ill?"

"I have not found her," Madeleine answered. "She is not in her room — at least the door is locked, and although I knocked several times there was no reply. She must be down-stairs somewhere. Go and look through the drawing-rooms and conservatory, while I go to the dining-room and see if Jessie knows any thing about her. It is foolish to be alarmed, but Mrs. Ingram is such a prophet of evil that she startles one."

He required no second bidding, but entered the drawing-rooms at once, while Madeleine, on her part, went to the dining-room, where the beautiful though much-demolished supper-table stood. She found Jessie in a tempest of indignant sorrow over a fruit-stand of Bohemian glass, which had just been broken. To her careful soul the accident was a terrible one, but she forgot it altogether when she heard Madeleine's question: Did she know where Mary was? — and why was her door locked?

"Is her door locked?" Jessie asked, in immediate trepidation. "She's up there — that I know. I saw her cross the hall and go up-stairs some little time ago. I noticed it, because she was all by herself, and I thought that was queer; but I was too busy to go and see about her. I wish

now I had! It would have been better to have had every piece of glass in the house broken, than to have let Miss Mary want for any thing."

"I don't know that she has wanted for any thing," said Madeleine. "Why should she? Her bell has plainly not been touched, for yonder is Stella; but you had better come up with me, Jessie."

"Of course I'm coming," said Jessie, leaving the Bohemian ware and cut-glass to its fate.

In the hall they met Devereux. He shook his head. "She is not to be found anywhere here," he said. "She must be up-stairs."

"We are going to see," answered Madeleine.

"I will come, too," he said.

No one demurred, and he accompanied them to the upper story. Mary's door was still locked, and no word came from within. Jessie waited a moment to ascertain this fact, after which she said, "I'm going through my room, Miss Madeleine. It's not likely she has locked that door."

"Oh, how stupid of me!" cried Madeleine. "I forgot your room altogether. Certainly we can go that way."

Leaving Devereux where he was, she followed Jessie down a side corridor to the head of the private staircase. Here was the room of the latter — assigned to her in order that she might be near her young mistress. She led the way through to a door which opened into Miss Carlisle's dressing-room. It was unlocked, as also the door between the dressing-room and chamber.

Entering the last, Madeleine found her fears realized. In the deep arm-chair near the toilet-table, where she had sat a few hours before for her hair to be arranged, Mary was sitting now — or, rather, lying — in a dead faint.

## Chapter VI

### "When The Lamp Is Shattered."

It was not long after this before the house — lately blazing with light, and echoing with mirth and music — was silent and empty, save for its usual inmates, together with the doctor and Devereux. Fortunately, the former had been among the guests, and when he was summoned in haste to Mary's chamber, the rumor spread — all in an instant, as it were — no man being able to tell where it originated — that she was dead. The German broke up in dismay, people flocked up stairs by scores, but no one was allowed to enter the room of the young mistress of the house. Jessie met them in the hall, told them that she had merely fainted — probably from fatigue — and sent them down again. After this followed demands for cloaks and carriages. In less than an hour the last equipage had rolled away.

Basil remained to the last, saw the musicians depart, and the lights all out. Then he sent for Madeleine, and asked if there was any thing he could do, and, finding that there was nothing, took his departure for a few hours' sleep, promising to be back early in the morning.

"Don't hasten back under the impression that you can do any thing," said Madeleine. "I see that it will be the old story. Mary has recovered from her swoon, but she is suffering with dreadful paroxysms of heart-disease."

It was the old story. Terrible suffering came on as soon as Miss Carlisle recovered from unconsciousness — indeed, she opened her eyes with a great gasp of agony. Neither the doctor, nor Jessie, nor yet Madeleine, was surprised. They had expected much such a *finale*. Yet it was a strange ending — this vigil by a bed of pain — to the night which had begun so differently for them. Among these watchers, it may be remarked that Mrs. Ingram was distinguished by her absence. She retired to her couch, while Devereux solaced his anxieties by a cigar, as he sat alone in the library and watched the lightning in the east, which showed the coming of the winter dawn.

The morning star rose radiantly — rose with a splendor which fascinated even his indifferent eyes — the glory of sunrise filled the whole eastern horizon, and finally the sun himself appeared, and sent his red lances over the earth.

Then the gazer by the library-window rose also — somewhat listlessly — and, opening the sash, walked out into the sharp, frosty air. The morning was like a flawless crystal in its clearness and brightness. It revived him more than any thing else possibly could have done. The lassitude of watching passed away; his spirits regained their elasticity. "A walk will help me," he said. "I shall go into Stansbury, change my dress, and be back before any one here is aware that it is day."

An hour later he had not yet returned, when Madeleine stood in the library with the doctor, and listened with a white face while he told her that Mary's illness was fatal. "I do not say that she will die at once," he added; "she may linger for days, and even weeks, but there is no hope of recovery. The organic disease has greatly increased since I examined her heart the last time. I have feared during the last few hours that she would die in every paroxysm. If you wish to satisfy yourself by calling in another physician —"

"Do as you think best," said Madeleine. She spoke like one stunned: she could scarcely understand: she could not at all realize. "Mary has all confidence in your skill," she said, "and so have I, but O doctor" — she held out her hands with a gesture so imploring that it was almost passionate — "do you mean that there is no hope?"

The doctor took the hands and wrung them hard. His own eyes were moist, for he had known Mary from her infancy. "God knows," he said, "that I would willingly believe otherwise, and still more willingly keep the truth from you, if there was any good in doing so — but there is none. A terrible ordeal is before you, and you are not like other women. To know the worst is not, with you, to shrink from it."

"You don't know — you don't know!" said Madeleine, brokenly. "I have never been tried like this before. I have never had to stand by and see one whom I loved — O doctor! is it true? Do you mean that Mary will *die*?"

Her lips faltered over the last word. She broke down, and, with a great sob of tearless grief, sank on the sofa and turned her face away from the light.

"Poor child!" said the doctor. Then he walked away — walked to the window through which Devereux had passed out. It did not seem strange to him that this burden should fall on Madeleine, for he recognized, like every one else, that she was made to bear burdens, but he wondered a little where was the man to whom Mary was engaged, and how he would bear the blow which threatened to wrest from him all that he had schemed to win. It will be perceived from this that Dr. Arthur shared the opinion of the rest of Stansbury with regard to Devereux's interested motives.

Only a minute or two passed in silence while he stood with his hands in his pockets and his brow slightly corrugated, considering these things. Then Madeleine rose and came to his side — the early sunlight falling over her face and showing the great change that even a few hours had wrought in it. She touched his arm, and, when he turned, lifted her eyes — ringed already by dark circles — with the mute look of suffering in their depths, which is never to be mistaken and difficult to be forgotten.

"If it is true," she said, "if there is no hope, Mary must know."

"Must know!" repeated Dr. Arthur, taken greatly by surprise. "Good Heavens, Miss Severn! you surely don't consider what you are saying? I did not expect such a proposal. From a medical point of view nothing is worse, nothing is more ill-judged, or more certain to work ill-results than to let a patient suspect her danger."

"From a medical point of view, perhaps people have not souls to be saved," said Madeleine, quietly, "but from a Christian point of view they have. Besides, I am bound by a promise to Mary. Long ago she begged me to be with her when — when the end came, and not to let her die in ignorance."

Dr. Arthur shrugged his shoulders. Like many of his profession, he thought it great folly of people to want to know when they were going to die. It agitated their minds, disturbed the effect of the medicines, made unpleasant scenes, and altogether was not nearly so convenient as when they were content to pass quietly away, in that ignorance which the medical mind esteems desirable, to wake — like many others, he never troubled himself to consider where. In fact, if he had been closely interrogated, some of his patients might have been shocked to find that he did not think them exceedingly likely to wake anywhere at all.

"You must do as you like, of course," he said, a little stiffly, "but I warn you that the consequences may be very serious."

"Whatever they are, she must know the truth," said Madeleine in a tone which, together with the firmness of her lips and the steady light in her eyes, showed that no warning would alter her resolution.

The doctor reflected for a minute. Then he said reluctantly: "Perhaps in the case of one who possesses such a property as hers, it might be well to give her an opportunity to put her affairs in order. But do not be precipitate. So far as I can judge, there is no danger of immediate death. I will bring Dr. Thornton this morning, and we will make a thorough examination of the heart. If you will allow me to suggest, would it not be well also to consult Mr. Devereux?"

"I had forgotten all about him," said Madeleine. She looked round as if she expected to find him near. "He ought to be here," she said. "He told me he would stay."

"Probably he has gone up-stairs to sleep," said the doctor.

Madeleine rang the bell, and when Albert appeared, inquired if Mr. Devereux was in the house. Albert was unable to say, but he went at once in search of him, returning speedily with the intelligence that he was not to be found. After a few more words, the doctor took his departure — Mary being then quite under the influence of an anodyne — promising to return in an hour or two with Dr. Thornton.

Left alone in this manner with her burden of grief and responsibility, Madeleine paced the floor for a few minutes, scarcely knowing what she did. Then the impulse which in pain or trouble always carries one of her faith to the sanctuary, came over her, and leaving the room, she went up-stairs to a small oratory next Mary's chamber. Her convent education had made her a Catholic, and Mary had willingly followed whither she led. Here they had often knelt together, and here now Madeleine sank on the *prie-Dieu* placed before the altar, and poured out her soul in sobbing prayer, while from the crucifix, that "throne of love," the thorn-crowned head bent tenderly toward her.

"When she rose from her knees, a consciousness of calmness and strength had come to her — that strength which often upholds, almost miraculously, through such scenes as those which lay before her. She left the oratory and entered Mary's room, where she found her still sleeping, with Jessie watching by her side. Wondering then if Devereux had come, she went down-stairs again, and met him entering the hall.

He came forward eagerly and took her hand, which felt cold in his own. "You look wretchedly," he said, forgetting politeness in truth. "What a night you have passed, and I could do nothing to help you! How is Mary?"

"She is better — that is, she is quiet," answered Madeleine, too much preoccupied to notice that thought of her went before thought of Mary in his mind. "But she is very ill. Come in here, I must speak to you."

She led the way to the library, where during her absence the housemaid had been at work, and every thing was now in order, a bright fire burning, the sunlight lying on the carpet, the whole aspect of the room cheerful and pleasant. "Have you been to breakfast?" Madeleine said, turning to her companion. "I had a cup of coffee with the doctor some time ago. If you would like any thing —"

"breakfasted in Stansbury," he said. "Do not trouble yourself about that. Tell me what is the matter. Is Mary dangerously ill?"

She looked at him with eyes full of tenderness and pain, shining through unshed tears. "How can I tell you?" she said. "And yet I must! She is not only dangerously, but also hopelessly ill."

He started and gazed at her with paling face and incredulous eyes. For a moment his heart seemed to stand still. The shock was overwhelming. He had anticipated nothing like this, and he could say nothing more than, "My God! and I have been thinking so lightly of her illness!"

"You did not see her," said Madeleine. "Her suffering has been terrible, and the doctor feared (so he told me afterward) that she would die in one of the paroxysms. Now she is quiet, and he says that she may live for days, or even weeks or— she may die to-morrow."

Her voice fell over the last words, and silence followed them. Devereux sat like one struck dumb; in the tumult of emotion which took possession of him, he could neither tell what feeling was uppermost, nor give expression to any. It was Madeleine who spoke again after a minute.

"I fear I have been too abrupt," she said, "Forgive me. I would have prepared you if I had known how to do so. But I have always felt that I would rather know the worst at once, and I judged you by myself."

"You were altogether right," he said, a little hoarsely. "Only I — I cannot realize it. Last night she was so well —"

"Only well in appearance," said Madeleine, as he paused. "The doctor says that the organic disease of her heart has greatly increased since he examined it last. He will bring Dr. Thornton with him when he comes back in an hour or two, but there is no hope. He says we must understand that."

"Does she know?" he asked, speaking with that effort which always shows when a man feels deeply.

"Not yet," Madeleine answered, "but I see you think as I do, that she must know. There is no time for delay — an hour may end all. We have no right to keep her in ignorance. Will you tell her? — It is your right."

He shrank back. "Great Heaven — no!" he said. "I! What fitness have I for such a duty?"

"I think such news — which, after all, ought not to be very terrible news to one who believes, loves, and hopes — comes best from the lips which are dearest to us," she answered, simply. "You have that much fitness, if no more. But if you do not feel able to do it, I will."

"You shame my cowardice," he said, "but it is best so. You are fit for such a task — I am not."

She shook her head, and some of the tears, with which her eyes were brimming, fell. "I have no fitness at all," she said, "except that God gives it to me to do, and therefore He may teach me how to do it. Now, I will go to her. You must stay here. She may ask for you when she wakes."

Mary did ask for him when she woke. As Madeleine bent over her, she whispered faintly, "Where is Arnold?" — so she had of late begun to call him.

"He is down-stairs," Madeleine answered. "Do you wish to see him? He has been waiting for you to send for him."

"Presently — not now," Mary answered. She uttered these few words slowly and laboredly, conscious that the least excitement would bring on another awful spasm of pain. Several minutes elapsed before she spoke again; then her lids trembled, though they did not unclose, and her slender fingers clasped closer round Madeleine's hand.

"I am going to die, am I not?" she said.

The question was so unexpected and so startling that Madeleine did not know how to answer. It was some time before she could command her voice sufficiently to ask, "Why do you think so?"

"Because I have never suffered so much before," said Mary, "and because — of the doctor's voice and yours. Don't be afraid to tell me — I want to know. I have a great deal to do."

Madeleine sank on her knees, and, kissing the frail hand which she held, burst into tears. "Oh, my dear, my dear," she said, "every thing is as God wills, but we fear — the worst."

"The worst!" repeated Mary. She paused for a moment, as if reflecting, with none of the agitation which Madeleine dreaded on her face. "You should rather say the best," she added. "Whatever God wills must be best, and then — perhaps I have done my work in the world. When that is the case God calls one, does He not? Pray for me, dear — but don't be sorry. God knows best."

It is impossible to give an idea of the sweetness and quietness which filled these words — sweetness distilled, as it were, from self-conquest, quietness without an effort. Faith had always seemed a very simple thing to this blind girl. She had the trust of a child, and even in this supreme hour when the necessity came to her of leaving life, and wealth, and love behind, she was able to say like a child, "God knows best." To Madeleine such an act of resignation was not so easy. She had uttered it, but who has not learned that, even while the soul bows in obedience, the heart cries out passionately against the pain of some parting that seems to rend its very fibres apart?

"O Mary, my darling, my sister!" she cried, "I cannot give you up! — I cannot feel that it is best — so gentle, so noble, so loving! Oh, why should your life be cut short?"

"Who can tell?" said Mary, softly. "Only God — but He knows. Think, dear! I have not done much harm in my life, and I have tried to do what good I could. Is it likely, then, that our blessed Lord — so merciful and kind — will deal hardly with me? Where we love, we trust; and I love him. Don't grieve, then! It is hard to leave you — oh, very hard! — but I shall also leave care and responsibility, and pain. I shall be safe from sin, and I shall see."

She opened her eyes at the last word, as if sight had already come to them. Then she took up a crucifix which lay beside her and gently kissed it, whispering a few words of prayer. That calm which often comes at death to the great in faith and the pure of heart, seemed breathed over her like a benediction. And what could Madeleine say? What can any of us say when God calls, and, like soldiers, those whom we love must rise up and obey?

Not long after this the two doctors came. They examined the patient with great attention, then held a consultation of some length, and finally gave their formal decision that Mary Carlisle's life could now only be counted by days — perhaps only by hours.

Hearing this — for she insisted upon hearing it — Mary asked for Devereux. He went to her at once, and Madeleine left them together.

An hour, two hours, three hours elapsed, before the door of the sick girl's chamber opened again. Meanwhile, Stansbury rang with the news which Dr. Arthur had taken there, and all who had any claim of blood or friendship authorizing them to do so, came to the Lodge. Madeleine was not able to see these solicitous friends, but Mrs. Severn had accompanied Basil when he returned, and the duty fell on her, since Mrs. Ingram proved as thoroughly useless in this as in every other emergency.

So the day wore on — dropping its minutes and hours into eternity — and when at length Devereux left Miss Carlisle's room, he came to Madeleine, looking pale and grief-stricken, but composed.

"Mary wishes," he said, "to see a lawyer and a priest."

## Chapter VII

### The Last Of Earth.

When it was known in Stansbury that James Champion had been summoned to the Lodge, a thrill went through every one to whom the intelligence was communicated. Men looked at each other and said, "She means to make her will." This suggestion once uttered — authorized, indeed,

by that summons of a lawyer — it is needless to detail the endless field of conjecture which it opened. Speculation was rife; to whom would the property go? People in general inclined to the opinion that she would leave it to Devereux — perhaps even that, following romantic precedent, she might marry him on her death-bed; while others espoused the cause of her relations, and a few suggested that "the Severns might come in for a share." Those who knew the value of this rich inheritance, shook their heads to think that it should all hang on a girl's dying caprice.

This girl, meanwhile, saw her lawyer, as she had seen her lover, alone, and gave him her instructions with great clearness and calmness. That these instructions surprised him exceedingly, no one could have looked at his face and doubted. Remembering that he was a friend as well as a lawyer, he ventured to utter a remonstrance, but Mary stopped him — gently, but with decision.

"It is a matter which rests with me alone," she said. "I am sure you mean well, and I thank you for this, as for all other kindness; but I cannot accept any advice. My resolution is taken. Make the will as I have told you, and let me sign it. Then I shall be satisfied. Remember, I trust to your honor that it shall be exactly as I have said, and with no legal flaw — for it must rest between us two. Give me your hand, and promise me that you will tell no one — not even your wife — what it is, until I am dead."

He gave her his hand, and promised in a voice that faltered over the words. Even James Champion had a tender place in his heart for Mary Carlisle. "God grant that you may live to put the instrument in the fire," he said, "and enjoy your wealth for many years!"

She shook her head, smiling faintly. "That will not be," she answered. "Now do not lose any time. Remember that my hours are numbered."

He went immediately to draw up the will, and it was then that Mary's suffering returned — suffering too terrible to dwell upon. It was not until the next day that a short period of relief came to her. The will had already been signed — in the intervals of her agony she had insisted upon doing that — and witnessed. Now she called for Jessie, and begged every one else — even Madeleine and Devereux — to go away. "It is the last of my private interviews," she said, "except, indeed, the most private of all, when Father Vaughn comes."

When Jessie came — poor, faithful Jessie, who felt that it would be easy to die instead of the child of her love! — Mary bade her close the door, and bring writing-materials to the side of the bed. Then she said, in a voice that had grown fainter, "You must promise me that you will write exactly what I dictate, and that nothing shall induce you to tell to any one what I have written, so long as you live."

"I'll promise you a thousand times if you like," said Jessie, "but, O Miss Mary, it's strange you should begin, after all these years, to think it's needful for me to promise to do whatever you say; and as for telling — not tortures could drag out of me any thing you wanted me to keep."

"I know you are true as steel," said Mary, tenderly, "but still, my mind will be easier if you promise. Come here — kneel down by me, and tell me you will remember that I trust you in this, as I could trust no one else on earth; that I, who am blind, thank God for the gift of a friend so faithful that not only have I relied on her during all my life, but I call on her for the last earthly service which any one can render me, now I am dying. Tell me that you will remember this, dear Jessie, and then promise never to repeat what I shall dictate to you."

"I promise — O my dearie, my dearie, don't you *know* that I promise, as God hears me, to do every thing you say, and keep any thing you trust me with, to my dying day!" cried Jessie, breaking into passionate sobs. "I knelt down by your mother just this way and I promised *her* to be true to you, and never leave you, and haven't I kept that?"

"Yes," said Mary, "in letter and in spirit you have kept your promise as few people ever do. My dear Jessie! You will grieve for me, and miss me longer, perhaps, than any one else. I wish I could say something to comfort you, but I can only say this — I love you, and God knows best. Remember these two things, and serve God as well as you have served me. I do not think that even He could ask much more."

She paused — evidently exhausted. Her strength was small, and her respiration difficult. For the space of two or three minutes no sound broke the stillness of the room, save Jessie's sobs — deep and convulsive almost as a man's. Fearing that her grief might agitate Mary, she was striving hard to repress it, and when at last she succeeded in a measure, the sick girl spoke.

"There is no time to lose. You must write what I want at once. Are you sure the doors are closed and no one can hear? Then get your paper ready, and begin."

A little more of suffering for one, of watching and grief for many, and the end came. It was on Friday — that day forever sacred to the Christian heart. Mary's paroxysms of pain were terrible till near mid-day. Then they abated somewhat, but this respite was different from any which had gone before. She was sinking visibly — that change, unlike any which mortality knows, was plainly stamped on her sharpened face — and those around her scarcely needed for the doctor to say, "She is dying."

She smiled — a faint, shadowy, unearthly smile — when she heard this. "Dying!" she whispered, so softly that only Devereux, in whose arms she lay, caught the words. Then she repeated that touching cry of the blind man in the Holy Scriptures, "Lord, that I may see!" After a short pause, she added, "It is strange, and yet not terrible — this dying. Remember that, and don't shrink from thinking of me after I am gone. I should like you to think of me sometimes, and say, 'She loved me very much, and even if she had lived, she would have tried to make me happy.'"

He could scarcely answer her — when he did, he murmured, brokenly: "For God's sake, don't say such things unless you want to stab me to the heart with their recollection! If you could only live — if God would only let you live — I should try with all my heart and strength to make you happy."

Even then her exquisite consideration showed. She uttered no further word in which lurked the shadow of reproach. Her fragile fingers pressed his hand as she said, "You have made me happy — don't forget that! I have been happier since I knew you than ever before in all my life. No such happiness had ever come to me until then, and I thank God for a taste — even for a taste of it. If it was not perfect, what is perfect on earth? It is only in heaven we can look for that. Ah, pray for me — pray for me, that I may find it there!"

She was silent for a moment — lying so still, with her breast scarcely stirring in its difficult respiration, that those around looked at each other with questioning terror in their eyes. Had the end come? Was she to slip away from them thus, without those consolations which religion brings to the bed of death — for the priest who had been summoned was absent from Stansbury, and had not yet arrived?

But the soul was not yet ready to go forth. Again the pale lips unclosed. She put out her hand, saying, "Is Madeleine here?"

"I am here," answered Madeleine, choking back her grief. She took the hand, kissed and softly stroked it. "Is there any thing you wish to say? — is there any thing I can do?"

"Yes," replied Mary, faintly. "There is a key hanging round my neck which you must take — after a while. It is the key of my desk, and I give it to you — the desk, I mean. There is a letter in it for you — you only!"

"I understand," said Madeleine, "I will find it. Do not think I shall not do all you ask."

"Will you remember that?" said Mary. "Will you do all I ask? If you can promise me —"

But Madeleine was spared a promise which she had no thought of refusing to make, and the memory of which might have weighed upon her in the time to come. At that moment there was a stir about the door which attracted even Mary's attention and made her pause. "Is it Father Vaughn?" she whispered, and Madeleine turned. A delicately-formed, dark-eyed man, wearing the dress of an ecclesiastic, entered the room. In his face was the peculiar mingling of asceticism and sweetness well known to all those who are acquainted with that heroic army called the Catholic priesthood. He came in rapidly, and when he saw that he was not too late, he turned to Madeleine.

"I was on the mission," he said, "remote from railroads. Your telegram only reached me yesterday. Thank God I am in time!"

The scene which followed was not one which, on such a page as this, can be described in detail. The children of the Church know that those sacraments which, with inspired wisdom and tenderness, she reserves for the hour of death, to aid the soul as it passes through the Dark Valley, are the most touching and sublime of all her offices. So long as men believe that they have a soul, so long high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, will own the divine majesty of the viaticum which strengthens, of the holy unction which purifies, and feel the beauty of those words which for centuries have fallen on the dying ears of all the faithful. Around the lowliest death-bed on earth they summon such state as no monarch was ever able to command. They bid the standard-bearer, St. Michael, conduct the departing spirit into the holy light, they call upon the noble company of angels to meet it, upon the court of Apostles and the triumphant army of martyrs to receive it, upon the crowd of joyful confessors to encompass it, and upon the choir of blessed virgins to go before it. They invoke a happy rest for its portion in the company of the patriarchs, and they pray that Jesus Christ may appear with a mild and cheerful countenance to give it a place among those who are in His presence forever.

The last sacraments had been administered, the litany for a departing soul had been said, and yet the feeble breath still came through Mary's lips. It has been well remarked that this life which is so hard to enter, and so bitter to live, is harder yet to end — but is it possible to forget Who hung for three hours upon the cross? Mary remembered this, as those around her knew when, as the clock struck three, she murmured, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" — words which fell from the lips of God, and fittest, therefore, for the last act of the dying.

Then in the midst of that strange hush which falls in the chamber of death, while the rest were holding back their sobs that they might not disturb the soul engaged in that last combat which the Church warns her children will be the most terrible they have to fight, the clear, solemn tones of the priest's voice rose in that command for which the spirit often seems to wait:

"Depart, O Christian soul, out of this miserable world, in the name of God the Father Almighty who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for thee; in the name of the Holy Ghost, who sanctified thee; in the name of the Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominations, Cherubim, and Seraphim; in the name of the patriarchs and prophets, of the holy Apostles and Evangelists, of the holy martyrs and confessors, of the holy monks and hermits, of the holy virgins, and of all the Saints of God; let thy place be this day in peace, and thy abode in holy Zion; through Christ our Lord.

Before the last words were spoken, Mary's eyes opened with a sudden, bright, seeing look, the lips formed for the last time into a faint sweet smile, and then, with one soft sigh, the spirit passed to God — passed without a struggle, seemingly without a pang, so gently that not even Devereux, on whose arm she lay, knew the truth till the priest began the *De Profundis* for a departed soul.

## Book V

### Tangled Threads

#### Chapter I

## An Unexpected Inheritance

To those who loved her, and whose lives in a measure revolved around hers, the world seemed to stand still after Mary Carlisle's death. The Lodge was closed, the mills were silent. When the funeral was over, Mrs. Ingram betook herself to her friends in Stansbury, while Madeleine and Basil, returning to their own home, looked at each other through tear-filled eyes — sorrowing as for the most tender of sisters.

What words are there to express that *blankness* which follows in the train of death, that sense of intolerable emptiness that pervades the world from which one presence has forever departed? All the familiar threads of life are to be taken up and knit together again, and how have we the heart for this? Every thing stabs us with a recollection, every scene is fraught with associations that we never recognized before. If we could only remain in the shadow of grief we should be content, we think; but life's duties claim us, the world goes on and we are borne with it, all the manifold acts of existence lie before us; *we* have yet to hope and fear, to joy and suffer, to labor and endure, and finally to die, while that grave from which we turn, marks the warfare of one soldier ended, the armor laid down, the hands folded, the tired spirit entered — pray God! — into eternal rest and peace.

These were the thoughts — or, rather, the sensations, for they did not form themselves into thoughts — that accompanied Madeleine when, on the day following the one which had seen all that was mortal of Mary Carlisle committed in its pale, fair beauty to the earth, she left the house, impelled by a fever of unrest. There are some people who in grief shut themselves up like wounded animals, and shrink, as it were, from the light; but others yearn for the freedom of the great sky, and the calm face of Nature. Madeleine was one of the last. She bore confinement as long as she could — being worn out in physical strength — but at last the restless impulse which bade her go forth could no longer be restrained. She put on her hat, and when Mrs. Severn looked at her solicitously, she said, "I feel prisoned in the house. I must have some fresh air. If Gordon comes while I am gone, tell him I shall be back presently, and ask him to wait for me."

As she passed out, Lance came and thrust his cold nose into her hand. She understood the mute entreaty. "Yes," she said, "you may come." It was the only society that just then she could have borne.

They went together through a back gate, across several fields, and finally into the woods which Madeleine had in view. Railroads and manufacturing interests, as Mr. Ruskin laments, are great destroyers of the picturesque; yet notwithstanding their presence, there were lovely bits of natural beauty left in the neighborhood of Stansbury. The best of these lay around Madeleine now, but she hardly observed them. It is not when the heart is aching, the eyes filled with tears, that we are best fitted to appreciate the graceful lines of distant heights or shadowy forests fringing the horizon.

Coming at last to a hill which she knew well, she climbed to a favorite seat of her own — a rock on the western slope. Here she sat down, with Lance crouched lion-like at her feet, and gazed across all the wide stretch of blue undulating country to where the sun was sinking in one of those ineffably golden skies which mortal minds can only liken to the glory of the heavenly Zion. "O Mary, my dear Mary," she said, clasping her hands, "you can see now! That radiance yonder is poor and dim compared to the beauty which has been shown to you! Gentle heart, true and tender friend, do you think of this sad earth and those whom you have left? Ah, if I knew, if I knew! I wonder did I ever tell you how much I loved you! I wonder do you know how much I miss you, and shall miss you always till we meet again! How wrong I am to grieve!" — her tears

were falling thick and fast — "I ought to rejoice for you, and yet I cannot, for, O my dear, my dear, I miss you so!"

The sunset faded, and the purple dusk fell like a soft veil over the landscape, before Madeleine moved. Then rising with a last low sigh, she drew her shawl around her, and bade Lance come. They descended the hill, and passed along a gently-rolling valley, through which flowed the stream that helped to turn the great machinery of the Carlisle mills. Here she strolled slowly, careless of the deepening twilight, for not only was Lance by her side — a guard to inspire confidence in the breast of the most timid — but she knew that for her there was no danger of harm or insult. The poor have not so many friends that they can forget those who have been kind to them — and her name and presence were well known wherever sickness and suffering had set their mark.

Hence she felt no uneasiness when she saw the figure of a man hastening toward her. Indeed, she scarcely observed him further than to think, "One of the mill-hands, probably, going home by a short cut." It was only when the figure drew nearer that she saw that the outlines were not those of a mill-hand, but of a gentleman, and a minute or two later she found herself face to face with Lacy.

"Gordon!" she exclaimed, in great surprise. "What are you doing here?"

"What should I be doing but coming after you?" replied Gordon. "And what are you doing — at this hour and alone?"

"Oh, that is nothing," said she. "I have been to walk, and staid a little later than I intended, watching the sunset — but Lance is with me."

"It is altogether wrong," said Lacy, taking her hand and drawing it within his arm. "You should not stroll in this manner about the woods alone — not even with Lance, though I own he is a formidable-looking protector. You had not been gone ten minutes, Mrs. Severn said, when I came to the house. After waiting for two or three hours, you can imagine that I grew uneasy, so I started in search of you, and was fortunately sent in this direction by two boys whom I met, who reported that they had seen you perched on the side of Crag's Hill."

"It was very kind of you to come," said Madeleine, clinging to him. Her heart went out toward him as it had not done in many a long day before. She felt that it was good to love and be loved, good to hold this treasure in actual possession untouched by death's terrible hand. The reaction from much grief — the calm that follows longing — fell over her. She felt glad of his arm, of his touch, of his voice.

"Kind!" repeated Lacy. "What do you mean by that? Is it not my right to take care of you? *Chérie*, even in this light I see that you look pale and worn — you are grieving too much! Think how useless it is! No grief can bring your friend back, and — and no doubt she is happy."

"I hope so," said Madeleine. She said no more. The vague generalities and platitudes in which people indulge on this subject oppressed her with their forced unreality, and she felt nervously averse to hearing them applied to Mary — Mary who had gone with a child's unwavering faith whither God's voice called.

"She must have been very much attached to you," said Lacy, after a pause. "When I came to the house this evening, it was with Basil, to tell you some news. Her will, which was left in Champion's hands, was opened to-day."

"Indeed!" said Madeleine. She shrank, as who that has loved the dead does not shrink from that which makes death so real? "Don't tell me about it," she said. "I can't bear it — yet. I think there must have been great anxiety to know what was in it."

"Opening it was a matter of necessity," said Lacy. "Her relations who came to the funeral could not remain longer. It was opened by their desire and in their presence. They were very much astonished when the truth was known, for, Madeleine, she has left all her fortune to you."

"Gordon!"

This was all Madeleine could say. She turned so white that Lacy involuntarily put his arm around her, the whole landscape seemed to whirl before her eyes. She did not faint, because she

was almost physically incapable of such a thing, but a feeling of faintness came over her. It could not be true! Mary could not have been so foolish — so wild!

"Sit down for a minute," said Lacy, placing her on a stump. "I am afraid I have been abrupt. I ought to have waited till you were at home. But my head was so full of the wonderful news that I could not keep it any longer."

"And is it true?" asked Madeleine, imploringly. "Is there no mistake? — O Gordon, there must be some mistake."

Gordon laughed. Evidently to him Mary's last will and testament appeared altogether good. "There is no room for mistake where legal documents are concerned," he said. "I was not present, of course, at the reading of the will, but Basil was, and I have heard all about it from him — as well as from half a dozen others. There are one or two minor legacies of no great amount — that to Jessie Holme is largest — but *you* are the residuary legatee of mills, houses, lands, stocks, in short, every thing."

"But Mr. Devereux?" said Madeleine, who was thoroughly bewildered. Lacy shrugged his shoulders. "Devereux's name is not even mentioned. This puzzles people amazingly. Was there any thing like a quarrel between Miss Carlisle and himself at the last?"

"How can you ask me such a question!" said Madeleine, and what with amazement, bewilderment, grief, and indignation, she burst into tears.

It was now Lacy's turn to be surprised and concerned. He had never known Madeleine so much like "other women" before. Deciding that these tears were half hysterical and half overwrought weariness, he proposed at once to take her home. "Night is falling," he said. "Basil and Mrs. Severn will be uneasy."

So, through the deepening winter twilight Madeleine went, walking as in a dream over the familiar hills and dales. She never forgot the aspect of that evening, which was always afterward connected in her memory with the news that was to work such a revolution in her life. The closing purple dusk, the faint afterglow still lingering in the west, a silver star shining in the east, blue smoke rising column-like from the chimneys of houses out of sight, every detail was stamped like a photograph on her mind. She never saw the picture afterward without recalling the chaos of emotions that seemed to possess her that evening. Lacy talked, but she scarcely heeded him, and answered in monosyllables when she answered at all. The whole story seemed to her unreal and impossible. She longed for Basil to tell her what had really occurred and what she must do.

When she reached home, Basil was there, looking pale and grave, but besides there were Rosalind and Champion, and Mrs. Severn in a tumult of joy. To this circle Lacy introduced her, while Lance, pushing his way in unobserved, sat down gravely and regarded the company.

The company met the heroine of the hour with a burst of congratulation. Mrs. Severn embraced, Rosalind kissed, Champion shook hands with her. She, on her part, sat down on the first convenient chair and looked at Basil, asking, "Is it true?"

"Of course it is true!" said Rosalind, before he could answer. "Didn't James make the will, and know all along how it was, and yet he never said one word to me until after it was read to-day! And now you are a lady of fortune! — oh, such a fortune, Madeleine! — and the Severn star has risen at last again! It does not concern me, you know — at least not very much — -but I am so glad I scarcely know what to do."

"You made the will," said Madeleine, looking at Champion and at last beginning to understand the situation a little. "How could you — oh, how could you let Mary be so foolish!"

"She was determined on it," he answered. "I tell you frankly that I thought it my duty to remonstrate — knowing that she had relations much nearer than yourself, who expected at least a part of the inheritance — but she stopped me at once. She said that she had made up her mind to leave her property in this way and in no other. After that I had nothing to do but to draw up the document in legal form."

"And Mr. Devereux is not remembered?"

"Not even mentioned. She told me that this was by his special desire. 'He has made me promise not to leave him any thing,' she said. So I suppose I must acknowledge" — this to Basil — "that, in common with a great many other people, I have done him great injustice."

"I have felt sure of that for some time," said Basil. Then he walked over to Madeleine. "Did Mary give any hint to you of this intention?" he asked.

"None," she answered. "Can you think I would have allowed such a thing if she had? I cannot imagine what it means, I cannot imagine why, if she wanted to leave the fortune to one of us, she did not leave it to you."

"That is just what I said," remarked Mrs. Severn. "Why isn't it Basil? It always seems more natural for a man than for a woman to hold property, particularly such a property as this. But Mary was always very much attached to you, Madeleine — very much."

"She was very much attached to Basil also," said Madeleine, with a trembling voice.

"Thank God, she did not leave the property to me!" said Basil, quickly. "It is a possibility that I do not for a moment like to consider. Such a fear never occurred to me. I thought that she would probably leave the mills to Devereux, and the rest of her fortune to some of the Carlises."

"Mary never liked her father's family," said Rosalind.

"Everybody knows that. Nobody could blame her for it, either — they are such disagreeable people! Henry and Thomas Carlisle — her first cousins — were both here, and James says they were so angry! They even talked of undue influence and of disputing the will. What was it you said to them, James?"

"I told them (in substance) that they were preposterous fools," replied James. "'You are very much disappointed now, gentlemen,' I said, 'and that will excuse your language. When you come to your senses, you will realize the absurdity you are talking. You may have the will carried into any court of law, and you will find that it will stand — at my client's request I took care of that. The rest is sheer nonsense.' They blustered, of course, but that was the end of the matter."

"And, oh, don't you know that Mrs. Ingram is furious!" said Rosalind. — "*How* I always detested that old woman, and how she detested you, Madeleine! I am sure she could bear it better if the property had been left to Mr. Devereux."

"Madeleine looks pale," said Mrs. Severn, at that moment struck by her step-daughter's face. "I am afraid all this excitement is too much for her."

"I am a little unstrung," said Madeleine. "I cannot realize that it is all really true. I feel as if I were waiting for a further revelation of what Mary meant."

"I call such a feeling foolish and wrong," said Rosalind, who, being now married, felt that from her height of position and experience she was capable of enlightening on many points the unmarried mind. "It sounds like spiritualism. What further revelation *can* Mary make?"

"Madeleine is not exactly herself this evening," said Lacy, whose hand was on the back of her chair. "She is agitated and weary, depressed and yet excited; if we all went away and left her to rest, it might be better. I am sure she will look at things very differently to-morrow."

There was real consideration in this suggestion, though Rosalind resented Lacy's making it. "He is very ready to speak for Madeleine *now!*" she said to her husband, after they had taken their departure. To herself she said: "Helen has lost him. Her fortune is nothing at all compared to the great Carlisle estate." It must be added that Rosalind sighed a little as she made this reflection, not on account of Miss Champion's loss of Gordon Lacy, but because some tempting spirit whispered to her that, if she had only waited, a much more brilliant future might have been in store for her than was possible to James Champion's wife. She knew that Madeleine was at all times the very soul of generosity, and a dazzling picture rose before her. "We would have gone everywhere," she thought, "and there is no telling who I might not have ended by marrying!" But, to do justice to Rosalind's good sense, she did not render herself uncomfortable with these reflections very long. What was done was done. She had acted for the best according to her lights, "since nothing short of the gift of prophecy could have enabled me to foresee such an astounding turn of affairs," she added. This led her to say aloud:

"It seems impossible that Madeleine can really be so rich! What will she do with all her wealth, I wonder? It is a pity for the whole of it to go to Gordon Lacy, who never has done, and never will do, any thing but amuse himself writing poetry."

"Her engagement is certainly unfortunate," said Champion. "I never had much opinion of Lacy — but Madeleine is too loyal to withdraw from it now. Her wealth will make a great difference to Basil, however. He has only to purchase the mills —taking his time, of course, for payment — and his future is assured. With his business talents and energy, he will be one of the richest men in the country."

He repeated this opinion after he reached home, and, though Helen preserved an appearance of indifference, she both heard and heeded. After she went to her chamber that night, she sat in her dressing-robe before the fire, meditating deeply. She had lost Lacy. That fact was as clear to her as to Rosalind. "He'll never give up Madeleine for me now," she decided. Then she thought of Basil with more favor than she had ever done before.

This was not strange, since Miss Champion was a young lady altogether of her day and generation, and Basil had now the golden halo which he had heretofore lacked. An old name, a stainless character, and the prospect of being "one of the richest men in the country" — she appreciated the last of these things, and did not wholly ignore the first. So, it came to pass that her decision was taken — she would draw Basil back to her side and marry him. Rosalind was right when she said that the star of the Severns was in the ascendant once more.

Lacy, meanwhile, had lingered after the Champions to say a few words. Mrs. Severn was called away, Basil left the room, and he was alone with Madeleine. Taking her hands, he looked into her pale face, her wistful, shadow-circled eyes.

"To-morrow," he said, "you will be better, and realize more the great good fortune that has come to you. My darling, my darling, what a thing it is! — how it ends all fears and doubts of the future! How it will lift you into a realm where vulgar cares and sordid anxieties need never enter!"

"I am not sure," said Madeleine. "Perhaps it is because I am stunned that I do not seem to feel any thing clearly — except regret. I have no right to this fortune. I wish, oh, I wish that Mary had not left it to me!"

A slight shadow came over Lacy's face. Even at this moment he felt that she ought to remember *him*. He thought that she should have recollected the freedom which it would bestow upon him. His was not in the least what is commonly called a mercenary nature. Money for money's sake, nor even for the sake of the power and luxury it can buy, he had never valued. But, of late, it had been borne home to him that, to mount into that high region of aesthetic refinement where he longed to abide, money was absolutely necessary. Hence, he felt that Providence had in a particular manner cared for him now — and that Madeleine was ungrateful for this care.

He did not give expression to these sentiments, but they would have been apparent in his manner if Madeleine had bestowed her usual attention upon him. For once she was too much engrossed by other thoughts to do this, so he went away at last without having drawn from her a single expression of happiness in the great change that overshadowed her.

Then the brother and sister, left alone, looked at each other and asked, "What does it mean?" Their sympathy was so perfect, their knowledge of each other's character from long experience so exact, that they had no need to compare the feelings which this unexpected bequest roused in them. Each knew what the other thought, and so they simply uttered the interrogation recorded above.

It was an interrogation more easily asked than answered. The secret of what Mary meant might reasonably have been supposed to have gone with her into that great world whither she had passed; but Madeleine repeated again what she had shocked Rosalind by uttering once. "I cannot accept this bare fact as it stands; I feel as if there must be some further revelation of Mary's

wishes. When she was dying, she spoke to me of a letter, and I have the key of the desk in which it is to be found. To-morrow I will go to the Lodge for it. Until then we must wait."

It was in this manner that the current of life claimed those who, only for a moment, as it were, had paused by the side of a grave where life's interests had ended forever. Perhaps the only person neither surprised nor concerned by the will was Devereux. He had suspected very much how it would be, and now he felt that the freedom of which he once spoke to Madeleine had come to him — freedom to go away from the associations of his life, and enter on a new career alone. That all the tenderness he had ever felt for Mary was revived and intensified by her death, will readily be believed by those who know what power death has to rouse such emotions. If it did not awaken the tide of remorseful love which overwhelmed the cold lover of Daphnes, he was at least conscious, in a measure, of the feeling which has never found truer or tenderer expression than in the beautiful lines that are the key-note of the same poem:

"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."

## Chapter II

### The Message Of The Dead.

The next morning, early enough to avoid both Lacy and Rosalind, neither of whom she desired to see just then, Madeleine set out for the Lodge. What an effort it cost her to resolve to go there, it is hard to express. Her grief was still so fresh and keen that it was like returning to gaze on Mary's dead face to enter the home so intimately associated with her presence. The day before she would have felt that nothing could induce her to go, but in the course of a few hours it had become a necessity to do so, and Madeleine was not one to shrink from a necessity, even though it lacerated her heart.

This necessity cost her suffering more poignant than any which she had endured since her father and brother were borne home from the fields of honor, where they had fallen. She trod the familiar road leading to the Lodge with a mist of tears over her sight and choking sobs in her throat. Death — the death of those we love — is not only bitter to endure, but also hard to realize. But yesterday they were here by our side, looking into our eyes, and now they are so far away that not even imagination can pierce the indefinite regions to which they have gone. We cry to them and they do not answer, we stretch out our hands and they do not heed. Of all that love which life gave us, death only leaves us the power to pray. When the heart is sick with longing, it is not only faith but Nature which cries, "Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them."

When Madeleine entered the Lodge-gates and saw the closed blinds of the familiar windows, her resolution almost failed. "How can I?" she said, half aloud. But the hesitation did not last long. She girded up her strength and went forward, avoiding the front entrance of the house and passing round to the house-keeper's room where Jessie was usually to be found.

She was there now, sitting in that idleness of grief which, with the usually hard-working is so full of pathetic meaning, before the fire, a ray of yellow sunlight streaming across her black dress. Mary had been right. On her the blow fell most heavily. Devereux and Madeleine had other interests awaiting them, other claims already engrossing them, but for her the occupation of life

had come to an end. What had she ever been save Mary Carlisle's faithful friend and servant, and, now that Mary was gone where human faith and service were no longer needed, what remained for her? She had been asking herself this question, perhaps, for her eyes were heavy with weeping, when looking up she saw Madeleine standing in the door.

An expression of something like relief came over her face. She rose instantly. "I'm thankful to see you. Miss Madeleine," she said. "I couldn't say that to anybody else, but I was just thinking that it might ease my heart a bit if I could talk to you who was always with my dearie, and loved her a'most as well as I did."

"My poor Jessie," said Madeleine, coming forward, "I have thought of you a great deal. How sad and lonely you must be! Don't you think it might be better if you came into Stansbury and staid with us for a while?"

"What would I do there?" asked Jessie. "It's true I've nothing to do here — and that's the hardest thing to bear — but it would be worse anywhere else. Here's the only home I've ever had, and, please God, I sha'n't leave it till I'm forced to go for good."

"I hope that may never be," said Madeleine, as she sat down by the fire.

"It's for you to say," replied Jessie. "They tell me every thing belongs to you now. If it belonged to anybody else it's not me would stay an hour under the roof; but if you are not the first in kin, you are the first in love, and *that's* the best claim of the two according to my thinking. What's our mortal bodies? Don't they die, and aren't they put in the ground to moulder away? But our hearts don't die, and those that's nearest to them are the closest kin in my opinion."

"You are partly right," said Madeleine, who knew that Jessie's ties were altogether of the heart, "but it is possible to carry such an opinion too far — with regard to property, for instance. Dearly as I loved Mary, I was very distantly related to her. I cannot feel that I have any right to what she has left me."

"Miss Mary knew best," said Jessie, almost defiantly. "It was hers, and, if she wanted you to have it, that's enough."

Madeleine shook her head, but she had no intention of arguing the point, and after a few more words she rose. "I will be back presently," she said. "Now I must go — to Mary's room."

"It'll break your heart," said Jessie. "I can't keep out of it by night or by day, but it a'most breaks mine."

"I dread it," said Madeleine, "but I must go. Don't encourage me in my weakness."

She turned as she spoke, and was leaving the room, when, to her surprise, Jessie followed and laid her hand on her arm. "You'll mind one thing. Miss Madeleine," she said, eagerly; "the last wishes of the dead is binding on the living."

"Sometimes," answered Madeleine, astonished, yet with a flash of intuition connecting this warning with the letter which awaited her. Then decidedly but gently she put Jessie aside. "I must judge," she said, "what is binding." With these words she passed across the hall and ascended the staircase.

Who can measure the power of familiar objects to stab us to the heart when the Angel of Death has passed over the threshold? We never guess until such an hour what links of association are twined around the most ordinary things. We feel like storing away, as sacred relics, articles which yesterday had no value in our eyes; we enter as if it were a sanctuary that which so short a time ago was only a common chamber in our sight!

So Madeleine felt now. The room where Mary had lived, suffered, and died, was so eloquent of her presence, that it seemed impossible that presence could have passed away forever. All was in order, yet all terribly significant of what had been. She was met not by one, but by a hundred ghosts — ghosts of dead hours, of tender smiles, of words that still seemed lingering on the air. The couch on which Mary had been lying when she likened her to Elaine was still standing by the window, through the partially-closed blinds of which the morning sunlight streamed. Though the sash was down, the sweet notes of the birds outside came in, full of the spirit of happiness.

It was some time before Madeleine could control herself sufficiently to open the desk which stood on a table in a recess. At last with the key which hung at her watch-chain — the key which she had taken from Mary's neck — she unlocked and lifted back the scroll-like top. The first thing which she saw was a packet of Devereux's letters, tied with a ribbon, and laid carefully aside. The next was the letter to herself, directed in Jessie's writing.

This she took, closed and locked the desk again, and, going to one of the windows, which she opened in order to admit a little sunshine to dispel the chill air of the room, sat down to read the last message of the dead. It began as if Mary had been speaking:

"I have made my will, dear Madeleine, and left you all that is mine to leave. It is a burden which would long since have proved too heavy for my strength if Basil had not lifted it from me, and I owe you an explanation of why I have shifted it to you, who do not want it, I am sure. If what I have to say pains you in any manner, forgive me! I would be silent if I could, but it is impossible. You must know the truth, and I only pray you to believe that, in speaking it, there is not a single reproachful feeling in my breast. What has happened is not your fault — is not anybody's fault. Remember that, in dying, I tell you once more, that you have been the comfort and light of my life, and that I love you and trust you implicitly.

"You must understand that I should have left my fortune to Arnold Devereux, if he would have accepted it. But he anticipated my intention as soon as I spoke of a lawyer, and desired me so earnestly to leave him nothing, that I could not disregard his request. But I feel — I have felt ever since the suit was decided against him — that it is his by right; and he must have it. You see, therefore, that it is more a trust than an inheritance which I have left you. And now I will tell you why.

"I have left it to you instead of to him, because he loves you, and because I hope that you will love him when his honor is no longer bound to me. I need not tell you all the reasons why I know the first and hope the last. I know that you have both been every thing that was true and honorable. I never doubted that for a moment — never! The fortune is yours until you marry Arnold; but, I beg you, as the last favor I shall ever ask, to do so speedily, and then show him this letter, that he may understand how my desire has been to secure to him that which is justly his. He has been very kind and good to me from first to last, and I am not unreasonable enough to blame him that he did not love me as he loves you. It was foolish of me to fancy that any one ever could love me in that manner. Yet I am not sorry to have fancied it. It made me very happy, and I do not think it has done much harm to any one else.

"Dear Madeleine, I can scarcely bear to write all this. I know it will pain you, and I fear you may think that I mean to reproach you. Do not believe such a thing for a moment. You are, and always have been, the gentlest, truest, best of friends. I have blessed you often in my heart, and I bless you once again for all your unselfish tenderness to me in the past and present.

"I hope I have not done wrong. If I have, you must pardon me, and think that, for the first time, I have had to rely altogether on my own judgment. If it has misled me, remember that I meant to act for the best. God bless you and make you happy. That is the prayer of

"Mary."

The amazement which Madeleine felt, when the letter dropped from her hand to her lap, was so great that it literally overwhelmed every other feeling. What madness had possessed Mary? This was the first thought which occurred to her — the first definite expression of her astonishment. She said to herself that nothing could possibly have astonished her more than this revelation of what had been in Mary's mind. How had such a thing been suggested to her? What did it mean?

She looked round the room with a sense of hopeless appeal against the judgment which had thus wronged her. "O Mary, how could you! — how could you!" she exclaimed aloud. "Why

did you not speak to me? Why did you go away with this shadow of cruel misconception over our faithful love? Oh, my dear, can you hear me say that you were wrong? What delirium possessed you to dream of such a thing?"

Alas, vain words! The silence which Death had made was never to be broken: the work on which Death had set his seal remained, with all its train of consequences yet to come. Madeleine felt as if her brain was whirling. She tried to go back and remember what had possibly occurred that could have left such an impression as this on Mary's mind. The effort was quite useless. She could remember nothing. Finally, with a despairing impulse, she took the letter and went down again to Jessie. The thought which suggested itself to her was that perhaps Jessie, who had written these words, might be able to throw some light on them.

Jessie heard the approaching step, and her face set itself in certain resolute lines that meant a great deal — lines that Madeleine understood as soon as she entered. Nevertheless, she advanced with the letter in her hand.

"Jessie," she said, quickly, "you wrote this. For Heaven's sake tell me, if you can, what it means! What induced Mary to think such a thing, and why did not you warn me what she had done?"

"Take it away, Miss Madeleine!" said Jessie, waving the letter back. "I don't want to see it, and I promised never to speak of it to a living soul so long as I lived. I wrote down just what she told me — word for word as it came from her mouth — and that's all I know about it."

"But there is no reason why you should not speak of it to me — to whom the letter is addressed," said Madeleine. "Jessie, if you know —"

"I don't know any thing at all but what Miss Mary told me," said Jessie, "and I've nearly forgot that. Do you reckon I was thinking of any thing but *her* then?"

"What did she tell you?" asked Madeleine. "Oh, if she had only spoken to me! If she had only given me one opportunity to assure her that she was wrong!"

"She told me what's there," said Jessie, pointing to the letter — "nothing more. I was not troubling my head about any thing but her, and she was weak and faint enough. Twice I had to stop and give her medicine."

"And you cannot help me!" said Madeleine. "You can give me no clew to the cause of this letter! — no idea what made Mary suspect a treachery which never existed!"

Jessie hesitated. Evidently she had something to tell, yet she could with difficulty conquer her reluctance to speak of the subject of the letter even to the person to whom it was addressed. After a moment, however, she said: "If you are talking about Miss Mary's believing that there was something between you and Mr. Devereux, I can give a guess as to who put such a notion into her head."

"Who?" demanded Madeleine, breathlessly.

"Why, who should it be but that old cat — the Lord forgive me! — Mrs. Ingram? She's always peering and prying into what don't concern her, and it was the very morning of the ball that I was in Miss Mary's dressing-room looking over some of her things, when I heard Mrs. Ingram talking in the next room. I thought it was queer for her to be there, but I didn't pay any attention to what she was saying — though her voice kept getting louder — until at last I heard Miss Mary say — and her voice was like a flute, it was so clear — that it was base and cruel to bring such a story to her, who was blind and could not see for herself, but that she did not believe one word of it. She said she would trust her life, and her love, and her honor to you, and that she had trusted them to Mr. Devereux. Then she told Mrs. Ingram to go — she had heard enough. 'If you ever read your Bible,' she said, 'I wonder you don't remember that if the peace-makers are blessed, those that destroy peace must be cursed.' After that Mrs. Ingram said something about not staying to hear herself cursed, and banged the door as she went out. I didn't think much about it at the time, but now I know she must have been warning Miss Mary about you and Mr. Devereux."

"O Mary, my generous, noble Mary!" said Madeleine, while a shower of tears fell from her eyes over the letter in her hand. At that moment she scarcely felt a throb of indignation against Mrs. Ingram — it was of Mary only that she thought, Mary who had proved so tender and so loyal. "Oh, if I had only known! — if I had only known!" she cried.

"It don't matter now," said Jessie, wiping her eyes. "She never believed any harm of you — that I know — and she's gone where sorrow and doubt and trouble are at an end. I begin to understand what the bible means when it says that, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. My treasure is in heaven now, and, please God, I mean to be a better woman, to meet her there. All I care about is, to end my days here in this house; and you know me well enough. Miss Madeleine, to be sure I'll serve you faithfully."

"I am sure you would never serve any one otherwise than faithfully," said Madeleine, "but you are mistaken if you think the house is mine. How the matter will be settled, I cannot tell; but this letter makes it impossible for me to accept Mary's bequest. I am going to Basil now, and I know what he will say."

"You won't give it up — O Miss Madeleine, you won't give it up!" said Jessie, imploringly. "It was Miss Mary's last wish that you should have it."

"It was her wish that I should have it in a way that is utterly impossible," said Madeleine. "I shall be sorry if it makes any change for you, but the legacy which Mary left you — it is five thousand dollars, and will bring an income of four hundred, Basil says — is secured to you."

"What do I care about legacies?" said Jessie. "All I want is to end my days here. It's the only home I've ever known since my dear mistress saved me from the poor-house — and I don't want to know any other."

"I am sorry that I cannot give you any absolute assurance of what is to be," said Madeleine, rising. "There is trouble before all of us, I fear; but we can only do what is right, and leave the rest to God."

### Chapter III

#### The Beginning Of The End

While Madeleine, at the Lodge, was reading, with bewildered amazement, the record of Mary's last thoughts and wishes, an unusual visitor came in Stansbury to pay her a call of congratulation. This visitor was Miss Champion, who, without informing any one of her intention, set forth soon after breakfast, for the Severns'. Meditation with her bore fruit. If she was to lose Lacy, she would run no risk of delay in securing Basil. Failing a "poet," the future owner of the Carlisle Mills was not to be despised.

Fortune favored her. Miss Severn was not at home, Ann informed her, and Mrs. Severn was very much engaged; but if she would wait — Yes, Miss Champion, mindful of her object, would wait. She swept across the hall, and was ushered into the sitting-room, where Basil — on whom idleness weighed heavily — was reading a newspaper.

He rose quickly. Was this a goddess who entered, in flowing robes of rustling black silk, with one crimson rose at her throat, and another in her hat, her cheeks glowing, her eyes shining? The young man, who had been reading with a very distracted mind the political intelligence of the day, was, for a moment, dazzled. Only for a moment. He advanced the next instant, courteously, but so coldly that Miss Champion felt that the occasion called for her best diplomacy.

"Pray excuse me for intruding so early," she said, extending both hands with a gesture of irresistible cordiality, "but I could not restrain myself any longer. I felt that I must come to congratulate Madeleine on her great good fortune."

"Madeleine would appreciate your kindness if she were at home," answered Basil, "but she went out an hour or two ago. She does not, however, consider the bequest to which I suppose you allude in the light of a very great good fortune."

"Does she not?" said Miss Champion, with an involuntary opening of the eyes, which indicated as much incredulity as surprise. "Of course, I know that she was greatly attached to Miss Carlisle, but still — the fortune must go to somebody now that she is dead, and it is a great deal better for it to go to Madeleine than to anybody else."

"I am not sure of that," said Basil. Then he moved a large arm-chair near the fire. "Pray sit down," he said, thawing a little under the influence of the sunshine showered so warmly upon him. "My mother will be in presently."

"Thanks," said Helen, graciously. She sank into the chair, and glanced up at him with the pleasant consciousness of looking her (daylight) best. "How strange and sad it seems to remember all that has happened since we met last!" she added, after a moment, drooping her lids. "Only think of the ball, and poor Miss Carlisle! You can't tell how much I have felt for Madeleine and — yourself!"

Over the last word her voice dropped to a lower and tenderer key, and Basil's heart thrilled; but he was firmly resolved against being made "a fool of" any longer, and, moreover, he had learned to distrust the speaker. It is to be supposed that even Circe's spells would lose their power after a time, if cast again and yet again over the same subject.

"Thank you for your sympathy," he said, quietly. "Mary's death has been a great grief both to Madeleine and myself — one of which I do not yet like to speak."

"I think painful subjects are best avoided," said Miss Champion, in a tone which indicated that she practised her own philosophy, "but I could not help letting you know how much sympathy I have felt."

Then there was a short pause. "I have given him an opening," thought Helen, "why don't he speak?" As for Basil, he felt as clearly as she could possibly have desired, that he had but to speak to obtain a more definite assurance than he had ever been able to draw from this slippery young lady. A month before, he would have grasped such an opportunity eagerly, but now he hesitated — why, he scarcely knew. It was not that he was less thrilled by the fair face turned toward him, or that wisdom had overmastered passion in his breast. It was simply an instinct that kept him silent. Perhaps the uncertainty of his circumstances had, unconsciously to himself, something to do with this. He was on the eve of a great change — one way or another — in his affairs. In a little while he would have some positive prospect to offer the woman he loved, but now he felt that silence best became him. Helen Champion knew — had known for many a day, on the best possible authority — that his heart was hers. Heretofore she had treated the knowledge very lightly. He did not like to consider why it should suddenly seem of more value in her eyes now.

These reflections did not last very long. When he spoke, it was in a manner which irked Helen exceedingly. "It was very kind of you to feel for us," he said. "You know how grateful I must be for any of your thoughts — and especially for such thoughts as these."

"You do not seem to care for them very much," said she, with tears of genuine vexation rising in her eyes. "You never come near me to — to ask if I think of you. I fear you have not forgiven my foolish conduct the night of the ball. Yet you ought to know by this time how capricious and frivolous I am — sometimes."

"Pray do not mention it," said Basil, gently. "I have not thought, I do not think, any thing unkind of you. Such trifles as those to which you allude have been swept from my mind by all that has occurred since that night."

This was not so consoling as it should have been, but Miss Champion made the best of it. "I am glad you are not vexed with me," she said. "I have been fearing that you were."

She glanced up at him with eyes shining through their tears like diamonds. In common with all men of his class, Basil was very easily affected by a woman's tears. He could not

withstand them even if the woman who shed them was indifferent to him, and this woman, with all her faults, he loved deeply.

"How could you wrong me by supposing such a thing?" he said, taking her hand. "I was pained, I own; but vexed — with you! That is impossible. Yet, if you realized your power, Helen, I think you would use it more generously."

"Have I any power?" asked Helen, naively. "How much?"

It is not worth while to follow the conversation further than this. As is always the case in an encounter of the kind, the one who was the most in earnest fared the worst. A man feeling less deeply, less keenly alive to what may be called the chivalry of sentiment, would not have been drawn on so easily; but the frank simplicity of Basil's character fitted him very little for such a game.

He had received Miss Champion's pledge of faith — a pledge given freely, and it may be added with perfect sincerity — had escorted her home and returned to his house, when Madeleine arrived from the Lodge, with an expression on her face which — before she uttered a word — told him that she had learned something.

Notwithstanding this partial preparation, he was thunder-struck when Mary's letter was placed in his hands. "Was she mad?" he ejaculated, looking up at his sister.

"No — not mad, but deceived," Madeleine answered. "Poor Mary! Nothing could possibly show her childlike ignorance of the world and human nature more plainly than that letter. Of course she was wrong — all wrong — in the idea on which it is based; but, even if that idea had been right, what pathetic want of knowledge her manner of dealing with it displays!"

"But, in the name of Heaven, what possessed her to entertain such an idea?" demanded Basil. "To suspect you — of all people!"

"She was blind," said Madeleine, "and the blind are easily rendered suspicious. Jessie thinks that Mrs. Ingram is the person who is accountable for it. I do not know."

"If she had only consulted any one!" said Basil. "But to act like this solely on her own judgment — she who never had any means of forming a judgment — it is the most inconceivable thing! And what is to be the result? Since the supposition on which she wrote was an altogether mistaken one, what do you mean to do?"

"You know what I mean to do," she answered. "I mean to make the property over to Mr. Devereux. It is to him in reality that it is left, and Mary says what I, also, believe — that part at least of it is rightfully his."

There was a minute's silence. Then Basil said: "You must consider this well. You must not act hastily and afterward regret what you have done. Remember the fortune is legally and absolutely yours, and it secures you — I do not speak of any one else — all the best gifts of life. If you put it away on a mere impulse —"

She stopped him by placing her hand on his arm. "Answer me one thing," she said. "In my place, what would you do?"

Their eyes met — the same clear light burning steadily in both. Each knew, though neither expressed this knowledge, what the sacrifice would cost, yet it is not possible to say that either felt for a moment the faintest temptation to retain that which honor bade them surrender. The merit of the sacrifice would have been greater if there had been this temptation; but there are some natures to whom such a thing is impossible, and both Basil and Madeleine belonged to that class.

"In your place I would give up the property," said Basil. "It is a question of honor — not of law."

"I knew you would say so," she replied. "Now, what is the first step to be taken?"

"The first step will be to let Devereux know — and here, I am sure, you will encounter a difficulty. If he would not accept the fortune from Mary, is it likely he will accept it from you?"

"I fear there will be a great deal of difficulty," said she, "but you must see him at once, and you must make him understand that, if he refuses to accept it, I will nevertheless make it over to him, and it may lie untouched, for I cannot and will not retain it."

"Do you mean to tell him any thing of this?" asked Basil, touching the letter.

A flush rose to Madeleine's cheek. For the first time, the realization came to her of the singular position in which the letter placed her with regard to Devereux. "He must be told something of it," she said, after a short pause, "but not all. Tell him, in Mary's own words, that she left her fortune to me 'as a trust, not as an inheritance:' that she believed it to be rightfully his, and that she wished him to have it."

Basil shook his head — a gesture which quite as often expresses doubt as dissent. "It will look very mysterious," he said. "Devereux will naturally ask why, if she wished to leave it to him, she did not do so in a legal manner?"

"Remind him of the promise he exacted from her that she would not do so. For the rest, we cannot help the mystery. It is impossible to make the contents of that letter public."

"Quite impossible," said Basil, glancing again at the letter in his hand. "One thing is certain," he added, with emphasis, "I should like to cut into mince-meat the tongue which has been at the root of this mischief!"

"That would not remedy it now," said Madeleine, with a sigh. "It was base and cruel, but we must deal with what is; not with what might have been."

"And you wish me to see Devereux at once?"

"Yes. There is no reason for delay, and he may leave Stansbury."

"That is true," said Basil, stretching out his hand for his hat, which he had thrown carelessly on a table near by. "I confess I see nothing but trouble and vexation ahead," he went on. "He is certain to make difficulties, if not to refuse the fortune point-blank; and then what is to be done?"

"As the Spaniards say — God knows!" answered Madeleine. "Let him do what he will, our course is clear. You were right when you called it a question of honor. Go, then, dear Basil, and — will you stop on the way and ask Gordon to come to me? I owe it to him to let him hear my decision first from myself."

Basil assented, but as he left the room a shadow fell over his face. Madeleine's allusion to Lacy had not been necessary to remind him of Helen Champion. He had not distinctly said to himself that her graciousness that morning had been dictated by the changed prospects that opened to him through the fortune which had fallen to his sister; but he was quite as well aware of these prospects as James Champion, and he had felt instinctively that it would not do to analyze too closely the motives which prompted Helen's accession of regard. In a manner not unusual with men of his order, he had resigned himself to a half-sad knowledge of the imperfections of his idol. He had told himself more than once that, as he had been foolish enough to set his heart on this woman, he must take her as she was, not hoping that she would ever be able to reign as queen in the high places of his soul. Some of her faults he could not fail to see; against the perception of others he closed his eyes, as he had closed them this morning — refusing to consider why she had sought him out. Half unconsciously he reasoned that she must care for him since she had encouraged him to believe that she would marry him, long before these later events occurred; but his heart misgave him when — as he went in search of Devereux — he thought, "Now will come the test!"

He had not proceeded more than half a square before he met Lacy; and Madeleine was still sitting with Mary's letter in her hand, when she heard the familiar step of the latter on the gravel-walk leading to the house.

She scarcely understood why she shrank with such a feeling of dread from the interview before her. "I am weak and fanciful," she thought. "No doubt Gordon will agree with me. He cannot do otherwise; but I know it will be a terrible disappointment to him, and it seems hard that I should be obliged to cause it."

There was certainly no anticipation of disappointment visible on Gordon's face when he came in. The world to him this morning was flooded with sunshine. He felt that he was fully justified by circumstances in those two apparently foolish acts of his life — his devotion to literature and his engagement to Madeleine. In remembering the past, he conveniently ignored all his doubts and hesitations, and appeared in his own recollection as an embodiment of loyal constancy. For this constancy he now had his reward! All sordid questions of ways and means were now at an end. He would be lifted above all need of degrading his genius to the mere uses of subsistence. He would have leisure to cultivate art, and he would possess the society of the woman who was his chosen companion and best inspirer.

He looked like "his old self," Madeleine thought, when he entered — the lover who had come to woo, not the one who, since that wooing, had so often brought his gloomy moods to her — and her heart smote her that she must cast a cloud over this brightness. As he reached her side, his first words were caressing:

"*Chérie*," he said, "you are not yourself even yet! You look pale and sad. I think, if you went out, the mild day would do you good. I see you have your hat on. Were you waiting for me to walk?"

"No," Madeleine answered. "I have just come in from the Lodge."

"Ah!" said Lacy, "that accounts for your pale looks, then. You should not have gone to a place so full of sad associations for some time yet; and the walk was too long for you, besides."

"Oh, no," said Madeleine, "I scarcely noticed the walk. I was thinking of other things. I felt that I must go. There were reasons — Gordon, I have something very important to tell you."

"Tell me, then," said Gordon, indulgently. He sat down near her — in the chair which Miss Champion had occupied an hour or two before — and looked at her with eyes full of sunny light. "You are tormenting yourself about some scruple," he said. "I see that plainly. It is my turn to play comforter now. Let me hear what troubles you."

"It is not a scruple," she replied, "but something much more grave. Do you remember last night when I said that I was waiting for a further revelation of what Mary meant by leaving her fortune to me? Well, I have had the revelation."

"Madeleine!" said Lacy, in a tone of surprise. He was thoroughly astonished. Was this spiritualism, as Rosalind had said? or had her wonderful good fortune turned Madeleine's brain?

"When Mary was dying," Madeleine went on quickly — anxious to make the explanation and be over with it — "she told me to take from her neck the key of her desk, and that in it I should find a letter addressed to myself, containing her last wishes. I took the key after her death, but I did not open the desk — not thinking that the letter could be of any immediate importance, and shrinking from the pain of reading it. But last night — as soon as I began to understand the strange terms of her will — I thought of the letter at once, and that was what I meant when I spoke of a further revelation of her wishes. This morning I went out to the Lodge, and — I found it."

"Found what?" asked Lacy. He still spoke with indulgent kindness, sure that nothing more than some feminine (probably sentimental) nonsense was behind all this formidable preamble. "The letter do you mean? I hope there was nothing terrible in it. Last wishes are usually very uncomfortable things. What injunction did Miss Carlisle's letter contain?"

"It contained more than an injunction," said Madeleine. "It told me that she left her fortune to me as a trust, not as an inheritance."

She repeated almost mechanically the words which had graved themselves on her memory as expressing concisely the spirit of Mary's letter. They were words which — uttered in her firm voice — had to Lacy the force of a moral blow. As was natural, however, he failed to comprehend their full significance.

"A trust!" he repeated; "not an inheritance! What is the meaning of that?"

Madeleine hesitated, uncertain whether or not to tell him all. She had put Mary's letter in her pocket when she heard his step. Now her hand involuntarily sought it. Should she show it to

him, or should she not? A second's reflection made her decide in the negative. How could she show to the man to whom she was engaged a letter, full of the evident belief that she loved, and clearly expressed hope that she would marry, some one else? It was simply impossible.

"The meaning," she answered, after a moment's pause, "is, that Mary wanted to leave her fortune to Mr. Devereux — to whom she thought that all the property in litigation justly belonged — but he desired her so earnestly not to do so that she left it to me, and then wrote this letter, telling me that she wished him to have it."

As she completed this most lame and blundering explanation, Madeleine felt that the amazement on Lacy's face was not remarkable. He looked at her as if he thought it a very doubtful question whether or not she were sane.

"Are you really in earnest?" he said, at last. "Had Miss Carlisle lost her senses? Left her property to you, and then wrote a letter saying she wished Devereux to have it? I never heard such a meaningless absurdity in my life! If she wanted him to have it, why on earth did she not leave it to him?"

"He asked her not to do so."

"And yet she thought he would accept it from you — by Jove! There are no words to characterize such folly. In fact, it is more than folly — it's downright craziness! Your friend must have been out of her mind, Madeleine."

"No, she was not," said Madeleine; "she was only blind and — mistaken. She knew so little of the world — nothing of human nature. Poor Mary! She meant to act for the best, and yet how much trouble she has made for me — for all of us!"

"I do not see any necessity for that," said Lacy, a little coldly. "Such folly is scarcely worth a second thought. As you say, it displays supreme ignorance — nothing else. Of course, it does not bind you at all."

"Do you think not?" asked Madeleine. Her face grew a shade paler; her eyes gazed at him with steady sadness. Suddenly she felt the struggle before her. It was borne to her not as an instinct, but as a certainty, that Lacy would not approve of what she felt bound to do.

"I am sure not," he answered, decidedly. "Is this the phantom that is disturbing you? Listen to a little reason about it. In the first place, there is every presumption that Miss Carlisle wrote that letter when entirely incapable of exercising even her ordinary power of judgment; therefore, even if its substance were sensible, it would not bind you to a direct contradiction of her will. But its substance is not sensible. On the contrary, it is simply absurd to imagine that Devereux would accept a fortune in such a manner. Refuse it from *her* and take it from *you*! The idea is too preposterous to be worth serious consideration."

"I fear you are right," said Madeleine, looking troubled, "but, even if he does refuse, it is impossible for me to retain it."

"What!" said Lacy. His astonishment had been ascending like a scale in music, and this exclamation marked the highest point. A vivid change passed over his face — a change embodying coldness, disgust, incredulity. "You cannot mean such a thing!" he said.

"How can I mean any thing else?" asked Madeleine, eagerly — almost nervously. "Stop a minute and think! The fortune was Mary's, and she tells me with her last breath what she wishes done with it. How can I be honorable, and refuse to do what she desires?"

"Do you think I have not as keen a sense of honor as yourself?" demanded Lacy. "But this is mere Quixotism. The fortune is not only legally but morally yours. If you throw it away — but I will not entertain such an idea! Madeleine, my darling, for Heaven's sake, trust to my judgment! You are not fitted to judge — you are overwrought, and ready to see things in an exaggerated light. I am sane and cool, and I tell you that you will be doing yourself, and every one connected with you, a grievous wrong if you act in this manner."

"I do not think of myself," said Madeleine, with a low sob. "But I confess it is hard to think of others — of Basil, and of you, dear Gordon —"

But Gordon threw his head back haughtily. This was not the kind of consideration he wanted. "I beg you will not think of me — at least, not in such a connection as that," he said. "If you believe that I have been pleading for myself, you do me great injustice. I certainly hoped that the long period of waiting to which we have looked forward might be abridged by your good fortune; but I could afford such a hope since I think " (quite loftily) "that I have sufficiently proved my disinterestedness."

"Do you fancy that I ever doubted it?" asked Madeleine. Her eyes were brimming with wistful tears, but they did not soften Lacy's heart, which was just then full of resentment. Never in his life had he been so outraged before — so set aside and made of no account, where he should have been of chief importance! It was almost incredible! After all his sacrifices for Madeleine, was it possible that she could treat him like this!

"If our engagement means any thing at all," he presently said, "it means that you have bound yourself to some regard for my wishes, and respect for my opinions. If you persist in your present intention, it will prove that you have neither the one nor the other, and the engagement, therefore, is little more than an empty body without a spirit."

"Have I ever failed to show regard for your wishes before?" asked Madeleine. "Do you not know that it almost breaks my heart to act in opposition to you? Gordon, I thought you would feel with me that, however hard the necessity might be, it is a necessity. After all, we are only where we were before that will was opened."

"Only where we were!" repeated Gordon. He uttered a short, sarcastic laugh. "And pray where was that? You may not have realized, but I have, for weeks and months past, that our engagement has been simply a hopeless clinging to something without definite end. I knew that we could never afford to marry, unless some entirely unforeseen good fortune happened to one of us. The good fortune came — from Heaven, as it were — and you tell me that you mean to throw it away."

"But it has not ever really been mine," said Madeleine, gazing at him with all her heart in her eyes — eyes which pleaded mutely for one word of encouragement, one word of acquiescence in the sacrifice for honor's sake — "Mary did not mean it for me, it was of Mr. Devereux she thought."

"And it must surely be of Mr. Devereux that you think," said Lacy, forgetting himself in the sense of indignant impotence which possessed him, in finding that even his influence over Madeleine was powerless to change her resolution. "Your solicitude for him must certainly be great, since, to place at his feet a fortune which he is not likely to accept — and to which he has not the slightest claim — you are willing to throw Basil on the world without occupation, and to render our marriage virtually impossible."

"O Gordon, how can you be so cruel!" said Madeleine. She clasped her hands together, and lifted her appealing face toward him, as — having risen from his chair — he stood before her. "Is it I who will do all this? But surely you perceive that I cannot help it — when duty and honor are at stake, one cannot count sacrifices. Basil thinks that I am right. He has gone to Mr. Devereux now."

Lacy looked confounded. This was worse — much worse — than he had expected. He grew fairly white with anger — anger which for a moment rendered him incapable of expression. When he spoke at last, his voice was so tense that it did not sound like his own. "In that case," he said, "it seems to me hardly worth while to keep up such a farce as our engagement has become. You think of every one before me, you consult every one but me. You are only kind enough to inform me after you have already taken steps to commit such a stupendous act of folly as this."

"With regard to the engagement, it must be as you like," said Madeleine. She also rose, but there was no trace of anger or haughtiness in her manner — only a grave, gentle dignity touched with sadness. This was no shock to her. She knew now that for some time she had expected it. How much pain it held for her, she did not stop to ask. The pride which often stands a woman in good stead upheld her, as she went on: "Even if it comes to that issue, I cannot recede

from what I know to be right. You should not ask it of me — and, above all, you should not insinuate, as you did a moment ago, that I think of any thing but my honor. That not only wronged me, but it was unworthy of you. If you think it best for us to part, do me the justice to remember hereafter that it was by your act — not mine."

As the clear, sweet tones ceased, there was a silence for a minute, and, if ever the forces of good and evil fought in a man's soul, they did in Lacy's then. He was half minded to say, "Do what you will — I cannot live without you!" to beg her to forgive him and let him keep the treasure of her faith. But the demon of selfishness, which he had been fostering for months past, rose up now in the might which he had given it. "Think of your own prospects," said that mentor; "remember your brilliant talents which only need a field; think of all the sacrifices you have already made, and do not bind you life any longer in idle, aimless waiting. Break your chain, and go into the world a free man."

Listening to this excellent counsel, there was no softening in his tone when he answered Madeleine's last words. "I cannot admit that. It is your act — not mine — which separates us. You show me plainly and decidedly of how little importance I am in your life. I should have little self-respect if I could continue to fill the position of your betrothed husband, while in a matter which concerns you vitally you put me contemptuously aside. But all this is useless. Pardon some of the terms I have ventured to use, and let me say good-morning."

"Good-by," said Madeleine, holding out her hand. The same strange, sad gentleness was in her tone and gesture. Dimly Lacy felt that she looked as a guardian angel might when forced to leave an erring human soul. "God bless you!" she said, in a low voice. "Don't imagine that I have any harsh thoughts. Perhaps you are right — perhaps it is best. I seem to have failed to make you happy. But I shall be very glad to hear that you have found happiness elsewhere. Believe that."

"I can readily believe that you are completely indifferent to me," replied he — angered afresh by this, yet touched, indignant, desiring — he knew not what. He did not take her outstretched hand, but, retreating a little, made a quick, defiant bow and was gone.

## Chapter IV

### The Cost Of Sacrifice.

As Lacy's ringing step passed away, Madeleine sank down again in the chair from which she had risen, and asked herself if life had ended within her, or why she felt so strangely stunned and quiet. Her power of emotion seemed for the time suspended; she was not conscious either of indignation or pain. She had simply a dull sense of having received a heavy blow, and she said quietly, "It is over!"

After a while she rose and went up-stairs — stopping a moment in the hall to speak to Mrs. Severn in her usual manner. "You look pale, Madeleine," said that good lady, but this was all she noticed. "I feel a little tired," replied Madeleine, and went on to her room, where she closed the door. Even then, however, it was not to give way to any burst of grief. She wondered at her own singular apathy and calm. She laid aside her hat and jacket, walked to the mirror and smoothed her hair, saying again half mechanically — as she met her own sad eyes: "It is over! Why do I not care more?"

Yet, as she asked the question, instinct warned her that the reaction of keen suffering was to come. Only light natures — natures to whom love is incomprehensible (save in its lowest forms of foolish sentiment or animal passion), and faith a jest can break without a pang such ties, and end such hopes as Madeleine had seen vanish from her that morning. Pain is the chiasm which concentrates all sacrifices, and pain was yet to wring her heart in its strong grasp. Some realization of this — together with a great sense of emptiness and desolation — made her sink on

her knees before an oratory in the corner of the room. At the feet of the large, white crucifix lay a rosary and an "Imitation." She opened the last like one seeking words of comfort, and this was what she read:

"Free me from all evil passions, and cure my heart of all disorderly affections; so that, inwardly healed and well purified, I may become apt to love, courageous to suffer, and steadfast to persevere.

"A great thing is love, a great good every way; which alone lighteneth all that is burdensome, and beareth equally all that is unequal.

"For it carrieth a burden without being burdened, and maketh all else that is bitter sweet and savory.

"Love will tend upward and not be detained by things beneath.

"Love will be at liberty, and free from all worldly affection, that its interior vision be not hindered; that it suffer itself not to be entangled with any temporal interest, nor cast down by misfortune.

"Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven or in earth: for love is born of God, and cannot rest but in God, above all created things."

Golden words of heavenly wisdom which in their tender sweetness loosed the bonds of numb apathy, and brought a wave of sorrow over her soul. "O Lord," she cried, "give to me this divine love, so that the desertion of no human friend, the failure of no human faith, may grieve the spirit fixed on Thee."

An hour later Basil returned and asked for Madeleine. "She is up-stairs, I think," said Mrs. Severn, from whom the weight of years seemed lifted by the pleasant consciousness that henceforth she would have no need to darn table-linen, or pay visits on foot. "Gordon Lacy was here for some time, and after he left she went to her own room. Shall I send and let her know you want to see her?"

"No," answered Basil, after a pause; "I will wait till she comes down. There is no reason why I should see her at once. Probably she is resting. She took a long walk this morning."

He went out of the sitting-room without saying any more than this. He, too, felt tired in mind and body, weary of the strain of much emotion, and disposed to defer the disagreeable duty of telling his step-mother what a mere dream Madeleine's fortune was to prove. "Nothing is settled yet," he thought. "There is time enough."

It did not occur to Madeleine to remain in her own room when the dinner-bell rang. She had never been one of the women who "give way," and to whom every thing must be accommodated. On the contrary, she was one of those in whom long habit had trained the original impulse of self-control, until she was capable, even in great emergencies, of putting her own feelings aside and caring unselfishly for the comfort of those around her. It was this impulse which made her rise now from the couch, on which she had thrown herself in utter exhaustion, and go down-stairs. To bear her burden bravely, to hide as far as possible the depth of her wound, and to make no one else unhappy because she was miserable — these were the ends which half-unconsciously she proposed to herself, and it was thus that the brave, sweet spirit rose up, without bitterness, to meet the suffering which had fallen on it.

Basil noticed her altered looks and absolute want of appetite at dinner, though he wisely abstained from remark; but after they rose from table he followed her into the hall and proposed that they should go into the garden. "The day is delightful," he added, "and I have something to say to you."

"Wait till I put on a hat," said Madeleine. The hat was soon put on, and then they went into the garden together. The day was indeed delightful — full of the breath of advancing spring, and soft with a faint, purple mist. Who does not know the feeling of such a day in February? Birds are singing, buds are expanding, green shoots are coming up out of the brown earth, flowers are gay along the garden borders, an odor of violets fills the air.

Yet to those over whom the shadow of grief rests, there is nothing, perhaps, more mournful than such a day. The dreariest December sky would be more welcome than this buoyancy of awakening life. "It is only when the first bitterness of the spirit is past, that the voice of Nature can reach sad ears. Her call is too still, too gentle, to be heard when a tumult is in the heart."

There was a tumult in Madeleine's heart, little as she gave any sign of it, and so the multitudinous sweet sounds and scents rather oppressed than cheered her. She did not even notice her favorite flowers, but plunged immediately into the subject that demanded her attention, if it did not claim her interest. "What did Mr. Devereux say, Basil?" she asked.

"Exactly what I expected," Basil replied. "He refuses absolutely to hear of such a thing as accepting the property, and he is coming this afternoon to tell you so."

"That is unnecessary," she said, with a slight chord of impatience in her voice. "Did you not tell him that, as far as I am concerned, the matter is fixed — that nothing can change my resolution?"

"Yes, I told him that, and a great deal more. I think we must have talked for an hour and a half; but I left him as decided as I found him. I don't think he has the least idea of yielding."

"I am sorry," said Madeleine, "but even in that case it is impossible for me to keep the property. Am I not right?" said she, stopping and turning to him appealingly. "Should I not give it up?"

"You are quite right," said Basil. "The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that it would be impossible for you honorably to retain property which was bequeathed to you under an altogether false impression. Mary left it to you because she thought she would thereby be virtually leaving it to Devereux. Now, for you to take it and marry another man —"

Something in Madeleine's face — a certain shrinking expression — hushed the words on his lips. He thought suddenly of Lacy, and was not surprised when she looked up with a faint quiver of her lips. "Never mind about that," she said. "There is no need to take into consideration any thing about marriage. The fact simply remains that I cannot honorably keep the fortune. That is enough."

"Madeleine," said Basil, suddenly taking her hand, "is your engagement broken?"

"It is at an end," she answered, simply. Then, as she saw a quick flash of anger in his eyes, she put out her other hand and laid it on his wrist. "There is nothing to resent," she said, "nothing to regret. When two people recognize that they have made a mistake, it is best to end it — do you not think so?"

"But why is it that you — that Lacy — only recognized your mistake this morning?" asked he, looking at her suspiciously.

"We have been advancing to the recognition for some time," she replied. "I see that now. This morning we faced the truth. No one is to blame. It is for the best. I am sure of that."

"I am sure," said Basil, full of heat, "that Lacy objected to your resigning this fortune."

She smiled — a shadowy ghost of a smile. "Edward the Confessor said that the secrets of the household should be known to God and the saints alone," she answered. "I have always thought that the affairs of those who are — who were — lovers, should rest under the same seal. I cannot describe even to you, dear Basil, how we parted. It is surely enough to say that no one is to blame."

Then silence fell for several minutes as they paced the garden-paths together, between trim, old-fashioned lines of box and cedar. Basil knew, as clearly as if Madeleine had spoken, the general purport of what had occurred with Lacy; and his prophetic heart warned him that something very like it would occur when Helen Champion came to know how Madeleine and himself meant to support the Severn tradition of "honor before all things." Yet this brother and sister were fortunate above many of their fellows in that each had the other's faithful affection for compensation when that which the world called love fell away. They were spared the terrible

sense of isolation which overwhelms the spirit when such a sacrifice must be made without any support, when a human soul is called by God into the drear desert of pain, alone.

The afternoon was nearly spent, and the sun was sloping low in the west, before Devereux presented himself at the Severn door and asked for Madeleine. He was ushered into the drawing-room, where a fire was burning, though a window at the farther end of the room was open, and the fragrance of hyacinths was heavy on the air. The last time that he had been here was on the morning of his return to Stansbury, and the whole apartment seemed to him full of that recollection. He could hear Madeleine's soft voice speaking of sacrifices which should be easy "for love's sweet sake," and he could see Mary enter. Only yesterday! yet part of a past as utterly dead as if the tender face that brightened for him that morning had been a century underground!

He was standing near a window through which the level sunshine poured in a slanting golden stream, when Madeleine entered. Though he turned at once, his eyes were too much dazzled by the radiance to appreciate for some time the great change in her appearance. When it gradually became clear to him, he was sincerely shocked. The deep mourning which she wore threw into relief her colorless face, with its dark-ringed eyes and pale lips. Watching, grief, excitement, pain — each in turn had done its work and left its trace on the mobile countenance. Devereux had too much tact to repeat what he had inadvertently said once before, "How badly you look!" but his voice expressed the same thing, when — after they had shaken hands almost silently — he said:

"I fear you have not rested properly yet — you still show signs of fatigue. I am sorry — very sorry — that you should have been annoyed so soon by matters relating to business."

"I am perfectly well," said Madeleine; "a little tired, perhaps, but that is all. As for business, it will trouble me very little. Basil has told you, Mr. Devereux, that it was Mary's desire that you should have her fortune, and that I therefore have no alternative but to make it over to you."

"Your brother told me something of the kind, but it is — if you will excuse me — so utterly out of the question, that I have not given it the least serious consideration."

"But you must give it serious consideration," said Madeleine. "It is a matter which concerns you chiefly; indeed, I may say altogether. What have I to do with it? Nothing except that I am placed in the position of one to whom a trust and not an inheritance has been left."

"How am I to reason with you on a subject so far beyond the province of reason?" said Devereux, as they sat down. "If Mary knew so little of the world as to write such a letter as that to which your brother alluded, you certainly ought to be aware that it is simply impossible for me to accept in this manner a bequest which I absolutely refused to accept through the regular form of a will."

"I know that there are difficulties in the way," she answered, "and I appreciate the awkwardness of the position in which it places you; but my course is clear; whether you refuse or whether you accept the fortune, Mr. Devereux, I will have none of it."

"Do you mean that you will not keep it under any circumstances?"

"I mean distinctly that I will not keep it under any circumstances."

"Miss Severn, for Heaven's sake, consider —"

She stopped him by a gesture. "Spare me, if you please. I do not feel equal to a long discussion. I have had too many of them already. Argument is useless. There is but one thing for me to do, and that I intend to do. The fortune is not honorably mine, Mr. Devereux, and I will not keep it."

"Give it away, then. There are the heirs-at-law. Hand it over to them."

"That would not be what Mary wished. Besides, I have no right to give it to any one but you. After it is yours, you can hand it over to them if you like."

"It never will be mine," said he, gravely. "Understand that once for all. There is nothing which could induce me to take it — not even Mary's last wishes, not even your desire. If you

were not — you, I should be indignant at such a proposal. As it is, I fear that you must think poorly of me, else you could not make it."

"How can you wrong me by saying such a thing!" said Madeleine. "Think poorly of you? — I am sure you know better than that. As for Mary — she meant to act for the best."

"I never entertained the least doubt of that," he said, with a strain of emotion in his voice. "But the matter is a complete mystery to me. I cannot imagine why she should have thought that I would take from you what I refused from her."

"I am sorry that you should not understand," said Madeleine, "but there is only one thing for me to do."

Then there was a pause. Devereux felt, as he said, that the matter was wrapped in mystery, but he also entertained a suspicion of what lay beneath the mystery and made Madeleine so determined. This suspicion was necessarily vague, and took no definite form. Madeleine, on her part, said to herself that she was not accountable for the mystery. It was clearly impossible for her to show Devereux Mary's letter. Things must be as they were: she could not smooth the tangled threads in which her own life and the lives of others were caught. A sense of dull apathy weighed on her; Devereux thought that he had never seen her so little responsive in sympathy, so cold, so unlike herself. Naturally conscience — which makes self-accusers as well as cowards of us all — made him suspect that this might have its origin in his fault. What had Mary said in that letter which it seemed he was not to see?

The feeling of constraint which followed these reflections with both, was not remarkable; and when Devereux spoke, his voice was so decided that it sounded almost stern:

"If you feel that it is impossible for you to retain the property," he said, "do what you like with it — endow a church, if you choose — but understand as a final matter that I refuse absolutely to receive it. To any one but yourself I should say this in much more imperative terms. If it is a question of honor with you to relinquish it, still more is it a question of honor with me to refuse it."

What could Madeleine reply to this? She felt that, in his place, she would act as he was doing, yet she also felt how much his resistance complicated her position. Under the influence of these feelings she made what might perhaps be called an exceedingly feminine plea. "You are very unkind," she said, with something like a sob in her voice, "you ought to think more of me."

It was so childlike, and under some circumstances would have been so irresistible, that Devereux could scarcely restrain a smile. "I would do any thing else for you," he said. "But this you ought not to ask. It is simply impossible. I have already decided what to do — my plans are all made. I am going to Colorado — to the friend of whom I spoke to you once before."

"Going — away so far!" said Madeleine. Tears gathered in her eyes not so much for his departure as for a sense of the change and instability of all earthly things. There seemed an upheaval going on of all her familiar world. "You are not acting justly," she added, after a minute, almost passionately. "You are throwing all this burden on me, and it is not right. Nothing can make me retain the fortune ; but you are throwing the trouble, the responsibility, the weight — "

"I would relieve you of them if I could," said Devereux, gently, as she stopped, but I cannot do so without taking the property, and that is out of the question."

So it was to this point they both returned. Poor Mary little anticipated such a clash of opposing wills when, in the simplicity of her heart, she wrote the letter which caused it. Discussion seemed useless. Every thing came to this — one would not retain, the other refused to accept. How the matter was to be finally settled seemed a puzzling enigma.

## Chapter V

"Some There Be That Shadows Kiss."

A BOMB-SHELL in the Champion household could not have excited more consternation than the news of Madeleine's resolution. Basil, by his sister's request, carried the intelligence to James Champion, asking him at the same time what legal forms were necessary for the transfer of the property. That gentleman was at first incredulous, and then indignant — more indignant than he had ever been before in his life. Such a thing was without precedent in his experience, and without excuse in his opinion. He called the question of honor, on which Basil laid stress, a question of fiddlesticks; he pointed out the moral and legal claim which Madeleine possessed to the fortune, and he concluded by saying that, if she persisted in such egregious folly, he would have no part in it; that some other lawyer must be found to do the necessary legal work. "My share in the business began and ended when I drew up Miss Carlisle's will," he said. "Of any foolish letter which she may have written afterward, I know nothing. I thought Madeleine had more sense than to act in such a manner as this. It seems one is never safe in assuming that a woman may not be carried away by impulse."

"I am not a woman," said Basil, "and I agree with her."

Champion had too much courtesy to say, "The more fool you!" but — he looked it. "You are one of a class of men who are cursed by a morbid sense of honor," he said. "You ought to distrust your own opinion on all such points. Now, I am sure that I am an honorable man, but, under the circumstances, I should not hesitate to take the fortune and to keep it."

"Under the circumstances, I have no idea that you would do any thing of the kind," returned Basil, dryly. "We are very apt to think our neighbor's scruples nonsense, when, if we were placed in his position, we might find them serious enough. However that may be, Madeleine's resolution is taken, and nothing will change it."

"I shall at least clear my conscience by letting her hear my opinion of the matter," said Champion.

He was as good as his word. He went to see Madeleine, and let her hear his opinion of the matter — a terse, decided, lawyer-like and common-sense opinion, which might have influenced a resolve less strongly grounded than hers. She listened with patience and replied with kindness, but he recognized, as every one else had done, that her determination was wholly beyond his power of moving. When he returned home with this news, Rosalind's disgust, and Helen's dismay, can perhaps be imagined. The latter felt that she had "committed" herself to Basil in a wholly unnecessary manner; the former, that the Severn star had set again in deeper gloom than ever. She was philosophical about the matter, however, observing that, although she had always known that Madeleine and Basil were full of Quixotism, she had not suspected, until now, half the extent of their absurdity. "What will be next on the cards, I wonder?" said she. "Whom will Mr. Devereux bestow the fortune upon?"

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Champion, in her imposing tone, "Mr. Devereux and Madeleine may settle the matter by a marriage."

But Rosalind treated this suggestion with the well-bred scorn which she felt that it deserved. "There is nothing in Madeleine to attract such a man as Mr. Devereux," she said, with the calm decision of one who knows whereof she speaks. "He admires beautiful women, and women with style. Now, one could as soon associate style with St. Cecilia as with Madeleine. She suits Gordon Lacy exactly, and will probably spend her youth waiting for him to make a fortune — which he never will make. How I detest long engagements!"

"Mr. Lacy said the other day that he thought they were generally mistakes," remarked Miss Champion, with deliberate malice.

"I am glad Madeleine has made him understand that at last," returned Rosalind, coolly. "I have been trying for some time to induce her to discard him."

In a place like Stansbury, whatever is known to three or four people must necessarily soon be known to everybody, and before society had ceased marveling over Mary Carlisle's will, and conjecturing what Madeleine would do — whether she would immediately marry Gordon

Lacy; whether Basil would buy the mills; whether they would all go to live at the Lodge, etc., etc. — the news of her resolution to resign the fortune convulsed Stansbury to its centre with such a sensation as it had not known before for years. People were so astounded that they simply stared at each other, and said at intervals, "Did you ever hear the like?"

Apparently nobody ever had heard the like. There was no precedent for any thing of the kind in Stansbury experience. A dozen wild rumors and versions of the story were set afloat in as many hours — versions which nobody took the trouble to contradict, the Severns being too indifferent, and the Champions too angry. The town was rather inclined to dullness just then — a chronic condition of most country towns — and it was consequently duly grateful for such a dish of gossip. Everybody was interested in Devereux's movements. What did he mean to do? The acute public mind still regarded him with distrust and disapproval. People did not hesitate to hint that the present state of affairs was the result of some deep-laid plot of his — that he had induced Mary to write a will before she died, which Madeleine conceived to be binding in honor, though it was not binding in law. "If it's binding in honor, it'll be the same as if it was binding in law with the Severns," said some of the older inhabitants, who knew the history and character of the family.

In the midst of all this, nobody (except, perhaps, Miss Champion) bestowed much thought on Gordon Lacy, but it is to be supposed he supplied the omission by bestowing a great deal on himself. He certainly spent two or three moody days revolving in his mind the situation in which he found himself, and finally he shook the dust of Stansbury from his feet, and departed for New York — with what ulterior intentions, save the vague one of making literature a profession, even his own family did not know.

The news of his departure added slightly to the general sensation. "So the engagement is off at last!" gossips, both masculine and feminine, said to one another — and this fact established, public comprehension leaped at once from effect to cause. On the subject there was but one opinion — that Lacy had acted very badly, though how much his personal unpopularity helped to make this opinion, there was no accurate mode of determining. Those who have in any manner exalted themselves above their fellows must expect to be judged by a severe standard, and Lacy had exalted himself most superciliously. Now came the inevitable hour when performance, measured by pretension, exhibited a very shabby discrepancy. "This is what comes of all his fine words and ideas!" cynical friends and neighbors remarked. "There's many a man who never knew any thing about 'ideal beauty' in his life, who would have had manliness enough to stand by the woman he loved, whether she was rich or poor." Certainly it was impossible to deny that ideal beauty had not worked a very beautiful result in the character of its apostle — and Stansbury (mindful of having been more than once denounced as "barbarous") rejoiced in the fact.

When Madeleine heard the news she grew a shade paler, and her lips set themselves a little, but that was all. It did not surprise her. She had expected something of the kind — at least she felt sure that her parting with Lacy was final, and that he was as clearly conscious of this as herself. It was no sudden shock which had separated them, but many causes culminating at last in one definite effect. Rosalind, who had brought the intelligence, looked at her keenly.

"I am very glad that you dismissed him at last," she said. "I should have given him his walking-papers long ago. If you were only going to keep the fortune now, like a sensible person — only in that case I am confident you would never have rid yourself of Gordon, for he would never have given you an opportunity to do so."

"Rosalind, you are talking about what you don't understand," said Madeleine, gravely. "My engagement to Gordon is ended, but you are mistaken if you think I 'dismissed' him. I should take shame to myself if I had broken my word for no better reason than that I chose to do so. One's word is too sacred a thing to be given or reclaimed lightly. But when two people are agreed that it is best to part, then an engagement may be honorably dissolved. It was in that way that Gordon and myself said good-by."

"And not at all, I suppose, because you were going to resign the fortune?" said Rosalind.

Madeleine waived this remark. She was too honorable to deny its truth, and too loyal to betray the man she had loved. "I shall not answer any questions. The matter rests entirely between Gordon and myself, and, if I do not blame him, no one else has a right to do so."

"I am glad to say that he left without seeing Helen," remarked Rosalind, amiably. "I know that he did not see her, because she was so much astonished to hear that he was gone, I think she is really in love with him — as much as she can be in love with anybody — and I am sure she means to treat Basil abominably before she finishes amusing herself with him. Why can't you warn him, Madeleine? He heeds you. It really puts me out of patience to see a man made such a fool of — and by Helen!"

"You did not think it strange when men were made fools by you," said Madeleine, smiling faintly. "There is no good in warning Basil. He must learn wisdom for himself, and I fear that he is learning it very fast."

She was right — Basil was learning a certain kind of wisdom very fast indeed. Yet it was a wisdom which no one need desire to learn — a sorrowful realization of what some writers would fain make us believe the rule in human nature, falsehood for truth, selfishness for tenderness, shallowness for depth. Happy is the man who has not at some period of his life learned such a lesson, and been forced to feel that — "Sad it may be to be longing, with a patience faint and weary, For a hope deferred — and sadder still to see it fade and fall; Yet to grasp the thing we long for, and with sorrow sick and dreary, Then to find how it can fail us, is the saddest pain of all."

What he had longed for through many days, Basil grasped at last for one fleeting moment, and lo! like fairy gold, it turned to moss and leaves in his grasp. Though, like many another man, he had been ensnared by mere physical beauty — beauty in which shone no ray from mind or soul — his was a nature which such charms had no power to satisfy. And herein lay one great difference between Lacy and himself. The former felt, as keenly as Basil did, that Helen Champion's nature was of the shallowest, her range of thought of the narrowest, and her capacity for sympathy so limited that it scarcely merited the name; yet there were times when the intellectual man found pleasure in her society from these very causes, when he was conscious of a sense of relief in feeling that he had no criticism to fear, when his vanity was gratified by her homage (utterly without any power of real insight as he knew her to be), when his lower nature asserted itself and he said mentally that the women who serve as playthings and dolls are the best companions for man, who wants a worshiper at his footstool, not a rival near the throne.

Such sentiments as these were utterly foreign to Basil's conception. They found neither place in his mind nor echo in his heart. He had none of Lacy's intellectual gifts, but he had that which is much higher and far more admirable — a loyal, gallant, knightly nature. Love and reverence went hand-in-hand with him — for in the instinctive pride and purity of his character, he had always held aloof from things base and degrading — and, when reverence began to fail, love could not long survive. Yet in a heart like his, affection takes such deep root that its death causes a struggle which a lighter nature fails to imagine or comprehend. Through this struggle Madeleine and himself were both passing, both learning by degrees the unworthiness of the objects on which they had lavished their tenderness, yet both loyal, as it were, in their own despite.

During these days which were sufficiently uncomfortable to everybody concerned, the palm of discomfort might, perhaps have been awarded to Devereux. He was still firm as a rock in his determination not to accept the fortune which Madeleine, on her side, was firm in her resolution to make over to him; but it may readily be imagined that to be the centre of such a commotion was not agreeable to him. Indeed, it was as distinctly disagreeable as any thing could possibly have been conceived. Yet what was to be done? He had exhausted the forcible negatives of the language in expressing his refusal, and he found that refusal altogether unheeded. It was true that, however determined Madeleine might be to give, she could not force him to accept; but it was the giving which disturbed him, it was her persisting in casting away an estate which would

secure to her all that ease and power of wealth which the man of the world fully appreciated. Nerved at last by desperation, he went once more to appeal to her.

## Chapter VI

### The Last Appeal

"Miss Madeleine's not at home, Mr. Devereux," said Ann, answering the door-bell, scrubbing-brush in hand — for she had been polishing the hall-floor with wax.

"Not at home!" repeated Devereux — looking as he felt, a little blank. "Do you know when she will be at home?"

"No, sir, I don't," Ann answered. "She went out into the woods 'bout an hour ago, and she don't often come home till dark when she goes there."

"Did she go alone?" asked Devereux, into whose mind an idea flashed like an inspiration.

"There wasn't anybody with her but Lance," replied Ann. Then, with a sympathetic intuition which did her credit, she pointed over her shoulder, "Miss Madeleine went that way," she said, "across the fields tow'rds Crag's Hill."

"Thank you," said Devereux, gratefully. He put out his hand, with something in it which raised him very high in Ann's estimation. While she dropped a courtesy and uttered her thanks, he turned, passed quickly down the walk, and out of the gate. A sudden sense of elasticity came to him — the first he had felt since Mary's death. It may have been the bright warmth and sweetness of the spring-like afternoon, or it may have been — and this was more likely — that he was going to see Madeleine alone, out in the great expanse and freedom of Nature, instead of within the formal walls of a room. That any thing pleasant could be the result of this interview was, of course, not to be expected — he told himself, as if rebuking his own levity, that such a thing was impossible — yet, nevertheless, he felt that to see her was pleasant, let other circumstances be what they might.

The road which he followed to Crag's Hill was a little longer than that short cut "across the fields" of which Ann had spoken, but he walked briskly down a street, past scattered suburban houses, through a lane, and so out into the stillness and pleasantness of absolute "country." Along the valley, where Madeleine had met Lacy, and heard the news of Mary's will, he went, noting, yet scarcely heeding, the mellow sunlight spreading the ridges with gold, and the wafts of spicy fragrance from the pines growing along the uplands, and standing, like Titan spears, against the sky. Around the base of Crag's Hill the valley made a bend, and he passed around this before he saw, perched on the high western slope of the hill, a figure clad in black, with a leonine dog for companion.

With a sense of satisfaction he proceeded immediately to mount the ascent, which was rather steep. Lance heard him breaking through the undergrowth before Madeleine, in her abstraction, noticed any thing, and with a low, menacing growl, that faithful sentinel darted away. "Lance!" cried Madeleine, afraid that he might harm or frighten some one — but, all in a moment, Lance's growl turned to a whine of delight, and a few seconds later he darted back to his mistress's side, followed by a figure that Madeleine at first did not recognize. Then, with surprise, she said:

"Mr. Devereux! Is it possible this is you?" There was an air of coolness as well as surprise in her tone, which made Devereux feel as if he had presumed. He lifted his hat with an air of deprecation. "It is I, Miss Severn," he said. "I hope you will forgive me for venturing to follow you, but I wished particularly to see you, and I heard that you came this way."

"There is nothing to forgive," said Madeleine, still a little coolly. "I am sorry that you should have had the trouble of the walk; but if you have any thing special to say —"

"I liked the walk," said he, almost humbly. "The afternoon is beautiful, and, since I am going away so soon, I did not like to lose an opportunity of seeing you. May I sit down?"

"Surely, yes," she replied, smiling slightly. "There is little choice of a seat — but I should have asked you to sit down. I forgot that this hill-side is, in a measure, my castle. It is a favorite haunt of ours — is it not. Lance?"

Lance, hearing his name, beat his plummy tail on the ground assentingly, while Devereux, disregarding the attractions of a rock and a stump, threw himself carelessly down on the short, dry grass that covered the hill. Having done so, he saw at once why Madeleine liked the spot. The view was far-reaching and beautiful, with that softness of a rolling country which, without the grandeur of a mountain-region, has its own attraction to the eyes of those who love Nature in all her phases. The valley, with its glancing stream, was at their feet; beyond, the ground rose in undulating swell, cultivated toward the west, far as the eye could reach; on the crest of a distant hill, where one or two tall trees stood outlined against the sky like the masts of ships at sea, some cattle were slowly moving, thrown into relief by the golden light of evening behind them. As the glance swept round the great circle of the horizon, to the north belts of blue forest stretched behind the level fields, while in the east rose a chain of wooded heights of which Crag's Hill was the chief, and which formed part of the ridge on which Stansbury was built. There was a sense of great expanse and wide freedom in the scene, as it melted away on all sides into misty distance. Fresh sweet winds came out of the west, where the sun was sinking in a tender, lucid sky, with floating masses of vapor above

"There is something in the effect of this view — particularly toward the west — which reminds me of the ocean," said Devereux.

"I have often thought so," said Madeleine. "I like to come here. It is almost like going into a church — it calms one, and makes one feel the littleness of life, and particularly of one's affairs in life. That is a good thing to feel at all times — not only from a Christian but from a philosophical point of view."

"Do you think so?" said Devereux, who was not averse to prefacing what he had to say by a little discursive conversation. "I am not sure that I agree with you. Such reflections may be necessary for some people, but I am obliged to spur myself to action by exactly contrary thoughts. If I pause to consider of how little real importance any thing is — at least, how few things which make up the sum of life have any meaning which is not trivial — I become hopelessly indifferent; and indifference has already been the bane of my life."

"We are not speaking of the same thing," said Madeleine. "I think I know the frame of mind to which you allude; but that was not what I meant. Are you never distressed or annoyed? If so, you would know the comfort of coming here where the great bending sky seems to dwarf one's trouble, and one feels, as Solomon said to the Eastern prince, 'This, too, will pass away.'"

"Most things pass away," said Devereux, reflectively, "but some of them cause a great deal of annoyance before they go. Miss Severn, I wish I could make you comprehend how much unnecessary trouble you are now giving yourself, every one connected with you, and myself most, perhaps, of all, by persisting in a course which is — if you will pardon me — unworthy of your good sense."

"I am sorry, very sorry, if I am giving trouble," said Madeleine, turning her soft, wistful regard upon him. "But, after all, is it quite just to say that I am giving it? Remember I did not place myself in the position which entails this course to which no doubt you allude."

"But how can any position in which you are placed possibly entail such a thing?" said Devereux, impatiently. A sudden resolution came to him of sounding the depth of the mystery which puzzled and annoyed him. "You have never been thoroughly open with me," he said. "I think you ought to be. I am sure there is something at the bottom of all this which I do not know — something which probably would be all the better for letting daylight in upon it."

A swift wave of color came over her face. She met his eyes — full, searching, direct in their gaze — for an instant, then turned her own away. "You know all that it is essential for you to know," she said. "I have told you that I am bound in honor."

"But how?" asked Devereux. He saw that he had gained an advantage, and pressed on eagerly. "How can you be bound in honor to perform a wholly useless, and — you must excuse my plain speaking — foolish act? What good results to any one? You ought to know me well enough to believe that I shall never touch this fortune which you persist in nominally bestowing upon me. In a day or two — to-morrow, perhaps — I shall leave for Colorado. Probably I shall never come back. I shall certainly never come back to claim what is not and can never be mine."

There was no mistaking the decision which filled the last sentence. Madeleine's lips parted and a faint sigh came through them. "Poor Mary!" she said; "how hard it seems that her last wish should go unfulfilled! She desired above all things that her fortune should be yours, and yet you refuse to take it."

He threw his head back with a very haughty gesture. "Of course I refuse," he said. "I should despise myself — you would despise me — if I did not refuse. I told Mary, before she made her will, that I could take nothing from her. To discuss such a question now is perfectly useless. The fortune is left to you, and it is yours."

"It is not mine!" said Madeleine. "It was left me under a false impression — and even if I wished to retain it, I could not honorably do so."

"Under what false impression was it left to you?" asked Devereux. "Don't hesitate to tell me. I feel that I ought to know."

"How can I tell you?" said Madeleine. She spoke in a low voice: her color came and went. Once she could have faced such an emergency with the courage that so rarely deserted her, but now she shrank, conscious of not being herself, sensible how much she had been shaken by all that she had passed through.

"Why can you not tell me?" asked he, with the gentleness which sometimes made his voice irresistible — a gentleness which came from nature, not from art. "Do you think I could misunderstand any thing? Do you think I could doubt her — or you?"

His kindness overcame all her doubts. A sudden resolution — the wisdom of which she did not pause to question — carried her away on its tide. It seemed as if she had unconsciously prepared for this, for she had with her the "Imitation" with Mary's letter between its leaves. The book lay in her lap, open where she had been reading, and, as she glanced down, her eyes fell on these words:

"How often have I not found faithfulness there, where I thought I might depend upon it!

"And how often have I there found it where I the less expected it!"

Who is not superstitious enough to sometimes throw the weight of decision on such an accident as this — an open book, a sentence fraught with meaning? To Madeleine, in her perplexity and doubt, it seemed as if a voice spoke. Her heart was still sore with the sense of having failed to find faithfulness there where she thought she might depend upon it. And now, might she not find it here? — might she not find a friend, who, as he said, would not misunderstand? She hesitated only a moment. Then she drew out the letter and gave it to him.

"There!" she said. "That will tell you all."

He took it, and as he glanced down at Jessie's large, irregular handwriting, a sudden instinct — a quick apprehension of the truth — was borne to him. He rose and walked away.

Madeleine was glad of this, and she thought again, as she had more than once thought before, that wherever a delicate perception of what was fitting could save a man from a blunder, Devereux would be saved. That fine courtesy which is born of consideration for others, and perfected by social training, was his in preeminent degree. She watched him as he walked away, and when he paused at a little distance, and, standing with his back to her, one shoulder leaning against the tall, straight trunk of a pine, began to read the letter, she found herself wondering at the revolution of her own feeling with regard to him. What a little while ago it seemed since she

had utterly distrusted him! and now she felt as sure of his integrity as of her own! She had come to expect, as a natural thing, kindness and consideration from him. To how few men could she have ventured to show such a letter as that of Mary's, sure that none of the overweening self-conceit, which is a more distinctively masculine than feminine failing, would come into play! "He will know perfectly how we have both been misunderstood," she said to herself; but of how few men could she have predicated such a thing with any certainty!

He was motionless a long time, or what seemed a long time to her. He must have read the letter over twice or thrice, she thought. Meanwhile, the sun — a great ball of fire — sank slowly beneath the far, blue horizon which marked "the fine, faint limits of the bounding day," and after the last line of his disk had disappeared, his rays of glory, shooting upward, turned the filmy vapors to islets of dazzling gold floating on a background of aqua-marine, which had that peculiar translucent appearance that one often sees in a sunset sky. Madeleine tried to fasten her attention on the changing tints, but with very little success. After a minute, she looked again at the figure leaning against the pine; and, as she looked, Devereux turned and came toward her.

Then it was that the delicate bravery, the supreme reticence and pride of her nature, asserted itself. There was not the faintest trace of the flutter of self-consciousness which an ordinary woman would have betrayed on such an occasion. Both courage and high-breeding came to her assistance, and the vainest man alive could not have misconstrued the calm dignity of her manner. There was no flush on her pale face, no drooping of the lids over her steady eyes. As Devereux reached her side, she saw that he had lost much of his usual composure, and therefore she spoke first — very quietly:

"I am sure you must have been touched as well as astonished by that letter. I was. Its generosity is like Mary; its mistake was no fault of hers. She was blind, she could not see for herself, and she listened too readily to a story as absurd as it was false. But you understand now why I cannot keep the property."

"Pardon me, I do not understand any thing of the kind," he answered. "It is true that Mary took too much for granted; but even if she had taken nothing for granted, I am sure that she would still have left you all that was hers to leave."

"How can you say such a thing when her own words are before you!" exclaimed Madeleine. "She says emphatically that she leaves it to me as a trust, not an inheritance."

Devereux knitted his brows slightly. "You attach too much importance to those words," he said. "You wrest them from their context. Do you not perceive that she put them on record only because she did not wish the unreserved possession of this fortune to stand as a barrier between —?"

He broke off abruptly, but Madeleine knew what words he would have uttered if he had finished the sentence, and she was angry with herself for blushing. Having been guilty of that involuntary act of folly, she made amends for it by speaking very coldly.

"Whatever Mary meant," she said, "the fact remains that she left the fortune to me under a grave mistake; and that is reason enough for my not retaining it."

She looked at him as she spoke, and something strange in his eyes — an expression almost impossible to define — sent a quick thrill of consternation over her. What did it mean? She did not stop to ask herself, but, acting on an uncontrollable impulse, rose to her feet.

"That is all," she said. "Now, I think we had better go home."

"It is early," said Devereux, whose composure came back as she lost hers. "Will you not stay a little longer? I shall not trouble you much more, you know — I am going to start for Colorado to-morrow — but I have a few words to say."

The allusion to Colorado was artfully introduced. It made Madeleine pause. Indeed, in the quick reaction of sentiment, she was ashamed of herself. What folly had she imagined?

"Are you sure that you are going?" she said. "Will nothing induce you to stay — at least long enough to make some arrangements about the property?"

"Good Heavens, Miss Severn!" he said, "are you still determined on that? Then you force me to candor! Don't blame me more than you can help when I tell you that what you consider a mistake on Mary's part was not a mistake at all, so far as I am concerned. She speaks in this letter of my love for you as something of which she was sure. She had reason to be sure of it. Do you remember our long interview before she made her will? She asked me then if I did not love you, and I — to whom the revelation was new, but strong — could not deny the truth."

"Mr. Devereux!" said Madeleine. The ejaculation was an absolute gasp. At that moment there was room for nothing but amazement in her mind. Mary's letter itself had not been a greater shock than this most unexpected declaration. She retreated a step and gazed at the speaker with incredulous astonishment. He took advantage of the pause to go on. There was no want of self-possession in his manner now. It was that of one from whom a load of silence had been lifted.

"You must forgive me," he said. "How could I help telling you? How could I let you continue to think that it was all a mistake. Any other woman would have known, but you never seem to think of yourself, and so you did not know."

Then Madeleine found words. Amazement suddenly swept into indignation. She turned on him with such a blaze of passionate resentment in her soft, brown eyes, as no one had ever seen there before.

"If this is true," she said, "if you are not merely playing on my credulity, how can I answer you? — how can I tell you with sufficient force that it would never have occurred to me to suspect you of such cruel dishonor if you had not borne testimony against yourself?"

The trenchant words cut the deeper for their unexpectedness. A flush rose to his brow, but his eyes met hers steadily. "I do not think you have considered," he said; "I do not think you understand. My conscience does not accuse me of either dishonor or cruelty."

"Your conscience must be a very callous one," said Madeleine, to whom, for the first time in her life, a power of uttering bitter words came. "To be false to Mary in your heart, and then to tell her on her death-bed — oh, I could not have believed it! I could not have thought that any one would be so cruel and so base! My poor, poor Mary! To think that she did not even die in ignorance of how she had wasted her love and faith!" She turned and walked away from him in an agony of tears. It seemed more than she could bear. That Mary's heart — the truth, the tenderness, the trust of which no one knew so well as herself — should have been stabbed by such a revelation at the very last, was as keen a sorrow to Madeleine as she had ever been called upon to endure. And Mary had gone away believing *her* faithless! This edged the bitterness twofold. No consoling reflection came to her that perhaps Mary knew better now in that clear light of eternity which (we hope) solves many a riddle of time. All she felt was the human sense of intolerable pain — pain for the tender heart that had been wounded; pain for having been misunderstood; pain most of all that no word of explanation could now break the great gulf of silence between the living and the dead. Not far from where she had been sitting a fence ran, dividing the hill. She walked up to this, and, leaning her face down on the top rail, sobbed like a child.

As for Devereux, it is not too much to say that he was appalled by the effect of his revelation. He was accustomed to seeing Madeleine so calm and self-controlled, that this burst of anger and grief amazed him inexpressibly. He was more than amazed; he was deeply concerned, and, after reflecting for a minute what was best to do, he walked quietly up to her.

"I will not ask you to pardon me for paining you so much," he said in a low voice, "for I am sure you cannot do so yet — you do not understand. But I appeal to your sense of justice not to judge me too hardly before you have heard my story. I know you do not feel able to hear it now, and I — perhaps I could not tell it as it should be told. But may I *write* it? If I send you a letter will you read it?"

"Why should I?" asked Madeleine, speaking with a great effort, and keeping her face turned away. "You are right. I cannot forgive you for darkening the last hours of — of —"

Her voice trembled, faltered, broke down — but he knew what she would have said. He answered gently — almost humbly: "I do not ask you to forgive me until you know all. Will you not reserve your judgment for a little while? I shall send you the letter to-morrow, and I am sure that you will read it. You are too kind, as well as too just, not to do so. Now I will go. I am sure you would rather walk home alone."

"Thank you," said Madeleine. She spoke involuntarily, feeling that, let him be what else he might, it was impossible to deny his consideration — impossible not to be grateful for it. She heard him pass away from her side, speak to Lance, and then go down the hill. When she lifted her face at last she was alone, and the divine flush of sunset had lighted up the whole sky with rose and opal beauty. Even in the east the tender radiance tinged all the bending arch, while the reflected glory fell over the great dumb face of Nature like a smile from God.

## Chapter VII

### Devereux Tells His Story

The next day was Sunday. At seven o'clock, Madeleine went out to church, and when she returned home, breakfast was on the table. As she sat down, she saw that the mail had been brought from the office. Two or three letters lay by her plate, at which she glanced listlessly, until on one she recognized, with a start, Devereux's writing. She could not help wondering if any one else had noticed it, and instinctively she glanced at Basil. He was dividing his attention between his breakfast-plate and a newspaper, and did not look up. If he had observed it, he made no sign to that effect. This was like Basil, however, and was no proof of a want of observation. Mrs. Severn was deep in her own correspondence, so with a sense of relief Madeleine slipped the letter into her pocket, to be read when she was alone.

This was not until some time after breakfast. Church-bells were beginning to peal out in chiming chorus on the air, when she sat down by the ivy-encircled window in her room (which had once been Rosalind's) to read the letter. Her pulses quickened a little, with a vague sense of excitement and curiosity, as she did so. What would he have to say? How could he clear himself of the charge of dishonor? In all this Madeleine scarcely thought of herself. It did not occur to her, as it would have occurred to many women, to excuse Devereux because he professed to love her. On the contrary, such a plea steeled her heart the more against him. To make her accessory, as it were, to betraying Mary's faith and wounding Mary's love — she felt that she could forgive any thing sooner than that. It was in this frame of mind that she unfolded the letter and began to read.

"In addressing you," Devereux wrote, "I will not picture you to myself as I left you this evening — pained, indignant, with averted face, and all the friendly regard which I have won by slow degrees and with so much difficulty, estranged from me. If I thought of you in that way, I should hardly be able to write at all. I must of necessity address one whom I know better — one in whose eyes kindness and tenderness dwell, on whose lips gentleness reigns supreme, and in whose heart even those who have erred may hope to find comprehension, charity, and justice. I think you will pardon me for this, and therefore it is to that gentle presence that my story shall be told.

"I do not know when I began to love you. Looking back I endeavor vainly to tell. The sentiment was so subtle, and its growth so gradual, that the idea of analyzing it, the idea of anticipating what it might become, never occurred to me. I had played with edged tools so long with perfect impunity that I did not fear receiving a wound at last. I had amused myself with the counterfeits of love, until I lost all power of recognizing the divine original, and lost also, perhaps,

all faith in its existence. My suspicions were disarmed by the manner in which your attraction stole upon me. A fever-fit of captivated fancy would have been perfectly familiar to me — but how could I tell what heavenly spirit was coming with shy sweet steps to brighten the earth for me by lodging in my heart?

"Does this sound to you strained and unreal? I hope not, for I count much on your sympathy — by which I mean that gift of comprehending the moods and thoughts of others, which is one of your greatest attractions. Try to throw yourself into my thoughts: try to realize how all that was best and subtlest in my nature answered to your touch, as a violin thrills under a master's fingers — and yet how it chanced that I gave to the spell every name but the right one. I said to myself that you charmed my fancy, that you satisfied my taste, that you were the most sympathetic of companions, the most unselfish of friends; but I did not say that I loved you, until the truth rose up suddenly and stared me in the face.

"It was on the night of that ball which neither of us is ever likely to forget, when we were sitting in the library — do you remember? Then I felt with the force of an absolute revelation, and with a greater sense of dismay than I can hope to make plain to you, that the strange sentiment which had changed the aspect of every thing for me was love. That I was dismayed will not surprise you. A hopeless passion may amuse a boy, but it can only prove the misery of a man. You will say that a man need not suffer from a hopeless passion if he chooses to be his own master. Granted. But think of the struggle which the assertion of mastery entails! To those who fight bravely, victory generally comes at last; but a life-and-death combat is a thing from which the bravest might shrink.

"Probably you have forgotten all that we said that night. *I* have not forgotten one word — I do not think I ever shall — but to recall to your memory all that passed, would tax too greatly the patience and kindness on which I rely. I did not betray myself to you, for you suspected nothing, but I betrayed myself to one whose ears were more acute because her eyes were blind. Mary came to the door of the library, paused there for a few minutes unnoticed, heard what was said, and then passed away.

"What followed you know. I cannot relate, I can scarcely even in my thoughts venture to dwell upon, her great tenderness and gentleness when she sent for me. One thing, however, I must say in self-defense — in order to prove that I was not guilty of the cruelty of which this evening you seemed to think me capable. She asked no questions, she simply said, 'I know the truth!' — and how could I deny it, even if denial would have brought conviction to her, which I doubt? She seemed like one who had already left the passions of earth behind — a calm had come to her which no emotion had power to break. That I have suffered keenly from the thought that such a knowledge should have cast a shadow over her last hours, you will believe — yet I cannot clearly see in what manner to blame myself. I can hear you say, with your eyes shining like stars, that honor should have kept my heart loyal to Mary. Alas! the truth must be written, and you must forgive it as well as you can — in the sense of supreme love, my heart never was given to Mary. Tenderness, kindness, pity, all these I felt for her — but not love.

"I do not fear from you any harsh judgment on this confession. You know better than to believe that any mercenary motive made me seek that place in her heart which it is now my punishment to have won. The subject is too complex to be dealt with here. Many things influenced me. O gentle sympathy, to which I find myself appealing as I write, am I wrong in thinking that you feel what some of them were?

"Now do you understand why that letter was written to which you have given infinitely more importance than properly belongs to it? If I had not betrayed myself when we were sitting in the library, it would never have been written, and Mary would have left her fortune to you unreservedly. It follows, therefore, that if you persist in the course upon which you were determined when we parted this evening, I shall go away feeling that I am accountable for your having impoverished yourself. Whether or not this consciousness will greatly add to my happiness, you can judge.

"May I hope to see you once more and hear your final decision from you own lips? I shall leave Stansbury to-morrow night. Before I go, will you grant me an interview? You may trust me to say nothing to offend or pain you. Over the contents of these pages I beg you to draw the kind mantle of your charity, and to believe me always

"Your faithful friend and servant,

"Arnold Devereux."

The faint color which came into Madeleine's cheeks as she began this letter had increased to a scarlet flame by the time she finished and laid it down.

"Is he mad?" she said, half aloud. "What does he mean, and what am I to do?"

The last question was harder to answer than the first. What he meant was sufficiently plain; but what she was to do was not so easy to tell. She could not but feel that the difficulties and perplexities of her position were increased tenfold. In her distress and doubt she wrung her hands tightly together as they lay in her lap. An overpowering sense of indignation against Devereux filled her heart. It was all his fault! That was what she thought. It had been an evil day when he came to Stansbury, to wreck the lives and disturb the peace of people with whom he had no concern, by his idle fancies!

Poor Madeleine was scarcely to blame for these thoughts, unjust as, in a measure, they were. It is hard to see the whole meaning of our lives altered, our most cherished hopes brought to naught, by the gravest blows of Fate: how much harder, then, when they seem the sport of trifles fit only for contempt! This was the light in which she regarded Devereux's declaration, being overwrought, strangely impatient, and disposed to take an extreme view of things. Certainly he had not found the gentleness, sympathy, and justice, to which he appealed.

Presently the bells clashed out again on the air, and, rising with a slight sigh, she walked to the mirror to put on her bonnet. She could not stay at home as she felt inclined to do, because she was organist, and no one could fill her place. She must go; but first she must write a note to Devereux. What should she say? The idea of seeing him was disagreeable to her, yet she shrank from refusing so slight a favor when he was going so far away. In her irresolution she glanced into the mirror, and the sight of the heavy crape she wore for Mary added to her repugnance to discuss any further the subject of his letter.

"He does not even think of the decencies of life," she said to herself, bitterly. "How short a time it has been since Mary died in his arms; yet he does not pay her memory the respect of seeming constancy! No; I cannot see him!"

In this mood she went to church; but it is pleasant to record that she came away more like herself. On her knees in the sanctuary she had formed a resolution, and, reaching home, her first act was to write a note to Devereux. It contained only two lines:

"I will see you after vespers. Can you meet me at the church-door at five o'clock? M. S."

"There will be no answer," Madeleine said to her messenger when she gave him this missive to take to the hotel where Devereux lodged. Notwithstanding that direction, he brought an answer when he returned:

"I am very grateful for your kindness, and shall certainly be there. A. D."

Vespers were nearly over, and a small acolyte was lighting the candles on the altar for benediction, when Devereux entered the church and sat down near the door. The rich, full notes of the organ were rolling out under the touch of fingers that knew how to draw forth all the magic of the keys; the choir — well trained, though few — were chanting the beautiful Latin anthem; the lights flashed out like stars over the face of the altar, and the people scattered about the chapel dropped through their fingers the last beads of their rosaries. After a while the voices ceased, and only the organ still rolled forth its splendid tones. Then the door of the tabernacle was opened; the congregation sank upon their knees; the monstrance, flashing in the light of the tapers, was lifted up, and the choir burst into the magnificent "O Salutaris Hostia!"

Before long all was over, the benediction given, the "Tantum Ergo" sung with a pathos and sweetness that might have touched any listener, the organ sobbing out its undertone; the golden-robed priest left the sanctuary; the starry lights were extinguished; the people began to depart. The choir came down in a band and went out. As they paused a moment in the vestibule, Devereux heard one of them say:

"How we miss Gordon Lacy! Of course he only came to oblige Madeleine; but didn't he sing charmingly!"

A few minutes later Madeleine herself came down the steep, dark staircase which led to the organ-loft, and found a cavalier waiting for her just inside the arched doorway. He was a cavalier fitted by nature to please any woman's vanity and touch any woman's heart; but neither Madeleine's vanity nor her heart was just then in a condition to be touched. He thought that she looked like a fair, cold statue as she advanced out of the gloom toward him, her black draperies sweeping round her. This was a mere fancy, however, for although she looked pale — as was now habitual with her — there was nothing statue-like in her appearance, while her manner had all its usual gentle simplicity when she spoke to him.

"Thank you for being so punctual. I considered, after my note was sent, that you might think it strange that I should have asked you to meet me here; but at home we should have been sure to be interrupted, and then — do you not feel sometimes more able to talk in the open air?"

"I feel so now," he answered; "I felt so yesterday afternoon when I followed you to Crag's Hill. Shall we go there again? Is the walk too long for you? Perhaps you are tired."

"I am rarely too tired to walk — it is a relief to me," she answered. "Yes, we will go there."

So they set forth for Crag's Hill, meeting few people on the quiet streets, for the other churches were "not yet out." Yet it was a relief to both when the streets were left behind, and they found themselves in the woods, where

"In the deep heart of every forest-tree  
The blood is all alee,  
And there's a look about the leafless bowers  
As if they dreamed of flowers."

Who does not know that look, when spring is in the air — yet who but a poet would have dreamed of expressing it?

Spring was certainly in the air on this fair "day of God." Her buoyant warmth was in the golden sunshine, her delicate purple mist over the distant hills. Every one wore a knot of violets or a few fragrant white hyacinths. Madeleine had not gathered any for herself, but a little child had offered her some when she was entering the church, and they lay now on her breast, their faint perfume exhaling on the air as she moved.

There was a sense of constraint between Devereux and herself, though both were too well-bred for this to be outwardly apparent. An observant listener (if such a person had been following them) would have drawn the inference principally from the fact that their conversation did not languish at all. It may be taken as an invariable rule that, when people are thoroughly at ease with each other, they are not afraid of being silent together.

As they passed the Severn house, Lance had joined them without waiting for the formality of an invitation; therefore it was the same group as on the preceding evening which was to be seen after a little while on the crest of Crag's Hill. A child passing along the road, on a horse behind his father, pointed them out, exclaiming in a shrill treble, "Oh, look papa! — a lady and a gentleman, and such a big dog!"

"It's Mr. Severn's dog," said the father, turning his glance in that direction. Then he added, "By George!" The lady in black could only be Madeleine, and Devereux's tall, graceful figure

was unmistakable. Everybody in Stansbury was deeply interested in those two, and this acute observer felt that he was, in information, a point or two ahead of his neighbors.

The lady, meanwhile, was rather tired when she gained the summit of the hill, and sat down on her usual seat to rest. For the first time silence fell between the two — silence which Devereux presently broke:

"How glad I am that I came here!" he said, abruptly. "How I shall think of this scene when I am far away! Next Sunday, perhaps, I may be looking at the Rocky Mountains — but I shall never forget these hills."

"I fear they will not bear comparison with the Rocky Mountains," said Madeleine, smiling. "I love this scene very much, but I am perfectly aware that it is what one from a bolder country would call tame."

"That does not matter," said Devereux. "The beauty of a scene rests in the sentiment with which we clothe it — at least very often it does."

"Certainly the beauty which the present scene possesses must principally rest in that," said Madeleine.

After this, silence fell again. The eyes of both wandered to the horizon which bounded them on all sides like a mighty amphitheatre. How soft the air was! — how faint yet perceptible the odor of growing things from the valley below! — what a pearly sky arched overhead! — and what a delicate drapery of mist hung over the distant, leafless forests! Devereux thought that it was a picture worth carrying even to the Rocky Mountains. Then he glanced at his companion. Should he ever forget that sweet yet noble face, with its sensitive lips, and eyes of tender gloom? He felt — not as a boy fancies, but as a man knows — that he never would. It was while he was reflecting upon this that Madeleine spoke:

"I received your letter this morning, Mr. Devereux, and read it before I went to church. If we are to speak to any purpose, I must tell you frankly how it impressed me."

"Tell me, by all means," said Devereux. "What can I ask from you better than frankness?"

There was an accent of restrained feeling in his words, but it brought no tinge of color to Madeleine's cheeks, nor change to her manner. She went on quietly:

"You may ask something better when you have heard my frankness. I fear that I shall pain you —"

"Never mind any fear of paining me," he interposed, quickly, "That is not a matter of the least importance. Say what you choose. You can say nothing that will offend me."

"I should be very sorry to do so," she replied, with evident sincerity. "Let me begin, then, by saying that I was unjust to you yesterday. I should not have called you dishonorable and cruel — I might have known that you could not be either of those things *deliberately*. You have shown me that you were only volatile and careless; but it seems to me that some of the worst consequences on earth flow from those causes."

"You are severe!" said Devereux, who felt that this did not mend matters much. "I wonder if I may venture to say that you are unjust. If my letter showed you that I was volatile and careless, I wrote it to little purpose, after all."

"What else could it show me?" asked Madeleine, with a glow suddenly coming into her eyes. "Stop a moment and think! When you first came here, five months ago, do you remember how you were attracted by Rosalind? I do not say that the fancy was strong or lasting, but it *was* a fancy — no one could doubt that. You amused yourself with her, as you had probably amused yourself with a succession of other women. Then you saw Mary, and her delicate charm pleased your subtler taste, you pitied her, and there were reasons which made it expedient for you to marry. You offered yourself, and she accepted you — loving most tenderly, trusting most absolutely. Should not such love and trust, and your own honor, have made you constant? But your fancy wandered yet again, and in this wandering stabbed the truest, gentlest, most generous of hearts. You sent that heart away darkened by a suspicion of — of one who would have died

sooner than deserve it; which can never be disproved on earth; and that great error has led to a legacy of trouble which you leave others to bear. All this your letter made clear to me, Mr. Devereux."

He was dumb. The list of charges was so unexpected and so overwhelming, that he felt like one whose power of speech had been stricken away. In Madeleine's words, he saw himself as she saw him, and the sight rendered him aghast. He was silent and motionless for so long, that her heart suddenly smote her — what had she said? Had she wounded him more deeply than she thought possible? Her lips were unclosing for speech, when Devereux himself spoke, without taking his eyes from the distant purple horizon.

"God help me. Miss Severn, if all that is true! No wonder you despise me if you believe it."

"I fear I have been harsh," said Madeleine, moved to compunction. "I do not despise you. I think you have been careless, but I do not believe you meant any harm."

"You only think that I made the worst kind of harm through very idleness; again I say, God help me if you are right!"

"And God forgive me if I am wrong," said Madeleine, "for I see that I have pained you. But I thought it best to be frank."

"It was best," said he, hoarsely; and then again there was silence.

Having delivered herself of that opinion, which during the whole day had burned within her for utterance, Madeleine now felt as uncomfortable as people generally do after such a relief to their minds. Had she been unjust? She feared that she had been unkind, that she had spoken with too little regard to the golden precept of charity. It was all true, she thought — but, then, no one knew better than herself that truth is not always to be uttered in uncompromising severity. It was Devereux who ended the pause after a few minutes.

"I have been asking myself whether I shall endeavor to justify my conduct in your eyes," he said, "and I have decided not to make the attempt. You have seen, no doubt, those drawings which, regarded from a wrong point of view, present only grotesque and unmeaning lines — yet from another point exhibit harmony and unity of design. Sometimes a character may be like that. It is not probable, I suppose, that you will ever change the point of view from which you regard my character; but if you ever should, you will understand your mistakes better than I can make them clear. Until that time, words of justification would serve no purpose."

There was something in this proud yet not angry reticence which touched Madeleine more than many sentences of pleading could have done. It was only natural, perhaps, that when he laid down weapons of defense, she should begin to consider that something might be said on his side.

"You must think me very unkind," she said. "No doubt you also think my ideas very strained. To a man of the world, I can imagine that such things may seem very trivial."

"Are you giving me a taste of satire?" he asked. "Such things! — do you mean such trifles as honor, and happiness, and the strongest passion of man? But I forget that you believe me to be a Sybarite, a trifler, who can never do more than sip the froth of life."

"Mr. Devereux, are *you* just when you hold me accountable for an opinion I never entertained?"

"Do you not entertain it? Do you not think that I spend my life in a succession of idle fancies?"

"Why do you force me to say what will sound harsh again?"

"Because I want to know exactly how poor an opinion you entertain of me."

She looked distressed. This was all very unpleasant, and the worst of it was that it seemed as unending as a circle.

"You forget that I am not altogether to blame," she said. "Your reputation preceded you, and then I have seen —"

She stopped, and he took up her sentence: "You think you have seen how well my reputation is deserved. In other words, must I understand that you rank my love for you with any fancies which may have gone before it?"

"Since you force me to utter what sounds so ungracious — how can I rank it otherwise?"

"And you do not believe that it will prove enduring?"

"Why should I believe it? But," she went on, hurriedly, with a sudden flush on her white cheeks, "all this is quite useless. According to rules of courtesy I suppose I should say that I am grateful for your — fancy. But you will pardon the omission. I cannot be grateful for what has wrought in every way so much harm. I must not let you suppose that whether it endures or whether it does not is a matter of importance to me. But I have no idea that it will endure."

"Time must answer for me," said Devereux, calmly. There he paused. What would he not have given to know how little or how great a place Lacy yet held in her heart! but he dared not ask. What right had he to utter such a question? He only looked at her and said, "If I am living three years hence, may I come back and tell you whether it has endured?"

## Chapter VIII

### Madeleine's answer

Madeleine was vexed with herself for having been led into a discussion which finally drew down such a question. A haughty answer rose to her lips — an emphatic disavowal of any interest in the life or death of Mr. Devereux's fancy — but she did not utter it. One of the generous impulses which were stronger with her than any thing else restrained words which she would have regretted afterward. For in this sad world we cannot easily be too kind, and, if we err at all, it is better to err in that way — it is far better to think, "I might have been more severe!" than to think, "I might have been more gentle!" When she answered, therefore, it was with much of her usual sweetness:

"I must be frank with you, and say that there is no reason why you should do so. I hope your fancy will not endure, but I should be very culpable if I let you think that I shall be more ready to listen to it three years hence than I am now."

He was still looking at her, and an expression so pained and wistful came into his eyes at those words, that involuntarily she turned her own away. The woman who can inflict even the most unavoidable suffering without finding an echo for it in her own breast, has lost from her nature the tenderest trait of womanhood. Madeleine had not lost it — indeed, through her own pain, she had lately gained a fresher, deeper sympathy for the pain of others — and this sympathy stirred now, despite her belief that what Devereux felt for her was only an idle sentiment which would soon be swept away by other impressions.

"You are quite sure of that?" he asked in a low voice. "Do you despise me so much, or is your own nature so unalterable that you can speak with so much certainty of the future? I have no hope now, Miss Severn, but if I prove myself worthy of better thoughts than you have given me —"

She lifted her hand with an entreating gesture, her lips quivered. "Don't!" she said. "I cannot bear it. It is not that I despise you, or that I imagine myself unalterable; but such words are out of place."

"I can wait," he said, quietly. "And some day — you will at least listen to me, will you not?"

She shook her head. "It would be wrong to say even that," she answered. "The woman who promises to listen, promises also to answer; and there is no answer possible between us save

that which I give you now. Do not try to force yourself to remember me; on the contrary, forget me as soon as possible; and don't blame yourself — don't think that it is because you are you that I say this — for I should say it to any one else."

Then the words which he had desired several minutes before to utter would not longer be restrained. "Do you mean that your heart is still given away?" he asked.

She turned and met his eager gaze with her soft, sad eyes. "No," she answered, "I mean that it is empty."

"If it is empty, it may be filled," said Devereux with a sudden flash of resolution on his face. "No! — do not answer me. I know what you will say. But you cannot hinder me from loving you, and from coming some day in the future to plead my cause — though it may be unavailingly. You are not accountable for this. Remember that, and do not ever blame yourself. If I rush obstinately on pain, it is my own fault, but experience has taught me that nothing worth possessing is won easily. The rich prizes of life are only gained by a man's best effort. It has dawned on me by slow degrees, that it is better to fail in striving after them, than to be content with lower things that are more easily reached. Therefore, I shall not let any thing hinder me from striving after the one prize which seems to me best worth winning on earth, and if I fail — it will be no fault of yours."

Were these the words of a trifler, of one who cared only for things easily reached, for fruits that grow low, for flowers ready to the hand? Madeleine could not help asking herself this question. All that was best and most determined in Devereux's character was in his face at that moment — lighting up the handsome, listless features with new expression — expression so vivid that she retained the memory of it afterward like a picture. The eyes grew luminous, the mouth set itself in grave, steady lines under the sweeping, blond mustache.

"You leave me nothing to answer," she said after a minute, "except that I am sorry, oh, very sorry, you have not some better hope to lead you to all that I think you may yet accomplish."

"I could not have a better hope," he answered, "and, even if it never finds fulfillment, I shall not regret — any thing."

Madeleine made no reply. The sun sank slowly, wrapped in tender haze. There were not clouds to form a brilliant sunset, but a rosy glow diffused itself over all the drooping west. In the sky above, a white moon hung. Every thing was fair and still: there were no striking forms or colors, but exquisite tone and sentiment pervaded the whole scene. It was pleasant to sit there with the beauty of the landscape spread before them, and the sweet murmur of flowing water rising from the valley below; but each felt that the time for ending this had come. When Madeleine rose, saying, "We must go," Devereux assented, though he felt all that the going meant for him. After they had descended the hill and were walking along the valley, he said:

"You will remember, perhaps, that I asked you to let me hear your final decision with regard to the Carlisle estate, this afternoon. Surely, you are not still determined to refuse Mary's bequest?"

"I am, if possible, more determined than ever," Madeleine answered. "What do you think of me, that you can suppose any thing else? You have added to my resolution by all that you have told me. Nothing would induce me to retain the fortune now."

"That is your unalterable decision?"

"That is my unalterable decision."

"Then I will say nothing further on the subject to trouble you, but I must see your brother before I leave."

"Are you going to-night?"

"Yes, to-night."

They said little besides this in the course of their homeward walk. Lance, marching gravely behind with drooping tail, wondered, no doubt, what spirit of silence had come over them; but Lance had a dog-like ignorance of the variableness of human moods.

When Madeleine reached home, she constrained herself to ask Devereux if he would not come in to tea, "since it is for the last time," she added; but the effort was probably too plain in the invitation — he declined. "With your permission, however, I will make my adieux to Mrs. Severn," he said.

This was not a ceremony which occupied much time. "Mr. Devereux wishes to tell you good-by, mamma," said Madeleine, leading the way into the sitting-room where Mrs. Severn was usually to be found. She was there at present, and although she had no partiality for Devereux — regarding him in the light of the person to whom Madeleine persisted in resigning the Carlisle property — she was too thorough-bred to fail in courtesy and well- worded regret. Devereux, on his part, acquitted himself with rather more than his usual grace. Having made his acknowledgments for all the kindness and hospitality which he had received, he carried to his lips Mrs. Severn's pale, delicate, blue-veined hand. "If we never meet again," he said, "pray give me a small place in your memory, for you will always retain a very great place in mine."

Then he turned to Madeleine, and it may not be uncharitable to suppose that, in kissing the elder lady's hand, he had wished to establish a precedent. Certainly he put his lips, almost without a word, on the one which Madeleine extended, and, as she drew back, it chanced that the knot of violets from her throat dropped at his feet. He stooped and lifted them. "May I keep them?" he asked, looking at her. "It was an accident — you did not give them — they gave themselves — may I keep them in memory of all your kindness?"

"Of course you may keep them," answered Madeleine, hastily, conscious of Mrs. Severn's eyes and ears; "but they are very faded."

"Thank you," he said, quietly. "Now may I beg one more favor — will you ask your brother to meet me at the hotel this evening? My train leaves, I believe, at nine o'clock."

"I will tell him certainly, and I am sure he will see you," said Madeleine. "I am sorry he is not at home now."

In this way they parted. With a bow which included both ladies, Devereux left the room, and Mrs. Severn walked to the window for a parting glimpse of him. "What excellent manners he has!" she said approvingly. "I have seen nothing like them since I was young. But how strange of him to go away just when you are about to give up all that fortune to him! I confess I don't understand the business, Madeleine."

Madeleine did not feel able just then to play the part of enlightener. She was weary in mind and body, and she passed out of the room and went up-stairs.

Basil came in late, and, hearing with some surprise of Devereux's intended departure, took his tea hastily in order that he might reach the hotel in time to see that gentleman. He found him writing a letter in the midst of a room full of that disorder which is so significant of preparations for a journey. A strapped portmanteau stood on the floor, an overcoat was thrown over a chair. Basil paused in the door and regarded these tokens of "flitting" somewhat grimly.

"I am very glad to see you," said Devereux, glancing up. "Come in and sit down — I shall finish in a moment. I am only writing a few lines to Stringfellow."

Basil waited till the few lines were finished. Then he said in a judicial tone, "Pray what is the meaning of this? Do you think it is exactly fair or considerate to take yourself off, leaving a business unsettled in which you are more concerned than any one else?"

"See here!" said Devereux. "There has been nonsense enough talked about that business. Understand, once for all, as man to man, that I will have nothing to do with it. If your sister persists in her present intention of making the property over to me, it will simply remain in your hands, unless you choose to hand the management over to some one else. I will have nothing to do with it, either directly or indirectly. It would be a pity for such an estate to go to rack and ruin, however, so I hope you will continue to look after it."

"To what definite end?" asked Basil. "By Jove! I wonder if such a thing was ever heard of before! I should like to know if you consider this just to my sister? You don't think of the position in which she is placed."

"Yes, I do," returned Devereux, shortly. "But it is a position the difficulties of which she altogether exaggerates. Can't you take my word for that? I know more of the matter than any one else. She will be influenced by you. Don't encourage her in the act of sheer folly which she contemplates."

"You don't know Madeleine," said Basil. "Gentle and yielding as she usually is, when she thinks a thing is right she can be like a rock."

Devereux was lighting a cigar and did not answer for a moment. When he did it was to say: "I think I know her well enough to imagine that. But there is no earthly reason why she should think this right. And you neither of you know me. If you fancy I shall yield an inch, you are mistaken."

"I don't fancy any thing of the kind," replied Basil, dryly. "I think it is pretty evident that your obstinacy and pride are both in arms."

"Call my resolution what you please, so that you understand that nothing will induce me to change it. I should like, however, to know that in any case you will remain at the helm of the ship you have managed so long. Won't you promise me that? I don't ask it in my own name, but — in Mary's. Nothing was nearer her heart than your interest. You know better than I can tell you how grateful she was for your faithful friendship and service; for her sake, then — will you do this?"

Basil rose and walked across the room. A full minute elapsed before he could steady his voice to reply. Devereux's words, simple as they were, seemed to bring Mary's presence before him. For her sake! Was there any thing he would not have done for her sake, for the sake of that tender friendship which death had hallowed, not ended? When he came back, Devereux knew that his point was gained.

"I can't refuse," he said, "what is asked in that name. Mary and her father were much more than kind, far more than generous to me. For their sakes it would certainly go hard with me to see the property neglected or abused. I meant to give up all management as soon as the transfer of the estate was made; but now —"

"Thank you!" said Devereux, eagerly. "Thank you very much. Now my mind is easier. I believe there is little more to be said except to tell you that I shall never forget all your kindness. I have no idea that you remember how great it has been, but I shall never forget. In time of action words are few, however, and I see" — glancing at his watch — "that my train is shortly due. Will you walk down to the station and see me off?"

"With pleasure," answered Basil. "The night is beautiful, and, thanks, yes — I'll light a cigar."

The night was as soft as the day had been, and fleecy vapors were floating over the moon, obscuring but not hiding her light. The two young men walked down to the station, and then paced the platform together, smoking and talking, until the red eye of a locomotive burned in the distance, and a minute later drew its train of vibrating cars beside them. Then their hands met in that tight clasp which with Anglo-Saxon men expresses so much.

"Take care of yourself," said Basil, "and let me hear from you."

"Don't forget your promise," said Devereux. "Good-by."

The engine gave an impatient whistle; one sprang on board; the other waved his hand; there was another whistle, a clang of machinery, and the train sped swiftly and noisily away.

## Book VI

### In Which Some Threads Are Smoothed.

## Chapter I

### "O Last Regret, Regret Can Die!"

Devereux's last words were not without effect. Madeleine remained firm in her intention of resigning the estate, and carried this intention into effect as soon as possible; but the consequences to the estate were not so disastrous as they might have been if Basil had carried out his intention of giving up the management. As it happened, the result of the whole matter was to make him virtual owner of the property — an odd kind of ownership, involving much trouble and very little profit. When Devereux was informed, some time after his arrival in Colorado, that the deeds transferring the estate to him were all regularly executed (though not by the aid of Champion, who persisted in "washing his hands of the affair"), he replied by assuring Basil that the information was not of the least importance to him. "Nothing shall induce me to claim the property, to touch a six-pence drawn from it, or to give any directions with regard to its management," he wrote. "I hope you will keep it in your hands and do the best you can for the sake of those who are dead; but, even if you decline to do so, I shall not assume any rights of ownership. This is final and unalterable."

In consequence of this final and unalterable ultimatum, Basil had no alternative but to continue in his position, and to administer as best he could the business of the estate. The Lodge he placed in Jessie's charge; the mills remained under his own superintendence, while he was forced to apply and invest the large income arising from the last solely by the light of his own judgment. It was a trying position, and one which would have exposed many men to serious charges and suspicions. But not the most malicious, evil-speaking tongue in Stansbury ventured to hint a doubt of Basil's integrity. Even men who disliked him — and in all such places there are hereditary if not personal dislikes — owned that his honesty was above suspicion. "It would be a capital opportunity for some people to fill their pockets," these shrewd philosophers observed; "but there's no danger of any thing of that kind with Severn."

This was a fact so thoroughly recognized by every one that it even penetrated Miss Champion's by no means acute intelligence. She did not absolutely say to herself that it showed very little knowledge of the world in Basil not to fill his pockets, but it is to be feared that she dimly felt something akin to this. She told her mother in the forcible language of her class, that he was "poky" — and further than this the condemnation of the girl of the period can scarcely go. "He will never be any thing but poor, he will never do any thing but superintend those horrid mills, and plod along on his salary," she continued. "I like a man with spirit and energy, if he is a little fast. Better be too fast than too slow."

"I am not sure of that," replied Mrs. Champion, who began to be somewhat uneasy with regard to the final choice of this self-willed young lady. "Fast men are the last men in the world to marry, Helen. Basil Severn is not slow — unless you call honesty slow."

"Oh, dear, no," said Helen. "I only mean that he tires me — he is too good for me, I think that must be what is the matter. I feel as if he expected me to sit up on a pedestal and be worshiped, to be always 'wisest, virtuest, discreetest, best' — and you know that it is not my style at all. The fact is, he is altogether spoiled by Madeleine — he wants every other woman to be on her pattern — and I don't admire her at all?"

"I have a very high opinion of Madeleine Severn," said Mrs. Champion, magisterially, "though I think she acted foolishly in giving up the Carlisle estate. I wish your manners were as good as hers, Helen."

"Her manners are old-fashioned," said Helen, who resented this. "She is old-fashioned herself. I think she is cut out for an old maid, and the best thing she and Basil can do will be to live always together and admire each other."

Notwithstanding these kindly opinions. Miss Champion did not take any immediate steps to end her engagement with Basil. Probably consideration for self was at the root of this. Stansbury was dull — very dull — just then. If she did not sing "Robin Adair" after Lacy's departure, she at least felt that the town was nothing to her without the spice of his presence. Failing the chief good which she desired, she fell back on a lesser. There are multitudes of women to whom, as long as they are unmarried, an admirer — a subject for flirtation — is a necessity of life. To this class Helen Champion distinctively belonged. Since Robin Adair had gone away in very unpoetical sulks, she consoled herself with a substitute for him — though it may be said, to Basil's credit, that he made a very poor one. He was not a sufficient master of the art of compliment, neither was he content to live in *badinage* forever, and he often wearied — gallantly as he strove to repress any sign of this — of the froth which made up Helen's conversation. He was too loyal, however, to fail in devotion or attention to the woman he had sought, or to complain of what he had deliberately brought on himself.

In this manner several months went on. Winter melted into spring, and spring bloomed into summer with very little change in the attitude of affairs. Twice or thrice during this time, Basil received a letter from Devereux — pleasant, friendly epistles, describing his life in Denver, and asking for news from Stansbury. After the first of these letters, they contained no allusion whatever to business, and more than once Basil wondered why they were written. He always handed them to Madeleine, and she read them as she might have read the letters of any ordinary acquaintance. "He writes uncommonly well," Basil would say, and she always assented cordially. "There is no affectation in his style," she answered once. "He writes with the simplicity which is the greatest charm of a letter."

"It is a great charm of any thing," said Basil, with a slight sigh. Perhaps he was thinking of a character which had lately unfolded itself to him, and which lacked altogether that crowning grace.

As time passed, the friends and countrymen whom Gordon Lacy had left so contemptuously behind began to hear news of him. This news came through the channel which he liked best — the public press. A book bearing his name appeared, which excited a great deal of comment — some of which was very far from flattering. Other, however, was laudatory in the extreme, and it has come to be an accepted axiom that it is better for an author to be a bone of contention among critics than for his work to be damned with faint praise, or not noticed at all. A bone of contention this book of Lacy's — a dramatic poem of considerable length — undoubtedly became. Some critics of high authority hailed the rising of a new and very brilliant star in literature; others said emphatically that, although Mr. Lacy was abundantly gifted with pleasant fancies, and was a thorough artist in his choice of terms and use of rhyme and metre, he had not a shred of original genius. "In this volume of graceful and melodious verse," wrote one of the latter class, "we find every proof of an agreeable fancy and a cultivated taste; but that which the performance most fatally lacks is strength. Whenever the author attempts to soar beyond a certain level of musical prettiness — we are heartily sorry to pain him by the use of the last word, but it is unavoidable — he does so on borrowed pinions. There is much in the book which suggests Morris, there is a flavor of Rossetti, and there is a great deal of Swinburne. At the feet of all these esoteric poets, Mr. Lacy has plainly sat. In many instances, he has inclosed thoughts which are his own in forms so plainly borrowed, that the imitation is evident to the most casual observation. We are sorry to add that, in borrowing much which is good — the peculiar charm of the author of the 'Earthly Paradise,' for instance — he has also taken much that blots the delicate grace of his pages. There is a sensuousness here and there which would do credit to Mr. Swinburne."

In the above key all the depreciatory criticisms were written. There was no lack of kindness in any of them — there was no excuse for Lacy to consider himself a second misjudged Keats — but they all made the same charge with singular unanimity. A copy of the book, with a complimentary inscription on the fly-leaf, Lacy sent to Helen Champion as soon as it appeared, and she carried it in a glow of triumph to Madeleine. "I thought you might like to see it," she

explained, "and the booksellers here have not received their copies yet. It must be making a great sensation. I saw a very complimentary notice of it in the *Journal of Literature and Art* this morning."

"Thank you," said Madeleine, quietly. "I shall be glad to look over it."

After Miss Champion went away, leaving the daintily-bound volume on the table in the room where Lacy himself had often sat and read the manuscripts of his poems aloud for Madeleine's criticisms and suggestions, Mrs. Severn roused from her usual placid calm to express an opinion.

"I never knew any thing to equal the ill-breeding and insolence of that girl!" she remarked. "To think of her bringing you a book which Gordon Lacy sent to her! Why did you let her leave it, Madeleine? I should have told her that I had no desire to read anything he had written."

"Oh, no, mamma; you would never have told her any thing of the kind," answered Madeleine, with a smile. "You are angry for me now; but if you had been in my place you would have acted as I did — knowing that she would have been very much gratified if I had declined to receive the book."

"I hope, at all events, you don't mean to read it," said Mrs. Severn, still indignantly.

"Why not?" asked Madeleine. "Do you think I have lost all interest in Gordon? On the contrary, I am very anxious to see it."

Later in the day she carried the book with her when she went for a walk, which ended — as her walks often did — on Crag's Hill. She could scarcely tell why she liked this place so much, except that it was elevated and lonely, and the view from it was very fair, now that the land was clothed with summer's green, and smiling with summer's abundance. As she sat there on this evening, soft, tricky breezes played about her, the great voice of Nature's multitudinous life rose up from the valley below, while through the pines behind a sighing murmur now and then crept. Every thing was still and peaceful. The low, slanting sunshine lay like a mantle of gold over the earth — sunshine full of serene beauty — while from the distance came the faint tinkle of bells, as the cattle wended their way homeward. It was an hour so suggestive of happiness that sadness seemed more than sadness, loneliness twice loneliness — and it is impossible to deny that Madeleine was both sad and lonely. She did not yield weakly or morbidly to these feelings — indeed, no one ever struggled more valiantly against them — but sometimes they overpowered her, and this was one of the times. As Lacy's book lay in her lap — as she opened it and saw on the fly-leaf Helen Champion's name in his well-known writing — it was not jealousy nor absolute pain, but a great sense of desolation which made her tears fall in a quick, fast shower. Almost involuntarily she murmured some lines which had haunted her for many days, as fragments of poetry will, in certain states of the mind:

"We walked too straight for fortune's end,  
We loved too true to keep a friend;  
At last we're tired, my heart and I."

The pathetic voice uttered the last words with an accent so expressive of loneliness and weariness, that it touched the only heart near at hand to be touched. Lance pricked up his ears, and, turning, looked in his mistress's face. If he did not understand the words, he understood the tone, and when, after a pause, she repeated again,

"So tired, so tired, my heart and I!" —

he could bear it no longer, but creeping close, with a low whine, laid his massive, gentle head in her lap. She started and looked down. No words can describe the love and faithfulness shining dumbly in the liquid eyes uplifted to her. It was as if he spoke — as if he said, "Stop and think

how many there are who love you yet!" She bent down suddenly and kissed the broad, intelligent forehead. "Thank you, dear Lance," she said, "and God forgive me for my ingratitude!"

After this she resolutely turned to the first page of the poem and began to read. A better antidote for the regret which had almost overpowered her could scarcely have been devised. Familiar as she had been with Lacy's mind, and with the change which had been coming over it when they parted, she was not prepared for such a revelation. She saw in every verse signs of decadence, not only in the poet, but in the man. Was this half-pagan singer, with no light but sunset, and no hope but the grave (as some one has well said of the school to which he belonged), the same whose earlier, simpler, purer songs she had loved and commended? She could hardly realize it. She saw the fatal spirit of imitation in these pages, as she had detected its first indication on that far-gone afternoon in the cedar summer-house — and, when at last she closed the book, there was a look of unselfish pain in her eyes. This pain was all for Lacy — for the mist which had come over his spirit, the cloud over his eyes. All that was best and highest seemed eliminated from his work — and, let us say what we will, an artist's work reflects his soul. In all God's world it has never been known that a clear fountain sent forth a polluted stream. "O my poor Gordon!" said Madeleine, as she closed the book. It was all that she could say. They had drifted too far asunder for any thing save sorrow — sorrow for him — to cross the gulf between them.

When the volume was returned to Miss Champion, she expressed, even more effusively than before, her admiration. "I think it is perfectly exquisite!" she said, "and I have written to Mr. Lacy and told him so. I am afraid my letter was absurdly enthusiastic; but then I can't be moderate about what I really admire! Have you any message, Madeleine, if I should write again?"

"None at all," answered Madeleine.

This was in July. A week or two later — the first of August — the Champions left home for a summer campaign of some length. "We may go as far as Canada, and we certainly shall not be back before October," said Rosalind, when she came to say good-by, looking charmingly lovely from the consciousness that the world, full of untold possibilities of pleasure and admiration, was before her, with only "James's odd ideas" as a slight draw-back. "If you had kept your fortune, Madeleine" — Rosalind never wearied of harping on this string — "you might be going anywhere you chose — to Switzerland, perhaps."

"Very true," said Madeleine, smiling; "but, since I did not keep the fortune, it is not worth while to discuss the possibility."

Miss Champion also came to make her adieux, and was very coquettish with Basil, very sweetly patronizing to Madeleine. She, too, was intoxicated with the hope of future conquests. "Perhaps I may never come back," she said, laughing. "I am not so enamored of Stansbury that I can promise to resist an excellent opportunity to remain in some gayer place. What do you say to that, Mr. Severn?"

"You must act altogether for your own happiness," answered Basil, gravely. They were walking together in the soft summer moonlight, and the young man thought this a good opportunity for an explanation. "I hope you will remember," he went on, "that I do not wish you to sacrifice any thing to your engagement to me."

"As if I were likely to do so!" thought Miss Champion, with a sense of profound scorn for the dullness of some men. But she was not frank enough to say this openly. She had been premature once, and she was determined not to be premature again. "I was only jesting," she said, looking up with her dark, starry eyes. "You should not take every thing so literally. I only wanted to hear what you would say."

This was an opportunity for Basil to utter some impassioned flattery — something to please her vanity, and touch the fancy which did duty for her heart. The kind of lover she desired was one who had all the light nothings of gallantry and sentiment ready at his tongue's end, who was expert in turning every remark into a compliment, and who never wearied her by a seriousness and earnestness which she could not comprehend. To such an ideal, Basil bore no

resemblance. Just now his heart was too sad for flattery. It has been known, since the beginning of the world, that at parting we are most likely to learn how much we love, and the parting looming before him now taught him that this woman was dearer to him than of late he had imagined. He began to feel the self-reproach, common to all generous natures, to think that he had judged too hardly her folly and frivolity. He did not answer her last remark for some time — then he said:

"One thing is certain — you will know your own mind and your own heart thoroughly when you return. You will be able to tell then where your happiness lies. If you can come back and share willingly the life which is all that I have to offer — I hope I do not need to tell you, Helen, how happy I shall be!"

"You don't talk as if you would be very happy," said Helen, with a slight pout. "When I care for any thing, I care for it to distraction. I never understood cold people."

"It can't be possible that you think me cold!" said Basil, to whom this was a new charge, though lately his companion had more than once hinted her disapproval of him in various ways.

Miss Champion replied uncompromisingly, that she did think him cold. "I don't believe you would care very much if I did not come back at all," she added in an injured tone.

"Don't try me — that is all!" said Basil, smiling. This was undoubtedly folly, pure and simple; but he felt indulgent toward it, since it sprang, or seemed to spring, from love for him. It did not occur to him that vanity is very often as strong as love in a woman's breast — the vanity which desires to be sure of the power to inflict pain.

In this manner Miss Champion took her departure — still engaged to Basil, and promising constancy even when the promise was not demanded. August passed. From mountain spas and sea-side resorts came rapturous letters, principally from Rosalind, now and then from Helen, describing, with much underscoring and many admiration-points, the gay life they were leading. When September spread over the earth its mellow beauty, these letters were dated from New York. Then it was that a paragraph in one of Rosalind's prepared Madeleine for what was to come.

"We have seen a great deal of Gordon Lacy since we have been here," Mrs. James Champion wrote, "and I think it only kind to let you know that he is very attentive to Helen. You know she has been crazy about him for a long time, so of course this delights her. The matter may end by a marriage, since James says that Gordon is very much disgusted with the life of a literary hack, and very anxious to obtain an income that will relieve him from the necessity of writing for newspapers and magazines. I give you this hint in order that you may tell Basil to write and *break the engagement*. I do not want her to have the gratification of jilting him. He may use my name as freely as he pleases. I told Helen that I meant to let him know how she is acting. She only laughed. Evidently, she thinks he is too deep in her toils to escape. I hope he will prove the contrary to her."

Madeleine had no alternative but to show this letter to Basil. It was not only meant for him, but to spare him pain by retaining it would have been, in all probability, only to defer the blow and render it harder in the end. She gave it to him, therefore, and watched his face with wistful, loving eyes as he read it. When he reached the paragraph quoted above, she saw him start, and his lips set themselves. Beyond this, he showed no sign of emotion, and, having quietly read to the end of the letter, he folded it carefully, returned it to the envelope, and then looked up and met her gaze. Something in that gaze touched him, and made him smile a little — the brave, sweet smile with which he had gone into many a battle, and faced worse than hostile cannon in his life of daily, self-sacrificing toil.

"Don't be sorry for me, *petite*," he said, caressingly. "You know you are clear of blame — you warned me. I did not heed the warning, but that was my fault, and, after all, it scarcely matters. Disappointment and pain are not as hard to me as they might be to one with less experience of both. It is possible to grow used to any thing; and then you remember my motto:

"Come what will, come what may,  
Time and the hour run through the roughest day."

"But you deserve something besides rough days," said Madeleine. "It seems so hard that you should have set your heart —"

"Never mind," he interrupted, quietly. "It is the fate of many a man, and I hope I know how to bear it. Perhaps it is best so. I am afraid I never could have made her happy."

"And do you mean to follow Rosalind's advice?" asked Madeleine — though she felt sure what the answer would be.

He looked at her and she read it in his grave, handsome eyes. "No," he replied; "a gentleman never gives a woman back her faith. If Miss Champion chooses to jilt me, she may do so. She will lower herself, but she cannot lower me."

A few weeks went on, and then the end came, as Rosalind had predicted. Not one line to the man to whom she was engaged did Helen Champion write, but Basil opened a New York paper one day, and there he saw her marriage to Gordon Lacy recorded.

## Chapter II

### Devereux Is Recalled.

So far this narrative has followed the course and endeavored to tell the story of certain exceptional events which happened within a short space of time. Occasionally such periods occur in life, but as a general thing the rule of existence is monotony — a very depressing rule we are sometimes tempted to think, and yet it may be that God's providence appears in this, as in all else, were we only clear-sighted enough to recognize it. The flame which is constantly fed by excitement would burn out too quickly; so perforce we must rest in long, sluggish calms when day follows day, with nothing save the ordinary affairs of life to mark their passage.

Such a calm as this came to Basil and Madeleine after the events which ended in that marriage on a crisp October morning in New York. A week later, Mr. and Mrs. James Champion returned to Stansbury, and the former made one — only one — allusion to his sister's marriage when speaking to Basil, which showed how deeply his pride and sense of honor had been wounded.

"I was powerless to prevent the marriage," he said, "but nothing would have induced me to be present at the ceremony if she had not been under my protection. I told her at the church-door that she had disgraced herself by acting as no Champion, to my knowledge, ever acted before, and I did not see her afterward."

Then, before Basil could reply, he turned the conversation abruptly to business, and the subject was never mentioned between the two men again.

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Lacy were able to support with cheerful philosophy any disparaging remarks which Stansbury saw fit to make about them. In the first place they did not hear the remarks, and, in the second place, they would not have cared if they had heard them. Both had acted with due deliberation and due regard to their own interest, which is of course the only thing a sensible person ever thinks of regarding. Helen flattered herself that Basil Severn had "broken his heart" over her loss, but Gordon indulged in no such fancy of Madeleine. He knew her better; and sometimes it cost him a pang to think how complete her contempt for him must be — not bitter or keen, but quiet, decided, and most sorrowful. As time went on, however, he grew careless even of this thought, and banished so effectually from his heart the sweet face which had once been the light of his life, that finally it ceased to haunt his memory. It is not worth while to

follow the record of his life — which indeed at the present day is still most prosperous. Who, that has looked attentively at the great web of human existence, has not seen many such a choice made as his — the lower path taken, the goods of this world chosen, self triumphing over honor, passion over faith, high powers prostituted to ignoble uses, the desires of the flesh exalted above the aspirations of the spirit? Such a choice is usually crowned with success, but who would not rather be Bayard dying by the wayside with his knightly honor unstained, than the victorious conqueror and traitor who stood before him?

Eighteen months passed very quietly for the Severns. Basil's position with regard to the Carlisle estate, which at first had seemed so anomalous, fell into the routine of accustomed things over which people cease to marvel. In Madeleine no outward change of any kind was apparent — the serene grace of her presence filled the home in which she had been born, as it had filled it for many years, and no one was able to say, with that compassionate interest which gossips love to affect, "How different she has been since that affair with Gordon Lacy!" Perhaps those who were in sorrow found a change in her, for her manner was even gentler and tenderer than of old, and little children never looked into her face save to smile; but this had been very much the case always, so it was not singular enough to be remarked.

Of Devereux it may be said that she thought now and then, wondering a little, as women will, if he had altogether forgotten the words which he had uttered before going away — the resolution which he had expressed with so much impetuous decision. It is true that she rebuked her own frivolity for indulging in such conjectures, and told herself that he had no doubt forgotten and ignored every thing connected with that past fancy; but still, as every woman will understand, it was impossible not to wonder. During the two years which had elapsed since he left Stansbury, he had maintained a tolerably regular correspondence with Basil, and it was very clear from this that he had, to use his own expression, "kept steadily at the oar" since he had been in Denver. He alluded once or twice to the fact that his friend and partner had gone away for a holiday; but he never spoke of any holiday for himself except once, when he said that he had joined a party to the Rocky Mountains, and inclosed a few flowers for Madeleine, "since I have her violets yet," he added. "What nonsense!" said Madeleine, when she read the letter; but she did not refuse to keep the blossoms which had been gathered in the defiles of the far Western mountains. It struck her as a little strange that a man who had probably had half a dozen love-affairs since his untoward attempt at one with herself should care to remember her in this manner; but she explained the matter to her own satisfaction by reflecting that gallantry of the kind was no doubt natural to a man like Devereux.

The second spring after the departure of the latter, Basil began to experience unaccustomed difficulties in the management of the mills. For the first time he had trouble with his operatives. He had never before known any thing of the kind, for he possessed in a remarkable degree that power of governing men — of uniting kindness and consideration with perfect subordination — which is a special gift bestowed by Nature on special men formed to exercise authority over their fellow-creatures. But, even in the best-drilled corps, mutiny sometimes appears; and so it was in this instance. During the winter one or two of the principal mill-hands died, and their places were supplied by new-comers who sowed the seeds of mischief, and, after a good deal of indirect trouble, they, with two or three aiders and abettors, were summarily dismissed for insubordination.

They did not receive their dismissal quietly. On the contrary, they complained loudly, and continued to hang about the neighborhood of the mills, though ordered several times to take themselves off. Once or twice Basil was warned that they were uttering threats against him. The young man only smiled. "Such blustering is not likely to frighten an old soldier," he said. "Let them do their worst."

They took him at his word; but it was a worst which he had not anticipated. One night the cry of "Fire!" rang out on the Stansbury streets, and people sprang from their beds to see a glare brighter than that of day lighting up the sky, and to be told that the Carlisle Mills were burning.

What Basil felt when he heard the news it is impossible to describe. There was scant time for words; but Madeleine never forgot the expression of his face as he mounted his horse and rode away at full speed, in advance of the fire-engines, toward the lurid splendor of the conflagration. It was a splendor dearly bought, for he found, when he arrived at the scene of action, that the incendiaries had done their work thoroughly. The watchman had been faithless or negligent, and the fire made great headway before any alarm was given. Consequently, Basil saw at once that it was hopeless to think of saving the buildings; but he made a desperate effort to save the valuable books and papers from the counting-house. On this service of danger he would allow no one to accompany him; but, having stationed outside two or three faithful men to receive what he was able to bring, he entered the burning building alone. Three times he came out with his arms loaded, and three times he returned. The fourth time there was a tumultuous shout from the assembled multitude when he appeared; but it suddenly died away into awed stillness, for, before he could cross the threshold, he was struck down by a falling timber, while rolling smoke and leaping flame appeared to sweep over him.

There was a moment's pause of horror — then half a dozen intrepid men rushed forward to the rescue. Scorched, begrimed, senseless, they drew him out — his right arm doubled under him and evidently broken. After this the fire had very much its own way, and finished its terrible work unmolested. Even the engines lost heart and ceased to play, except on the cottages of the operatives, which they drenched thoroughly, and so saved from destruction — the inhabitants of these cottages meanwhile stood by in despair. It was their bread which the cruel flames were devouring, and when they heard that Mr. Severn had been killed, or something very near it, despair broke into lamentation. Women sobbed and men cursed. It was a scene to be long remembered — the wild glare of the fire on excited faces, the uproar of many voices, the roaring and crackling of flames, the crash of falling walls, and the imprecations poured forth on the authors of such a work. If one of the supposed incendiaries had ventured to show his face, it certainly would not have been well for his neck. Angry men are not, as a rule, inclined to try suspicion by the test of reason, nor to remember that law of fair play which demands that both sides shall be heard. Meanwhile, Basil, still senseless, was taken back to Stansbury and placed in the hands of his sister, and the doctor who was hastily summoned. The latter pronounced his injuries very serious indeed. Concussion of the brain is in itself no trifle; but besides this — from which he could not recover for some time — the young man was severely burned, his shoulder was dislocated and his arm broken. So, when the morning sunlight reddened the smoking ruins of the Carlisle Mills, it found him unconscious both of the destruction which had been wrought and of his own danger.

That unconsciousness and danger lasted for days, and it was upon Champion that all the labor resulting from the fire fell. He started swift and hot pursuit after the suspected incendiaries, who had one and all decamped, and he attended as far as possible to the loose odds and ends of business demanding attention. The position was not very much to his taste, however, and, coming in one day, he electrified Madeleine by asking if she did not think Devereux ought to be summoned.

"I have not thought of it at all," Madeleine answered, "but why should he be? You know that he has never claimed the property, nor even expressed the least interest in it."

"Nevertheless," said Champion, whom any allusion to the matter always irritated, "I suppose it is his — if it can be said to be anybody's. Basil will be in no condition to attend to any thing for weeks — perhaps for months. If it were his business or yours, I would attend to it with the greatest pleasure, but I have no time to spare in looking after Mr. Devereux's interests."

"I understand," said Madeleine. "Something must be done, of course. As soon as Basil is better, I will ask him what it must be."

Basil was a little better the next day, and opened the conversation himself by asking what had been the result of the fire, and if various matters, which he mentioned, had received any attention.

"James Champion, assisted by Mr. Willis" — the latter was foreman of the manufactory — "have done their best to put affairs in order," answered Madeleine. "Two of the men who are supposed to have fired the mills have been apprehended and committed for trial."

"I doubt if any thing positive can be proved against them," said Basil. "But I wish you would send for Willis to come here to me: I must give him some directions."

"You must do nothing of the kind," returned Madeleine. "The doctor says you are not to be worried or excited. Do let the mills alone! They are burned, and that is an end of it."

"That is not an end of it," replied Basil. "You don't understand — there is an enormous amount of business to be transacted. Oh, if I were only not lying here incapacitated!"

"Whose fault is it that you are incapacitated?" demanded Madeleine. "If you had not been so rash —"

"Don't let me hear any thing about that!" said Basil with a groan. "Never hit a man when he is down — and I am down unmistakably just now."

Madeleine reflected for a moment and then decided to mention Champion's suggestion. "Do you think Mr. Devereux ought to be informed of the loss of the mills?" she asked. "He has taken so little interest in the property that it scarcely seems worth while, and yet — they are, or were, his, you know."

"Of course, he ought to be informed," said Basil. "Has nobody written to him? Whether he takes interest or whether he does not, the property belongs to him, and it is my duty to let him know of such a loss as this. Write at once, Madeleine. Tell him all about it, and how I am situated."

"Very well," answered Madeleine, quietly. She had no fancy for the task, but it did not occur to her for a moment to shirk it. Why should she not write to Devereux, as she would write to any other man, a letter of business? This was what she asked herself — indignant with the folly that made her, even in thought, hesitate for a moment.

She brought writing-materials to the side of the bed, and, assisted by Basil's dictation, this was what she wrote:

"Dear Ms. Devereux: I am sorry to tell you that the mills have been burned down. Every one thinks that the fire was the work of incendiaries, but there is no positive proof to support this opinion. It rests entirely on what, I believe, you lawyers call presumptive evidence. Basil discharged several hands for insubordination a fortnight or two ago, and instead of going away they remained in the neighborhood, and more than once were heard to utter threats against him. He disregarded this, because he thought they only threatened him personally. If he had thought of the mills, he would have redoubled his usual watchfulness. On last Thursday night, between midnight and morning the alarm of fire roused us — the mills were in flames. When Basil reached them he was too late to do any thing except make a desperate effort to save the books and papers. This he succeeded in doing. Very little which was valuable in that line was lost, but he was severely injured, and is consequently unable to write to you. His right arm was broken, his shoulder dislocated, and his burns are very serious and painful. He bids me tell you that the loss is partly covered by insurance, but that it will nevertheless prove very heavy. As soon as he is able to do so — which cannot, however, be for some time — he will send you a detailed statement. The accumulated income of the last two years will warrant, he says, the immediate rebuilding of the mills, and he hopes that you will write as soon as possible and let him know your wishes on the subject.

"Pray pardon me for adding that I, also, hope you will do so. I am sure you must feel that it is scarcely generous to throw on my brother all the weight of responsibility, as well as of labor. During the last two years he has toiled faithfully, with no sign of interest or encouragement from yourself; but now that he is disabled and suffering, I am confident that your kindness and sense of justice will conquer your pride, and that you will give him the aid which he asks and needs — the aid of sympathy and direction. That the presence of the owner of the property is very much

needed here at present, you may perhaps imagine; but Basil hesitates to ask you to come, not knowing in what spirit you may receive the request, and I can only say, for him as for myself, that if you come at all it must be to assume the duties as well as the rights of ownership.

"I cannot close without congratulating you on your success in your profession, and with the kindest regards of my mother and Basil, I am,

"Very sincerely yours,

"Madeleine Severn."

It will be perceived that a more altogether formal and commonplace letter could scarcely have been written, yet, when Devereux received it, his heart leaped up like a school-boy's. It is trite to say that absence extinguishes a weak passion and deepens a strong one, but many trite things are true things—and this is one of them. Two years had done nothing toward extinguishing that "fancy" which Miss Severn had treated so severely. On the contrary, it had been so materially strengthened that Devereux had ceased to ask himself to what order of passion it belonged. It is only when men are doubtful, when it is sentiment not love which has come to them, that they analyze and dissect their hearts as a botanist dissects a flower. With certainty comes repose. Let a man desire something as a supreme good, and he will cease to ask why or how he desires it. Still it must be admitted that, notwithstanding all he had (very sincerely) said when leaving Stansbury, Devereux — warned by much experience — had not been altogether sure of his own constancy. But he was sure of it on the April morning when he unexpectedly found on his table that letter addressed in Madeleine's fair, clear writing. He tore open the envelope, wondering what had moved her to write, and grateful for the cause, whatever that cause might be. The news which the letter contained did not in any manner diminish the exhilaration of his spirit. He felt absolutely grateful to the incendiaries who had fired the mills, and his resolution was taken immediately. He would go to Stansbury: she wished it, and that was enough. When his friend came in presently, he announced this resolution:

"Those mills have been burned down. Hurst," he said, "and Severn has been badly injured. I fear I must go to Stansbury and look after matters. It hardly seems fair for that poor fellow to have all the trouble of ownership without any of the profit."

"He must be an uncommon fellow to fill such a position," said Mr. Hurst. "I have been convinced of that for a long time. But I thought you were determined never to claim the property."

"I never shall — in the manner they desire. But matters can't possibly go on in this unsatisfactory, unsettled fashion forever. Something definite must be decided upon, and therefore I must go to Stansbury."

"I shall be sorry to see you go — I fear you'll never come back."

"Don't fear any thing of the kind. I shall come back as certainly as the sun is in the sky. I could not, if I would, return to my old, idle, aimless existence; you have bitten me too thoroughly with the mania for hard work."

"As far as that is concerned, you have gone beyond me," said Mr. Hurst, "and it would certainly be a pity if you gave up your profession again, now that you are so likely to mount in it."

"Nothing shall induce me to give it up," said Devereux. "You ought to know me well enough to be sure of that."

"One never knows a man well enough to be sure what he will or will not do, for the sake of a woman," returned the other, significantly.

"You are talking nonsense, as men always do when they don't know what they are talking about!" said Devereux. "Because you see a woman's writing on this letter, you leap to a conclusion — like a woman. Miss Severn has written to me because her brother is unable to do so — that is all."

"That may be a good deal," said Mr. Hurst, glancing suspiciously at Miss Severn's letter.

### Chapter III

#### A Lost Ideal

It was the last week in April when Devereux arrived in Stansbury, and the weather was perfect. The earth green with its first delicate emerald, and bright with countless blossoms, the air rich with fragrance, the skies arching softly in their misty blue, and dropping light tears upon the turf, roses blushing, feathery leaves rustling, light and warmth and odor everywhere — this is what April means in the South.

This was what it meant on the particular day when Devereux found himself once more entering the familiar Severn gate. An odd home feeling came over him as he did so — perhaps because the house was so eminently one of those which we are apt to associate with the idea of home. He remembered how he had seen it first with the mellow October sunlight streaming on it, and suiting admirably, he had thought, its look of mellow age. Now, was it that his mood had changed, or why did the tender beauty of Nature's awakening life, the capricious glory of her April smile, seem to suit as well the mossy roof, under which succeeding generations had lived and loved, suffered and died? Certainly there seemed entire harmony between the season and the old house which had witnessed the beginning and the end of many jubilant springs. The trees drooping over it were half clad in dainty leafage, the ivy had put forth its lighter green, high over the portico a yellow jessamine clambered, and swung its fragrant bells —

"Like golden censers on the golden day."

Basil, with his arm in a sling, his shoulder bandaged, and his scorched face not improved by having all the hair and beard as much as possible cut away, was lying on a low, broad couch, by one of the sitting-room windows, when the sound of advancing steps on the gravel-walk made him turn his head. "Some one is coming, Madeleine," he said. "Who is it?"

Madeleine laid down the novel she had been reading aloud, and glanced out of the open window. She, too, heard the step, but the jessamine was so luxuriant that she could not see beyond its wall of green and bell-like flowers. Lance, who was dozing just outside the window, sprang up and darted forward with a growl, which changed the next instant to a whine of recognition. When she heard this and a voice saying, "Why, Lance, old fellow! are you still here?" she knew who had come. For an instant — not longer than a heart-beat — she was silent, then she said, "It is Mr. Devereux."

"Devereux! — is it?" said Basil. "He has come quickly."

To explain which it may be stated that Devereux had telegraphed the news of his departure from Denver.

"Yes," said Madeleine. She spoke absently, for she was debating whether or not she should leave the room before he rang the door-bell. There was time enough to do so, but, as was to have been expected from her good sense, she decided in the negative; and so it chanced that the first thing Devereux saw when he entered was a full, soft, well-remembered gaze shining out of two brown eyes.

For a man of the world, his greetings were rather incoherent, but there was no room to doubt one thing — that he was glad to be back. He not only said so at first, but — after he had sufficiently inquired into Basil's condition — he repeated the statement.

"It is strange that I should feel so much as if I had come home," he said. "It has been many years since I had the same sensation about any other place; and I have lived in various places much longer than I ever lived in Stansbury."

"You have lived in Denver four times as long," said Basil. "By-the-way, how do you like that place?"

"Very much in some respects — not at all in others. Yet I fancy I shall live there always. A roving life is pleasant enough when a man is quite young, but as he grows older — especially if he has any ambition to rise — he must have a definite place and fixed home in the world."

"When I knew you first it was your favorite belief that you had no ambition."

"I have learned a great many things since then," said Devereux, glancing at Madeleine.

He thought, as he did so, how little two years had changed her. The sweet, earnest eyes; the gentle, soft-cut mouth; the stately grace and charm of her manner — how well he remembered all, and how exactly he found them as he had left them! If he had doubted before seeing her whether or not his heart was in her possession, it would have been impossible to doubt it after her hand had touched his, her voice had spoken his name. Looking at her, he was conscious of something very different from any of those passionate fevers of the earth with which, like many another man, he had been too familiar. It was as if his soul rose and yearned toward its highest good and best inspiration — yearned with a strength which had in it something of the calm of a great resolution.

"I am glad that you have not come back to be disgusted with our quiet life," she said, meeting his glance with a composure which he knew enough of women to be aware did not augur well for his hopes. "The fire was our last great event, and you must not fancy that you can escape it long. You will be deluged with accounts of it — indeed, I see Basil is ready to begin now, so I shall leave you to his mercy, with a recommendation of patience."

"One minute, Madeleine," said Basil, as she rose. "Send a messenger to the hotel for Mr. Devereux's traps — that is the correct Western phrase, isn't it?" he added, turning to that gentleman. "You must stay with us — I will take no denial. You said in your telegram that you were coming to serve as my right hand, and what the deuce could I do with a right hand at the Stansbury Hotel?"

"Probably Mr. Devereux did not expect to be taken so literally and promptly at his word," said Madeleine, with a laugh.

The low, sweet cadence set Devereux at his ease immediately. It told him that she desired him to stay, and therefore his momentary hesitation was at an end. "You are mistaken," he said. "I shall be only too happy to be taken at my word — as literally and promptly as possible. But I do not wish to trouble you. Miss Severn."

"There is no fear of that," she replied. "I only hope we can make you comfortable. I may send for your — traps, then? Thanks."

In this way, rather to his own surprise, and much to his own satisfaction, Devereux found himself settled under the Severn roof, and admitted to that informal family companionship which is sometimes a very pleasant thing, and sometimes exceedingly the reverse. To be made to feel at home and considered "quite one of the family" is not always the best luck which can befall a stranger. There are families which do not appear to advantage when viewed *en d'éshabille*; they should be seen only in the robes of state with which they adorn themselves for the inspection of Mrs. Grundy. To this class the Severns did not belong. Those charming manners, which were so universally admired, were not worn by them as a society mask, but showed to best advantage within the threshold of home. Devereux soon appreciated this. Though by nature and training indisposed to enthusiasm, he told himself that his taste had never been so thoroughly pleased before.

The possession of the Carlisle estate remained, meanwhile, an open and tacitly avoided question. Devereux proved exceedingly capable and energetic in transacting business; but he acted altogether under Basil's direction, serving as a most efficient right hand, but carefully avoiding any thing which committed him to an acknowledgment of ownership. Both Basil and Madeleine observed this, but neither pressed the matter. "It will right itself after a while," the former said, and the latter, it is to be supposed, acquiesced.

They were pleasant days — days with an almost idyllic charm — which followed. Basil's injuries made him a prisoner; but it was not an irksome captivity when lightened by Devereux's labor and Madeleine's companionship. The three spent most of their days and all of their evenings together. Occasionally Rosalind dropped in — moved more by curiosity than any thing else — and she was soon shrewd enough to perceive what was likely to be the end. She told her husband that it was evident Devereux meant to marry Madeleine as he had endeavored to marry Mary Carlisle, from motives of interest.

"That may be," replied Mr. Champion; "but what are the motives of interest? The fortune is already his."

"But he is too proud to take it," said Rosalind, "so he thinks he will take Madeleine along with it as a compromise."

The man credited with this acute view of things was, meanwhile, more thoroughly discouraged with regard to his suit than he had been even during those two years in Colorado. Then he had thought that time was working for him, and that when he returned at last Madeleine might be ready to listen. Now he felt that if he spoke it would only be to receive the same cold, gentle kindness which had sent him away before. Feeling this, he asked himself, in a fit of salutary humility, what right he had to expect any thing else; he looked dispassionately at his character, his past life, and turned from both with a sense of weary disgust. There was no consolation in remembering how many women had regarded him with favor — how many hearts he had lightly won, and as lightly lost. These were not women like Madeleine Severn; they were not hearts which had more than idle fancy to bestow. This sentiment of honest self-contempt grew so strong that presently it found expression, as all strong sentiments do.

May had come with a rush of summer warmth, a glow of more than summer beauty. The close of a day of intense heat found Madeleine, Basil, and Devereux in the garden. As the sun sunk, they had adjourned there for coolness, and they found at least quiet and fragrance. Roses were everywhere — for it is May, not June, which is the month of roses in the South — and their perfume, together with that of honeysuckle and jasmine, loaded the air. The little group of three were seated on garden-chairs on a grassy plot where a large magnolia — the finest in Stansbury — grew. Among its glossy leaves the pure white blossoms were opening, exhaling the richest fragrance of all — indeed, so rich that Basil pronounced it almost overpowering.

"I do not like such highly-perfumed flowers as the magnolia, the tuberose, and the cape-jessamine," he said. "Give me something that is faint as well as sweet."

"Violets, for instance," said Devereux.

"Yes — and roses. One cannot have too much of their odor. See those Madeleine is wearing — we know just how subtly fragrant they are, though we can perceive nothing but this stunning magnolia."

"Roses suit Miss Severn — and so do violets," said Devereux, looking at her. She made a picture just then worth looking at. Dressed in white, with roses on her breast and in her soft brown hair, she was very near beauty — quite near enough, the man who was regarding her thought. He would not, if he could, have changed a line of the graceful figure, or a tint of the delicate face. She smiled as she met his eyes.

"You say very kind things to me," she answered. "But how languid this sudden heat makes one, does it not? I ought to water my flowers, and instead I am sitting here idly."

"Let me water them for you," said Devereux.

"I don't think either of you need trouble about the flowers," said Basil. "There is going to be rain within the next three hours. Look at that cloud in the southwest. Keep still and be comfortable! It is not weather to exert one's self unnecessarily. Madeleine, will you light me a cigar?"

"I am afraid you will be dreadfully spoiled when you recover the use of your arm," said Madeleine, taking the cigar-case which he extended with his left hand. "Mr. Devereux, is this

a good cigar? You must give me a match to light it — and I cut off the end, do I not? Now" — after Basil had received it and found it satisfactory — "may I light one for you?"

"For me!" said Devereux. "Are you in earnest? I shall be greatly honored — but how good of you!"

"Why so?" she asked, laughing, as she selected another cigar. "If we were in Spain I should make you a cigarette. Do you like cigarettes? I know how to make them admirably —do I not, Basil?"

"Pretty well," said Basil, in undemonstrative brotherly fashion, "but you need a particular kind of tobacco for cigarettes."

"Some day I shall ask you to make some for me," said Devereux, "but at present I am very grateful for my cigar."

She had lighted and handed it to him with a grace which no Spanish woman could have excelled. Her smile thrilled him to the heart, but only to cast his hopes more utterly to the ground. Indeed, he thought despondently that he had no hope whatever. The very frankness and sweetness of her manner filled him with a sense of despair. In all his experience he had never known any woman treat the man she loved with such calm, unembarrassed kindness.

Evening deepened, and dusk — the magical dusk of May — crept softly round them. A mocking-bird was singing in the crest of the magnolia like an incarnate spirit of melody. The odor of tobacco mingled with the odor of flowers, and along the verge of the southwestern horizon fitful flashes of electricity began to play. Basil rose after a while and strolled away, but Madeleine and Devereux kept their seats. "Exercise is too over-heating," said the former, and the latter answered, "It is pleasanter here than anywhere else."

There was silence for a minute after this — silence which Madeleine's voice broke. "You must let me thank you, Mr. Devereux," she said, "for all your kind service to Basil. What he would have done without you during these last few weeks, I do not know!"

"I am glad if I have been of service to him," said Devereux. "In my useless life, to be of service to somebody is a novelty and luxury. But you forget that your brother has a right to all that I have given."

She did not commit the blunder of asking what right, but she answered the other part of his remark: "Why do you always speak of yourself in such a depreciating manner?" she asked. "I do not like to hear it. If any one else spoke so, I might think it a pardonable affectation, but I know you better than to suspect such a thing, so I am sure it is honest. But I am also sure it is unjust. Why is your life less useful than the lives of other men?"

"My life is useless because I live for no one but myself," he answered. "I often think that if I had been killed in battle it would have been the best thing that could have befallen me. My life was very young then, and a 'death-bed of fame' would have redeemed its errors — but there is something suggestive of anti-climax in coming safely through the rain of bullets which sent many a hero to heaven — your brother and my brother among the number — to spend the best years of youth as an idle trifler and sybarite."

"Why do you say such harsh things of yourself? I think they are very unjust."

"Do you?" — he spoke eagerly — "but you said them once yourself."

"Are you sure of that? I am sorry if I was so rude. But I learned long ago that I am not infallible."

"You were perfectly right, however, in that case," he went on, with the humility and despondency of his heart finding faithful echo in his voice. "I did not appreciate how right at the time — but I do now. I have squandered my fortune and wasted my youth; I am not necessary in the least degree to the comfort or happiness of any human being. I can give no reason for my existence."

"The best reason is that God bestowed it on you," said Madeleine, in her reverent tones. "But I repeat again that you judge yourself too hardly — nothing is more necessary than that we

should have patience with ourselves. It will not do to give way to disgust and contempt of our own shortcomings, else there would be hours for all of us when we could scarcely bear to live."

"There is certainly a great deal of folly in abusing one's self," said Devereux, a little grimly. "Do you remember the advice which an old diplomatist gave Prosper M'rimée, 'Never speak evil of yourself: your friends will speak enough'?"

"And I suppose you add, like that ingenuous and amiable gentleman — M'rimée, I mean — that your great virtue is modesty, that you carry it to excess."

"No — as a rule, only very vain people claim to be modest. A truly modest man knows how vain he is."

"That is paradoxical, but true, I think. So, being a modest man, you know that you are vain?"

"Insufferably vain sometimes — at others, a flash of wisdom comes to me like an inspiration. I see myself in my true colors, and then no longer wonder at any failure which life has brought or can bring me."

"Humility is wholesome," said Madeleine, "but it should not be suffered to grow morbid. Take care that yours does not become so. When you have fallen hopelessly in your own esteem, come to me and perhaps I may assist you back to proper self-appreciation."

"You should not tempt me by such an offer — especially since I cannot fall lower in my own esteem than I am at present."

"Ah!" she laughed softly. "Then let me see if I cannot reinstate you. I think — indeed, I know — that you are kindly, generous, and unselfish. Can one desire a better foundation on which to build a character than those qualities?"

"If I possess them, they are what your theologians call natural virtues: I deserve no credit for them."

"Few of us deserve any credit for the little good that may be in us! — few are wise enough to cultivate virtues as we may cultivate flowers. An amiable character is often as much God's gift as a beautiful face — but we love both."

"You are kindness itself. Miss Severn. You are too kind, indeed. I wish I could make you understand — but that is impossible."

He broke off abruptly, and for a moment there was silence. Then suddenly came a flash of lightning, and a quick, rattling clap of thunder. Madeleine was perhaps not sorry for an excuse to rise. She felt that the conversation had wandered to the brink of possibilities which were best avoided.

"Basil was a true weather-prophet for once," she said. "Usually his prognostications are chiefly remarkable for their inaccuracy. But my flowers are to be watered from the clouds to-night. We had better go in, Mr. Devereux — especially as I see Ann coming to say that tea is ready."

As they were going to the house Devereux thought, "If she was not so kind, I might make one more effort — I might ask her if there is any hope for me in the future — but what is the good of it? I should only bring constraint into our friendship. She certainly does not care for me."

After tea an incident occurred which strengthened this opinion. The prophesied rain was pouring in torrents, but the drawing-room, with its shaded lamps, was almost as full of fragrance as the garden had been, from the cut roses which filled every vase and hanging-basket. Madeleine was at the piano — her touch lingering over the keys in the dreamy strains of Schumann and Chopin; Basil was reading by a table strewn with books, papers, and late periodicals; Mrs. Severn and Devereux were playing backgammon, which, it may be added, the latter held in cordial detestation. Discovering, however, that his hostess liked the game, he had hypocritically expressed a partiality for it — in consequence of which the board was brought out every evening. Three games at least were always played, and Mrs. Severn was generally victorious — whether by good fortune, skillful playing, or the courtesy of her adversary, it is difficult to say. This

evening, as usual, she won two games out of three, and while Devereux, with a pleasant sense of penance accomplished, closed the board, Basil called his attention to an essay in one of the magazines. "It is worth glancing over," he said.

As a matter of pure complaisance, Devereux accepted the book. He desired to go to the piano, where Madeleine's music — sweeter than the songs of the sirens — summoned him; but, being obliging to a fault, he sat down instead to read the essay, in which, at that moment, he felt not the least interest. He glanced hastily over it, feeling the effort of doing so to be quite a task, and receiving its propositions into a very distracted mind, but when he came to the end, his eye fell on a poem which occupied the opposite page, and which instantly attracted his attention. It was entitled "A Lost Ideal," and signed "Gordon Lacy." The title and signature startled Devereux, and almost involuntarily he began to read the verses — which were these:

#### A LOST IDEAL.

She stood beside me long ago,  
Whereon, in dreams, I feel them now:  
Her voice was tender, soft, and low.  
"Look up, soul!" she said — and smiled,  
Her mystic fingers touched my brow,  
"See in thy sky Hope's morning-star.  
By no false splendor be beguiled.  
But follow me afar."

I knelt and kissed her gracious feet,  
I bade her lead the onward way,  
For could I falter, fail, or stray,  
Blessed by a guide so fair and sweet?  
Her eyes shone on me with the light  
Of powers divine and fancies high,  
Of hopes and glories pure and bright  
As God's eternal sky.

She led me from the haunts of men,  
She whispered thoughts beyond the reach  
Of human minds or human speech,  
She bent and gently touched my pen:  
"soul," she said, "be brave and strong,  
Keep faith and courage on the way,  
For faint hearts fail as life grows long  
Toward the setting day:

"Let no earth-glamour come between  
Thy face and mine: no passion rise  
To veil my beauty from thine eyes.  
And from thy sight my glory screen.  
While thou art faithful I am true,  
And over paths of loss and pain,  
Trodden by a brave immortal few,  
I hold divinest gain."

Long while ago this heavenly voice

Spoke to my soul the mystic word.  
Still cherished there, though now unheard,  
Of hopes that made my heart rejoice;  
The morning star has paled away,  
Gone from the sky its rosy flush,  
And long ago the garish day  
Replaced Aurora's blush.

Long too ago that pure Ideal  
Turned her sad face and tender eyes,  
From where my chosen pathway lies.  
Amid the tumult of the Real;  
Her white robe passed beyond my sight.  
Her presence left my empty days,  
With one last glance of sorrowing light,  
She vanished from my gaze.

And now I seek, and now I yearn  
For that lost vision of the dawn,  
From my false side forever gone,  
That radiant guide, whose footsteps turn  
"Where, through enchanted meadows fair.  
Immortal asphodels still shine.  
And pearly morning fills the air  
With opal touch divine.

O'er world-worn paths my footsteps tread,  
The world's loud echo fills my ears.  
But, through its din, my spirit hears  
The sound of that sweet voice which led  
My soul adown the golden past.  
fair Ideal, betrayed and lost,  
Earth's treasures at thy feet I cast,  
Won at too dear a cost!

From the last line the young man looked up, and, to his surprise, met Madeleine's gaze. So entirely had his attention been absorbed by the poem, that he had not heard her leave the piano and cross the floor to the table. She had spoken to him once without obtaining any reply: now she said, "What is it that interests you so much?"

His first impulse was to close the magazine, and answer, "Nothing of any importance:" his second (which he followed) to say carelessly, "Your brother directed my attention to an essay which I have found rather interesting."

"Very interesting, I should think, to judge by the manner in which it absorbed you," said she, smiling. "May I see it?"

"It really is not worth your attention," he answered — anxious, he scarcely knew why, to keep from her this, which even to him seemed full of earnestness, as if it came directly from Lacy's heart.

She looked at him curiously. "Why is it not worth my attention, if it was worth yours?" she asked. Then she extended her hand and took the magazine. "I am a daughter of Eve," she said. "I must know what it is."

"If you must know," said Devereux, in a low voice — thinking it best to be candid at once — "it is a poem which I thought might pain you — by Mr. Lacy."

"Why should it pain me?" she asked — blushing, not so much from the sound of that name as from the tone in which it was pronounced. "You surely forget," she added, a little haughtily, "how entirely it has passed out of Mr. Lacy's power to pain me."

"I don't forget any thing," said Devereux. "God forbid that I should! But you must read the poem now — then you will understand what I meant, and why I thought to spare you pain by keeping it from you."

She opened the magazine wonderingly, yet a little reluctantly — doubting what might be before her. She was prepared to be shocked, for Lacy's poems of late had drifted nearer and nearer to a standard which is "advanced" without being high, and from this very reason she was not prepared for the verses on which her glance fell. The poem was less artistically polished than much of his work, but it possessed a spirit of pathos and sincerity which many more elaborate efforts had lacked.

As she read this message which seemed addressed to her comprehension alone, all the past rushed back over Madeleine, and tears gathered so thickly in her eyes that she could scarcely read. Suddenly they startled Devereux, as well as herself, by dropping on the page, and then saying, in a scarcely audible voice, "Poor Gordon!" she put down the magazine and left the room.

## Chapter IV

### Among The Roses.

It may be imagined that Devereux's reflections, when he went to his chamber that night, were not agreeable. He sat down by an open window to smoke, and while the damp air came in, laden with fragrance which the rain had exhaled, he asked himself what new knowledge this was which had brought to him such a great revelation of pain. Was it the knowledge that Madeleine did not love him? But he had fancied that he knew that before. Was it the realization of how much he loved her? — of how entirely, for good or ill, his heart was in her keeping? That, too, he had known — though not, perhaps, with the sharp distinctness borne to him. Was it jealousy? — was it longing? — was it hopelessness or passion? He could not tell, and he was in no mood to analyze his own sensations. That his soul was sick with pain, he knew: that he was possessed by a sense of anguish which is old as humanity — the strong yearning for a good which cannot be reached, the burning sense of wasted effort and impotent powers! There could be no doubt of one thing — his whole nature was roused at last. He had scoffed at earnestness and played with passion, and now they turned like tigers to rend him. "My God! if it were only a fancy!" he said aloud, remembering Madeleine's words when they had parted two years before. "If it were only possible to put it out of my life as I have put many another sentiment!" But, while he spoke, he felt that such a thing was impossible. He might fail, as men unnumbered have failed, to win the desire of his heart and the light of his eyes, but he could not thrust aside the love which had grown within him until it seemed to say with unchanging resolution, "I have come, and I shall abide — to bless or curse!"

Considering these things, reflecting on the incident of that night, his heart rose up in indignant protest. She had called him light and fickle, she had sent him away refusing even to believe in the depth and strength of his love, and now before his eyes she could show how her heart still clung to the memory of a man who had not only failed in faith to her, but who had renounced every high ideal in life and art. That sting, as was natural enough, pierced deeper than any other. He felt in every fibre of his nature the intensity and constancy of his own love, and for this love to be made a thing of naught would have been hard to bear under any circumstances, but

for it to be disregarded and rejected while an unworthy shadow of the past was exalted above it — this was something which he felt scarcely able to endure. A fierce sense of rebellion overpowered him. Why should that which he would have toiled and suffered — ay, even died — to win, be denied to his passionate longing, and given to one who had no need or care for it, who, if he recognized his great mistake too late, could sit down and sing of it to the world in words that hardly veiled their meaning?

Such questions have been asked since the beginning of time, and through all the ages no answer has come that the human heart is willing to hear. No answer came to Devereux now. There was nothing to calm the tumult of his soul. The clouds broke away, the stars looked at him through the jasmine-hung window, but the serene majesty of Nature had no power to still the passionate fever of his heart. When he rose at last and flung the burning end of his last cigar among the wet flowers below, the words which came to his lips were those which Schiller gave to princely Wallenstein:

"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."

That a change had come over Devereux was perceptible the next day to every one. It was a subtle change, but it did not pass with the day, nor with many days. He was colder and quieter in his manner, he withdrew more to himself, his interest seemed to flag; in the work which Basil and himself had undertaken — the rebuilding of the mills — and now and then he spoke of an early return to Colorado. All this looked ominous, and Basil — who had become sincerely attached to him — spoke gravely to Madeleine.

"Something has come over Devereux," he said. "I don't understand what it is, but he seems unaccountably altered. Have you done any thing to him?"

"I! What should I have done to him?" She laughed, but, as she laughed, she colored, and Basil, noting the fact, looked at her suspiciously.

"I am half inclined to think you have," he said. "Devereux has changed too suddenly for something not to be the matter. Now that I come to think of it, he has not seemed like himself since that evening I left you in the garden together. Madeleine, he really is a very good fellow, and if you have done or said any thing to wound him —"

"Basil, your conjectures are running away with you," said Madeleine. "I have not, to my knowledge, either said or done the least thing to wound Mr. Devereux. Nothing passed between us on the evening to which you allude save a little idle talk, and then we came into the house."

"He has not been like himself since that evening," repeated Basil, obstinately, "and he says he is going back to Colorado next week."

"I am sorry to hear it; but there is nothing I can do to prevent his going."

"You might speak to him — you have a great deal of influence over him — and tell him that he ought to stay and take charge of his property."

"I cannot," said Madeleine, shrinking, she scarcely knew why. "You should not ask it of me, Basil. I have not mentioned the property to him since he came — I cannot do so."

"Well, say what you please to him, so that you induce him to stay — for a month or two longer, at all events. It is really impossible for me to assume the entire responsibility of these buildings."

"Why don't you tell him so?"

"I have told him so — and he replies by shrugging his shoulders and saying that I must. Now, he won't answer you in that manner."

"He may not answer me in that manner, but the substance of his reply will probably be the same."

"Try," said Basil, laconically.

Thus urged to effort, and her mind "put upon thinking," as Robinson Crusoe says, Madeleine began to consider what the meaning of the change in Devereux — evident to her as to Basil — could be. A little while before he had said that he would probably not go back to Denver before the end of the summer, and now he talked of returning next week! This sudden resolution was plainly the result of some recent cause; but she was unable to imagine what that cause was, until the hint which Basil had given with regard to the evening in the garden suddenly enlightened her. Like a flash she remembered Lacy's poem, and how it had affected her — how she had read it before Devereux, how her tears had fallen on the page, and how she had left the room. From that hour the change in him had dated.

This revelation came to her with almost startling force. She was alone in her own room; but, glancing in a mirror opposite her seat, she saw that a flood of crimson dyed her face. "How could he! — how could he!" she cried, and then, stung by a sense of having been misunderstood and misjudged, she astonished herself by bursting into tears more passionate than those she had shed over Lacy's "Lost Ideal."

It is an accepted fact that, when two people live in the same house, they must of necessity see a great deal of each other. It is certainly true that they have ample opportunities for doing so; but it is also true that if they are inclined to avoid each other, they can accomplish that as well under the same roof as in any other position. If either or both are good tacticians, it makes the matter more interesting and agreeable. To avoid each other, and yet not to betray the secret of this avoidance to casual lookers-on, requires very good tactics indeed, and a grace of social diplomacy not often found.

This diplomacy both Madeleine and Devereux possessed, and for several days they exercised it in a truly admirable manner. The latter thought that he had scorched himself badly enough, and that his best wisdom lay now in avoiding the fair but cruel flame which allured him. The former felt some slight resentment of his injustice, but much more of that instinct of reserve which often makes a woman seem cold when she only feels that it is her right to be wooed before she is won. Under these circumstances, there was a great deal of courtesy in the manners of the two, but very little of that frank ease into which, for a little while, they seemed to be drifting. When matters reach such a point, they rapidly tend to a culmination of one kind or another — and a culmination came here shortly and sharply.

It occurred at breakfast one morning. Several letters lay by Devereux's plate when he came down, and on the first he recognized at a glance Mr. Hurst's writing. Having read it, he looked at Basil with a smile.

"My furlough is at an end," he said; "the bugle sounds 'Boot and saddle' again. Hurst writes that I must come back at once. He is called away to one of the Atlantic cities on important business, and I am needed in Denver."

"I wonder if you have not something to do with the important business?" said Basil, suspiciously.

"On my honor, no. Here is his letter if you like to read it." He tossed it across the table. "You can see for yourself what he says."

Basil read the letter, and returned it gravely. "I suppose you can't avoid going," he said.

"Even if I had any desire to avoid it, which I have not, it would be quite impossible to think of such a thing," replied Devereux. "I owe more than I can say to Hurst — he has been the kindest and most generous of friends to me — and I should be intolerably ungrateful if I inconvenienced him now by neglecting to answer his summons."

"When do you mean to start?"

"To-night."

"When there is any thing like a journey in prospect, what a hurry gentlemen always are in to be off!" said Mrs. Severn. "I think they are as impatient as children. Now, why cannot you take things quietly, Mr. Devereux, and wait for a day or two?"

"For one reason, because, while I was taking things quietly, Hurst would be taking them very much the reverse," said Devereux, smiling, "and because there is no good in making a painful thing a long thing."

"You don't want to go, then?"

"How can I possibly want to go when you have all been so kind to me?"

"We think the kindness is on your side, who came so far to relieve Basil," said Madeleine. "Of course, if your friend needs you in Denver, we cannot be so selfish as to ask you to stay; but we hope that you will come back."

"I do not promise myself such a pleasure," he answered, without looking at her. "I scarcely think I shall come back — unless Basil breaks his arm again."

Silence followed this announcement. Nobody cared to take up the gauntlet thus thrown down, and introduce on the scene that oft-discussed and much-vexed subject of the Carlisle property, Mrs. Severn elevated her eyebrows in mild surprise, and glanced at Madeleine. Basil also looked at her, as if to say, "You see how right I was!" while Madeleine, on her part, felt in the position of one who is held accountable for vagaries beyond all power of regulating. On the spur of the moment she formed a resolution which after breakfast she proceeded to execute.

The horses were before the door for Basil and Devereux to ride, as usual, to the mills. They never troubled themselves about haste in starting, however, and this morning was no exception to the rule. Basil found it necessary to go to his room in search of some missing plan which the builders needed, while Devereux, seeing Madeleine starting to the garden with her basket and shears, could not resist the temptation to accompany her. He had not done any thing of this kind of late; but, after all (he thought), why should he not singe his wings a little more? Opportunity for doing so would soon be over, and certainly he had no need to guard from harm a heart which had already passed so far beyond his control. He walked up to her, therefore, as she was tying on her hat.

"May I come with you?" he asked, in the tone of one who is not altogether sure what reception he may expect. "I am fond of roses, you know, and perhaps you will give me a bud to put away with your violets as a souvenir."

"Is it possible you have those violets yet?" asked Madeleine, looking up with a smile — a smile so bright and sweet that Devereux's heart startled him by a great throb. The delicate face under its garden-hat seemed to him at that moment the fairest on which the sun of May ever shone. The glamour which Love brings in his train touched its beauty with a divine charm, like that which the face of the first woman — yet unstained by sin — may have worn to the gaze of the first man.

"Of course I have them yet," he said, answering her question. "Did you think I was likely to have given or thrown them away?"

"They were not worth giving away — who would care for a knot of faded violets? — and scarcely worth throwing away, since that requires an effort; but you might have lost them."

"I have taken excellent care not to do so," he replied. "Frail and faded as they are, they have been my only memorial of — of much which I had better forget, perhaps. If I were a poet — like Mr. Lacy — I would tell you the story of all they have been to me. But then, very probably, after my story was told, you would not care to hear it."

"Why should you suppose so?" she asked. Then, feeling that the opportunity was come for what she had determined at breakfast to say, she went on in a low voice: "I am glad you have spoken of Mr. Lacy and his poems — it reminds me of something which for several days I have wanted to say to you. I have been afraid that you might have misunderstood what I felt on that night when you showed me — or, rather, when I read, despite you — his 'Lost Ideal.' "

Devereux was slightly startled, for he had not in the least expected any thing like this; but his self-possession rarely forsook him, and he did not lose it now. They had been crossing the lawn as they spoke, and, as he answered, they entered the garden under an arch over which a rose-vine ran.

"I do not think I misunderstood any thing," he said, quietly. "I knew how the poem would affect you, and therefore I did not wish you to see it. There is an odd kind of sympathy between us — there has been from the first. I *felt* that it would pain you; but you must not fancy that, for a moment, I did you any injustice."

"Are you sure that you did not?" she asked. "Are you sure that you know why it pained me?"

She turned as she spoke, and looked at him with her candid eyes, which, whether he would or not, seemed to compel a truthful answer.

"I imagined that I knew exactly why it pained you," he replied. "You felt the tenderest pity, and you have still — may I say this, sure that you will not misunderstand? — the memory of love."

"I am glad that you have been frank enough to say this to me," she answered, a deeper color flickering into her cheeks, but her eyes remaining steady in their grave regard. "In justice to myself I must tell you that you are mistaken. Poor Gordon! what I felt for him was indeed pity, the purest pity — and you know how near akin pity is to pain. I saw the beginning of his unfaithfulness to all high ideals so long ago, and I have watched with so much sorrow his downward path! The love I once gave him has passed almost from my memory — entirely from my heart — but it is impossible not to be sorry when we see a spirit sinking into the mire of earth, weighed down with earthly things, whose wings we once hoped might bear it to the stars."

She spoke, Devereux thought, with the simplicity of a child and the gentleness of a saint. His heart leaped up with such a sense of relief, of absolute trust and confidence, that he could have knelt and kissed her dress as it swept the dewy grass beneath their feet. He felt a pang of shame that he had ever doubted her, that he had not read her meaning better.

He expressed something like this, adding: "I can only excuse myself when I remember that the heart sends up mists which cloud and confuse the brain. Will you forgive me for saying that I have no capability of cool judgment where you are concerned? If I had, I should not have blundered so unpardonably."

"You have so often judged me more kindly than I deserved," she said, "that I can afford to pardon you for judging me once with slight injustice. Now that you understand, however," she went on, with a smile rising to her lips and into her brown eyes, "will you have the rose that is to be a companion souvenir to your violets?"

"I will have any thing that you choose to give me," he answered; "but since you make me bold to ask, I would rather have a rose that you have worn. Will you give me one out of your hair — to-night? I have often wished that I might fall heir to one that had rested for a whole evening among your soft tresses."

She looked at him with something like wonder in her gaze. What woman, who is not vain and shallow, but feels humbled and touched by the supreme height to which a brave man's love exalts her, with all the imperfections (which he does not see) thick upon her? It may be safely asserted that in exact proportion to the fineness of a nature, it feels this. There are women who never feel it — to whom such homage is only a vulgar triumph.

"Certainly, you shall have the rose to-night," she said; "but will you not have one now also? Here is a lovely Malmaison."

Devereux received the fragrant, half-opened bud which she offered, and kept in his own the hand which gave it. He was not thinking of the Malmaison; he was thrilled by a sudden divine hope which came to him so much like an inspiration that he felt unable to disregard it.

"I told you a little while ago that I should not come back," he said. "I thought then that there would never be any good in doing so — that my only hope for peace was in remaining away;

but now you are so kind — you must blame yourself if I am presumptuous — that I feel impelled to ask you if I may come back?"

She did not reclaim her hand; she only lifted her eyes to his face for a moment, and then the lids fell again, as she replied, "Surely there is no need to ask such a question. Do you not know that we shall be very glad to see you come back?"

"We!" he repeated. "I only spoke of you. No one else matters. Will you be glad to see me?"

"Very glad," she answered, simply.

"And when I come," he went on, growing bolder and laying his other hand over the one which he held, "may I tell you the story of all that has so long been in my heart regarding you — the story which I promised when I went away that I would come back in three years to tell?"

"Oh, no," said Madeleine, with a low laugh. "You are mistaken — my memory is better than yours. You only said that you were coming back to tell me whether or not your fancy had endured."

"But there is no need for me to tell you that," he said. "You know now — what I knew then — that it is no fancy, but the passion which colors a man's whole life. I feel as strongly as possible that I have nothing to offer which is worth your regard — that, taken at my best (which, God knows, is poor enough!), I am not and never shall be worthy of you; but still, if you can give me any hope — if you can let me think that some day you may learn to love me — I shall strive to wait as patiently and serve as faithfully as the knights of whom you spoke to me once."

"Do you remember every thing that I ever said to you?" asked Madeleine, with a slight quiver in her voice. "I wish — I wish I had uttered things better worth remembering."

"I never heard you utter any thing that was not worth remembering," said Devereux, with a sincerity that could not be doubted. "What power your words have had over me I shall not try to tell you — I would rather show you."

"I wish you would forget some words that I once spoke to you," she said. "They were not only harsh, but deeply unjust. I have felt that for a long time. Do you know what I mean? I said that you were frivolous and fickle — and — and other things of the same kind. Will you forgive me? I know better now."

"Forgive you!" He kissed passionately the hand he held. "There is nothing to forgive. I was all that you said — and worse. If I am better now, it is you who have made me so. I claim no credit for my constancy. How could any one know you and not love you? — how could any one love you and forget you?"

"Oh, you think too highly, far too highly of me!" she cried, touched, melted, overcome, not so much by the words themselves as by the great earnestness which filled them. "If you could see me in my true colors, you would not care so much for me — you would not think me a prize worth winning."

"Then God forbid that I should ever see you in your true colors!" he said, with something like a laugh. "The world would be emptied for me if I lost my belief in you as I know and love you — my queen, my star, my truest inspiration and best hope in life! O Madeleine! do you not know that, after all this sweet kindness, I cannot leave you without some assurance for the future? My love, my love, will you try to give me the answer I desire when I come back to tell my story?"

He looked at her with passionate, pleading eyes, in which she read all that was in his heart — the heart which had remained true to her through coldness, scorn, neglect and absence. As she thought of this, a swift remembrance came to her — ah, would to God it came to all of us when hands are clasped to say good-by! — that on this sad earth of pain and loss we are certain of nothing save what we hold in our grasp. The present moment is ours — the next may be forever beyond our reach. To Madeleine this thought was like a warning. The man who loved her was going away, and could she be sure that her glance would ever rest on his face again? The doubt cost her a pang which ended all hesitation. With an impulse full of the bravest and sweetest grace, she held out her other hand.

"Need you wait to tell your story until you come back?" she said.

Who is not able to imagine what Devereux answered? It was the light of Paradise which suddenly filled the sunshine for these two, as they stood among the roses of May. There are few lives which such an hour has not brightened with that same primal radiance which in the oldest love-story of earth rested on the two — type of all who were to come after — amid the bowers of Eden.

Basil went that morning to the mills alone; but for him, too, there was a brightness on the earth which had not been there before — the brightness of an unselfish joy in the happiness of others. There was no thought of envy or repining in his soul, for his was that true and simple courage which, accepting life as it is given, bears its burden cheerfully over the roughest road.

Devereux remained firm in his resolution to leave for Colorado that night, and Madeleine did not try to dissuade him; but when the sun was sinking, they went in the sweet May gloaming to Mary Carlisle's grave, and there one promised to wait — the other to return.

When it is said that he did return, all is told. It is good to think that sometimes on earth faithful love and tender hope are crowned with that golden gift of happiness which our hearts desire; but it is also good — nay, better — to believe that if they are not so crowned, there are some gifts better lost than won, some souls called to taste the divine sweetness which lurks in the bitterness of sacrifice, rather than that rich nectar which men call joy, and who are taught the great lesson that, out of weary longing and baffled efforts, and failure which seems almost too sad to be dwelt upon, a victory which shall endure forever may be wrought.

THE END.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Browning's How they Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix