JANET

BY

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"IT WAS A LOVER AND HIS LASS," "THE LAIRD OF NORLAW,"
"AGNES," "ADAM GRAEME OF MOSSGRAY," ETC.

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JANET.

CHAPTER I.

JANET SUMMERHAYES did not start in life with the feelings usually attributed to the young governess when beginning what is certainly a very thankless trade, with about as little prospect of continued prosperity as any in the world. Many representations of that sad and resigned young heroine have appeared before the world. We all know the appearance of the slight girl in deep mourning shyly coming into a strange house and a new world, shrinking alike from kindness and neglect; feeling that she is likely

to be shut out there from everything that is agreeable, expecting humiliation, and, if not ready to take offence, at least quite aware that nobody is likely to take her feelings into consideration, or think that she is made of young flesh and blood like the others. There are many excuses for this frame of mind, and in many cases the worst prognostics are carried out. But I am very glad to say that this was not at all the idea with which the subject of this story prepared to go forth upon the world.

Her position up to this time had not been like that of the young and gentle governess of romance, an exceptionally sheltered and happy one. She had not been the only daughter of a doting father or mother, whose want of means to provide for her was only discovered upon their sudden death. On the contrary, Janet's experience was entirely that of a dependent. It is true the dependence was more or less a natural one. She was the relation of her patroness, and she had grown up from childhood in Miss Philipson's house, without any conscious-

ness that it was not her home, and with much of the feelings of a child, always subject, always liable to be ordered about and reproved, and little considered, but only in a way common to children. She had been very well educated on the whole, very well cared for, nicely dressed, since that was quite according to the fitness of things, and not allowed in anything to fall behind the neighbouring girls of her age in any pleasure or accomplishment. It would have been contrary to Miss Philipson's credit, and it would have impaired her comfort, if Janet had not been on a level with the rest, or if she had not been cheerful and happy in her life. She was always kind to the girl, not being naturally unkind to anyone. She liked to have everything pleasant about her, and she had a conscience besides—both which things were very good for her little cousin. She did not provide for Janet, but that was all—and indeed, having done so much for her, and given her on the whole such a happy life up to her twentieth year, there was no failure of duty in this; and

though some of Janet's friends were inclined to blame Miss Philipson, Janet herself was much more just, and neither felt nor expressed any blame.

'Aunt Mary was always good to me,' the girl said. 'I had no right to that, but she gave it me freely, and we were very happy together, and certainly I had no right to expect any more.'

'My dear, I would not for the world impair your gratitude or your affection for your poor aunt,' said the vicar's wife; 'in many things she deserved it fully, but—'

'There is no "but,"' said Janet. She was not perhaps quite so much overcome by grief as her friends would have liked to see her. There is a very simple standard in this respect which people like to see followed. They like to see a grief which is overwhelming for the moment, tears without measure, a sorrow which can take no comfort, all the better if it makes the mourner ill, and perhaps confines her to bed for a few days in a shrouded room, without any occu-

pation but that of brooding and weeping over her loss. And then they expect her to cheer up—not too quickly, but with a little visible advance every day, an advance which they can feel to be owing more or less to their own sympathetic kindness and good offices. Janet had to a certain extent followed this unspoken rule. She had cried a great deal, though her health had not at all suffered; but after the funeral she had perhaps too quickly regained her cheerfulness. When the doctor proposed to her, which was a thing that happened very soon after, it had been all she could do not to laugh at the droll idea that anyone should think it possible she would marry a middle-aged country doctor, she—Janet! She did laugh in the safety of her own room where nobody could hear her, recalling his look, and all the peculiarities of his unattractive person and his rough riding dress. He wanted to save her from the life of a governess by binding her to him, and his shabby house, and his busy, dry, joyless existence. How extraordinary, how ludicrous

it was that anybody should think it was better to vegetate than to go out into the world and seek your fortune! Janet had lived at Clover all her life, and she liked the little place. The scenes were all so familiar, the people were all friends; but then she never for a moment supposed that she could be bound to such a seclusion. It had always been her expectation that one time or another she was to fling herself forth upon the world.

At the vicarage they were exceedingly tender of the girl who was going forth upon fate like this. Mrs. Bland made a survey of all her clothes, and mended some and condemned others with a pathetic tenderness.

'You must have all your linen in order,' she said, 'for there is nothing a girl is so apt to forget. I was in rags myself when my first wedding outfit wore out before I ever thought of getting a new set of things. A girl can see when she wants a new frock, but as for her under-things she always leaves that to her mother.'

'But you forget, Mrs. Bland, I have never had a mother,' said Janet.

'Ah, my poor child! but you were very kindly thought of, Janet, very kindly.'

'Do you think I meant any reproach to poor Aunt Mary? Oh, no, no! She liked me to have everything. She liked me to be the best-dressed child in the parish. But as I grew up I saw to it myself. She thought it was best for me. But I shall always take the most care of the buttons you have sewed on. Fancy sewing on buttons and seeing after tapes for me!'

'It is the most natural thing in the world,' said the vicaress. 'I only wish I could always take the charge of you, Janet; but we are old people, and we have little to leave, and it would only be putting off a little what would have to be faced at last.'

'Dear Mrs. Bland!' cried Janet, looking at her with something like tears in her eyes: they were real tears—and yet even while they sprang by instinct of nature, the little thing could not help the rising of a revolt against the thought

of settling again at Clover after she had once been unseated from her corner. At Clover! when what she was thinking of was the world.

'But you must promise me, my dear,' said the old lady, with a tremor in her voice, 'that as long as we live you will always look on the vicarage as your home. If this Mrs. Harwood should not turn out all you expect, you must not think it necessary to stay on, you know, and fret yourself to death trying to make it do. You must always remember you have a home to come back to, Janet.'

'But the vicar thought Mrs. Harwood was very nice.'

'So he did, but in such cases a man's opinion does not go for very much. If a woman looks nice and talks nicely, and has an agreeable smile, it is all the vicar thinks of: and most people are nice to him.'

'How could they help it, he is so delightful himself?'

'Well, I tell you, he is no judge; and in the best of places, Janet, there is a great deal to

put up with. Every family has its own ways, and you will be a stranger, and it will be hard for you to be left out and to feel yourself always an outsider. There is a young lady, and she will go out to her parties and balls and you will be left behind. I don't mean that you will feel it now, when your spirit is broken, but by and by, when in the course of nature——'

'It would just be the same at Clover,' said Janet; 'there are neither balls nor parties.'

'Ah, but everything there is you are asked to. That makes such a difference: and it will not be the case there. My dear, I am frightened about you, for you are too bold. You don't realise the difference. It will be a great difference,' said Mrs. Bland, shaking her head.

Janet could have laughed, but did not. She was very bold. The new life and the strange family had no terrors for her. Novelty was dear, an exhilaration not a terror, to this little girl. Her heart was beating high with expectation while all these prophecies were poured into her ear. But it would not have been in

good taste (Janet felt) to exhibit the real state of her feelings, so she answered, demurely, that she hoped she was not too bold.

'But, dear Mrs. Bland, when one has to do it, don't you think one had better try to do it cheerily and think the best? Don't you remember the old song in the play that the vicar likes so much—

"A merry heart goes all the way
A sad one tires in a mile, a'!"'

'That's true enough,' said Mrs. Bland, still shaking her head, 'but men don't know half that women have to put up with. Anyhow, Janet, my poor dear, you must always recollect this, that if it should ever become more than you can bear you must just give up the struggle and come back home. This is home so long as he and I are alive, and, if he goes first, whatever poor little cottage I may get to hide my old head in, you'll just be as welcome there; and if I go first there will be all the more occasion, for he will sorely want somebody to look after him.'

At the mingled prospect of Janet's need, and

her own poor little problematical cottage as the vicar's widow, and the vicar's want of somebody to look after him, Mrs. Bland broke down entirely, and shed salt tears. Indeed, those things were all possible, though only one of the last two sorrows could be. But when an old pair come to the end of life, it is almost certain that one of them must be left one day to survive and miss the other, though, to be sure, it does happen now and then that they are so blessed as to die within a day or two of each other, which is by far the best.

Janet went to her old friend, and kissed her, and was, as Mrs. Bland said, very sweet, comforting the old lady with tender words and letting fall a few tears, as it is easy on any provocation to do at nineteen. And immediately after it was tea-time, and the vicar came in from his study, where he was writing his sermon, and everything became cheerful again. Afterwards Mrs. Bland put all Janet's 'things' together, and looked at them with affectionate, complacent eyes, patting each snowy heap.

'Now, Janet,' she said, 'you have a dozen of each, my dear, and not a button or a tape wanting, and all the trimmings nice and in good order. That will last you for a long time. You must keep an eye upon the trimming, which London washerwomen tear dreadfully. I've put our old-fashioned Buckinghamshire lace, made in my old parish where I was born, upon all the new ones. There is nothing that wears and washes so well. You never have had to think of these things till now; but you must promise me to look them over carefully every Saturday. You know, "A stitch in time——"'

Janet gave the promise with all necessary earnestness, and the 'things' were carried upstairs and carefully packed. It was a sad evening at the vicarage. The old people said all manner of sweet and pretty things to the neophyte, which Janet tried when she could to ward off by a little joke, or one of the merry little speeches which all the Clover people expected from her: but, though this might turn the edge of a piece of serious advice for a moment, the

grave tone always came back. A sentence might be begun lightly, but it was sure to end with 'remember, Janet——' The old people both kissed her and blessed her when she went upstairs to bed—'The last night,' they said to each other with an interchange of sympathetic glances.

'And she takes it so easily. She is not a bit daunted,' said Mrs. Bland, shaking her head.

'Perhaps that's all the better,' said the vicar; but the old couple were almost alarmed, in spite of themselves, at Janet's calm.

If they had but known! She went upstairs quietly enough with a composed step. But when she got to her own room, which was, happily, at the other end of the house, Janet threw down on her bed the things she was carrying, which were presents from her old friends—a writing-case from one, a work-basket from the other—and danced, actually danced a lively old hornpipe step, which she had learned when she was a child. She did it before the glass, and nodded and smiled at herself as she

bobbed up and down. Then, stretching out her arms, flung herself in the old easy-chair and said, 'Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!' softly under her breath. 'The last night,' said Janet to herself. The last of all this dull old life, which she knew in every feature, which never had anything new in it—no excitement, no change: but to do the same things at the same hours every day, and come in to meals and sit down in the same chair, and go to church and go to bed. She was not at all without affection for the people who were so kind to her, but to feel herself upon the edge of the unknown went to Janet's head. It was like laughing gas, or champagne, or any other stimulant to gaiety. The idea intoxicated her. As for all the dolorous pictures that had been placed before her, she believed none of them. To go off among people she had never seen, to plunge into the midst of a life she knew nothing about, to become a member of a family whose name alone she knew —it was like beginning a new world to Janet. She would have everything to find about them

—their Christian names, their stories, if they had any; perhaps the family story, if there was one —the skeleton in the closet, the romance; whatever there might be. What fun! she said to herself, clapping her hands. Even the new place would be something to begin with—the new home and customs, the new rooms.

It appeared to her altogether in a bright light of expectation—everything nice, everything new. The name of Mrs. Harwood, a widow lady with three children, living in St. John's Wood, will not, perhaps, appear exciting at the first glance. She was Mrs. Novelty, the gatekeeper of the new world, to Janet, and her three children were three romances about to begin, in each of which Janet would come by degrees to be the heroine. The house in St. John's Wood was the theatre, the stage on which she was to make her first appearance. She knew no more of that respectable (or dis-respectable) region than she did of Timbuctoo. As for the naughtiness, that was all a sealed book to Janet. Her wild-

est thoughts were as innocent as a child's. She had absolute ignorance as a guard to her imagination, which is a guard always to be desired, and most so at nineteen. The life she longed to know was the common life of the world. Not even in her dreams had she thought of the transgression of any law. She expected to have her own merits recognised, to have adoration and homage laid at her feet, to find not only Prince Charming in the end, but, no doubt, many others whose sighs and glances would make existence very amusing. She expected that admiration would meet her, that she would be in the midst of a story before she knew. She expected to triumph all along the line. 'The world's my oyster, which with this glance I'll open.' That was the light in which Janet contemplated the life of a governess in St. John's Wood, which she was to begin next day.

CHAPTER II.

THE household at the vicarage was astir earlier than usual next morning, which was altogether unnecessary, for Jane did not leave Clover till after twelve o'clock; but that was a kind of tribute to the excitement in which everybody had a part. The morning was spent in investigations as to whether anything was wanting in Janet's little travelling work-case, where she kept (by special provision of Mrs. Bland) a reel of black silk and one of white cotton, needles, thimble, and scissors; or in her little writing-case, where (supplied by the vicar) she had two sheets of notepaper, two envelopes, two post-cards, the same of postage stamps, a pen on an

ivory-holder, and a small travelling inkbottle. These little articles were quite independent of the handsome work-box and writing-case, severally given her by her kind friends, and were intended solely for the necessities of the journey, though, perhaps, as it was only three hours by railway to London such careful provisions were scarcely necessary.

Janet's box was not locked till ten o'clock, in case some one might recollect something that had been forgotten; but after every precaution had been taken, the last strap fastened, her railway rug and cloak neatly, nay, almost more than neatly, put up, her own hat put on, and her coat buttoned to the throat, not one detail left which had not been attended to, there was still one hour to spare before the train left. They went out into the wintry garden, where everything was bare, and strolled round the walks—the three together, the vicar in his greatcoat, prepared to accompany Janet to the railway, and Mrs. Bland with a large white shawl over her cap. It was a beautiful

morning, the sun shining red through the mist, and everything so warmed in colour and sentiment by those ruddy rays that it was almost impossible to believe that it was a cold November day.

'I wish now,' said the vicar, 'that I had insisted, as I always wished, on going up with Janet to town, and seeing her safe in Mrs. Harwood's hands.'

'I almost wish you had, dear,' said Mrs. Bland.

'But I don't,' cried Janet. 'Oh, please don't think of such a thing! How am I to learn to manage for myself if you pet me like this, as if I could do nothing? No, dear vicar, I should so much prefer to part with you here, in our own dear Clover, and to keep the—image quite unbroken.'

Janet was a little at a loss how to finish her sentence, but felt very successful when she thought of these words.

Mrs. Bland put up her handkerchief to her eyes.

'There's something in that,' she said, 'to leave us just as I hope you will find us when you come back. And always do remember, Janet, if any difficulty should arise, that here we are, always so happy to have you—only sorry that we can't keep you altogether.'

'Always delighted to have you,' echoed the vicar, 'and sorry above measure——'

'But I hope no difficulty will arise,' said Janet, very briskly; 'I don't intend there should. I am not quite like a little novice, am I? I have seen a little of the world. I remember watching how the governess at the Grange got on, or rather how she didn't get on, and thinking had I been in her place—! So you see I am not unprepared. And then it will be everything to know I may come back here for my holidays, when I have any.'

'We ought to have made a condition about that,' said the vicar. 'I have been thinking so for some time. We should have put it down in black and white, so many weeks at a certain

time, say Christmas or Easter, instead of leaving it to chance as we have done.'

'Not Christmas,' said Mrs. Bland, 'nor Easter either, for that would not be so convenient; but in August, when every child has holidays.'

'Only then,' said the vicar—'for I thought of that—they might be going abroad, or to the seaside, or somewhere where it would be nice for Janet to go.'

'People very seldom take the governess with them when they go abroad,' said Mrs. Bland, shaking her head.

'But, dear Mrs. Bland,' said Janet, 'you always used to say one should not think of holidays till one had done some work. And it will come all right about that. The grand thing is having a place to come to when one is free; a place,' she said, with a little moisture springing into a corner of her bright eyes—a little real moisture, which Janet was quite pleased and almost proud to feel, as it carried out every necessity of her position—'which will feel like home.'

'In every way, I hope, my dear child,' said Mrs. Bland, with a sob, enfolding Janet in her arms and her white shawl, which were both motherly, warm, and ample, like her heart. The vicar put his hand upon her shoulder, and patted it tenderly as she was held against his wife's breast.

When the girl freed herself (and a dreadful thought about her hat darted into her mind as she did so, for it is so easy to crush crape) she gave a little laugh, and cried.

'You must not spoil me too much. I can't go away crying; it would not be lucky. Dear vicar, there is one bud left in the china vase beside your study window. Do get it for me to put in my coat, and that will be the last thing, and a cheerful thing: for it is nearly time for the train, and I must go now.'

Janet kept her point, and pinned the rose to her breast, after she had given Mrs. Bland her farewell kiss, and went away, looking back smiling and waving her hand till she was out of sight from the vicarage gate.

'Bless her, she do have a spirit to keep up like that,' said the vicarage cook, who stood behind her mistress to see the last of Miss Janet.

'It's all excitement,' said Mrs. Bland, drying her eyes. 'I know she'll break down dreadfully as soon as she gets into the railway carriage by herself.'

'Now, Janet, you are sure you would not wish me to go with you: for there is time enough yet to get a ticket, and send Mrs. Bland a message?' said the vicar, at the carriage door.

'No, no. No, indeed. It is far better to begin at once—to begin when I am not forced to do it,' said Janet. 'And perhaps next time I travel alone it will be to come home, which will make everything delightful. Good-bye! and, oh, thank you, thank you, a thousand times!'

'God bless you, my dear child.'

When he had said these last words, the vicar

turned right round and walked away, for his eyes were full; and I am glad to say that Janet too saw his back, as for the first time he turned it upon her, through a tear. It was an old back, in a somewhat rusty black coat, and with stooping shoulders, and there was a slight quiver of emotion in it as he turned away. Poor child! poor little thing, setting out upon that world which is so cruel, which makes so small account of soft things and little things like a bit of a girl, carrying them away upon its stream, drifting them into corners, taking all the courage and the happiness out of them. 'God bless her! God help her!' the vicar said within himself as he hurried away.

Janet had been deposited in a first-class carriage alone, with all her little properties carefully arranged about her. Henceforward probably she would have to travel by second or even third-class; but Mr. Bland had got her ticket for this last occasion regardless of expense, and had fee'd the guard to take care of her, and done everything for her as if she had

been a princess. And I am happy to state that for the first mile or two Janet saw the familiar landscape all dilated and out of drawing through the medium of tears. They were not many, nor were they bitter, but at least they were genuine.

'Poor old vicar,' she said to herself; 'poor Mrs. Bland; poor Aunt Mary——'

Even at that moment it was not herself she pitied, but those whom she left behind. She added at the end of a minute,

'Poor old doctor,' and burst into a laugh: and her heart jumped up again after its momentary sympathetic depression, and the tears dried of themselves. Her heart jumped up with a throb almost of exultation. At last she had fairly escaped—got away from the village and all the enveloping kindness and cares that had been lavished upon her.

Janet was not ungrateful any more than youth in the abstract is ungrateful, but the first sensation of freedom had something intoxicating in it! Setting out to face the world! She had

been told all her life that she would have to do it some day; and though that eventuality had always been held before her as a dreadful though inevitable prospect, it had lost all its terrors as contrasted with the monotony of the village life, which she knew by heart, and all the quiet evenings and dull days in which Janet had often felt as if her young activity and energy of mind must burst the very walls of the dainty decorous cottage where it was so happy for her, so fortunate to have found a home. How often had she felt there as if she would like to take hold of the posts as Samson did, and shake it till it toppled down about her ears, not with any ill meaning, but for sheer need of movement, mischief, something to happen. To face the world! She looked it in the face with a smile of triumph and delight, as a sea-boy faces the smiling ocean that is in time to be his grave, as it had been his father's before him.

Janet was not afraid. The world's mine oyster. Her feeling was even more buoyant than that of the young man who goes up to

London to seek his fortune, as being more entirely ignorant, visionary, and without foundation. A young man can at least amuse himself for his day, even if he is to be swept off upon the dark waters of ruin to-morrow; but a girl, a little governess, going to a house in St. John's Wood! What amazing folly, what wonderful self-delusion, what a little dauntless, unforeboding, almost heroic heart! the ideal of a governess is very different, but Janet felt no regrets, no alarms. She was going to conquer fate. What she would have liked would have been to have had a longer journey before her, to have travelled the whole day in order to have been able to *savourer* her release, her freedom, the novelty of everything. She would have liked to arrive in her new sphere when it was dark, when she could only have a mysterious glimpse of the life before her, so as to save up a sensation for the next day, which would bring a full discovery of all her surroundings. But as things were she was very well content.

And then Janet began to think what sort of

a person Mrs. Harwood would be. Would she be the nice sweet motherly person who sometimes in a novel took the young governess to her heart and made her feel at home at once? Janet almost hoped not, for that would be too easy, too commonplace and unexciting—to go from one kind home to another, and find everything made smooth for her on every side. Or would she be the purse-proud rich woman who would consider the governess as beneath her notice, with a footman who would ask 'Any name?' as was done to Tom Pinch in 'Chuzzlewit' when he went to look after his sister. Foolish Janet, in the exuberance of her life and untried power, thought it would be 'rather fun' to have to do with such a specimen of the employer. She felt with delight that she would be able to hold her own, that no person of the kind should overcome her, and that the fight would be rather exhilarating than otherwise. Or would she perhaps be a fine lady, too fine to be rude, who would take as little notice as possible of the young stranger, ignore her existence,

and consider her only as a medium to grind a little knowledge into her children? All of these types Janet had beheld in veracious fiction, which holds the mirror up to nature: which of them should she encounter? She was not afraid of any, but the consciousness that a battle of one kind or other would soon declare itself gave excitement to her mind and light to her eye.

There were several other points in which Janet, I fear, took the vulgar and superficial view. She felt with an instinctive certainty that the men of the house, if there were any, would be on her side, and that the visitors who ought to admire the young lady of the house would probably find the governess more attractive. She had an expectation, almost going the length of a certainty, that she would be fallen in love with by two or more very eligible persons at the least, and that whenever she was visible in the room, and, most of all, if she were conspicuously neglected, the eye of 'the gentlemen' would pick her out, and that they would

make flattering comparisons between her and the other young ladies in a happier position, and comment upon the feminine spite and jealousy that kept her in the background. This she considered to be one of the recognized certainties of her future existence, and that assurrance of being preferred and vindicated gave her a great deal of pleasure. But to do her justice this conviction did not occupy a very great part of her thoughts.

Thus Janet rattled on through all the brightest hours of the day towards her fate.

CHAPTER III.

It was between three and four in the afternoon when Janet arrived at her destination. She knew London well enough as country young ladies know it—the parks and Belgravia, Piccadilly and the exhibitions; but St. John's Wood was as unknown to her as if it had been a country town in the depths of the shires. She thought it looked like a country town as she drove along the quiet road between garden walls with trees looking over them, and stopped at the door in the wall which was all the entrance.

That it had no carriage entrance was rather a trouble to the young people in the house, but they had been used to it all their lives. The

door when it was opened showed a paved line of pathway to the house, covered by a light permanent awning, supported on slight iron pillars, which were covered by strong climbing roses, now almost bare of leaves. The house door was also open, and showed rather a pleasant vista, for the red of the setting sun was in a long window at the back of the house, and lighted up an old-fashioned hall and winding staircase with a warm and comfortable light. Janet had all her wits about her, though her heart was beating loudly in her ears. She noted that it was only a parlour-maid who came to the door, with momentary discouragement—but was slightly relieved when a man came round the corner of the house to take her boxes. These perceptions and variations of feeling occurred in about a minute of time, during which she paid her cabman, and turned to follow the parlour-maid into the house. The garden looked pleasant and sheltered within its walls, and there was still a scent of late mignonette in the air of the November afternoon, though scarcely any

mignonette was left at Clover. Janet walked in with her firm little step, not at all bold, but neither was she abashed. She had come now to a very critical moment, and was about to have her first look at fate.

If this was fate, it was not alarming. The room into which she was shown was evidently one which occupied the whole breadth of the house, though it was divided unequally by a large curtained doorway, through which, where the curtains hung open, came the same gleam of red sunset colour which had lighted up the hall. But it was twilight in the other end to which Janet was introduced, except for a bright circle of firelight coming from an old-fashioned high grate of glimmering steel and brass, which threw forth the most brilliant reflections, and made all the shadows warm. By its side sat an old lady in a large chair—that is, a lady whom Janet took to be very old, with white hair, a white cap, and a white shawl over her shoulders, a very pleasing piece of light and suggested colour, in the pleasant gloom.

'Is it Miss Summerhayes?' said this lady, in a soft voice, holding out her hand. 'Gussy! My dear, I am very glad to see you, though I scarcely can see you in this faint light. Don't think me rude for not getting up. The fact is I can't get up, except with difficulty. Gussy! Priscilla, call Miss Gussy and Miss Julia; tell them I want them at once, and give Miss Summerhayes a chair. Come near the fire, you must be cold after your journey. It's grown very cold this afternoon, don't you think?'

'Oh, no,' said Janet, whose heart had stopped that unnecessary racket, and dropped down quite comfortably into its usual place of beating. 'It is not so cold at all; it looks so warm and cheerful here.'

'Do you think so, my dear?' cried the old lady; 'indeed, I am very glad to hear you say so, and it is a pretty thing to say. I fancied everything would be dismal to you, your first coming out into the world. Oh, here is Gussy at last. Gussy, this is Miss Summerhayes.'

Janet could not well make out the appearance

of the figure which came out quickly from within the curtained doorway, and held out a hand to her. The daughter of the house was taller than herself, very slim, clothed in a dress rather too light for the season, and with hair which seemed very light also. She, too, had a soft, long hand which clasped Janet's lightly, and a soft voice, which said, 'I am very glad to see you.' Altogether, a more genial pleasant welcome could not have been desired.

'Miss Summerhayes thinks it is not at all cold and that we look very warm and cheerful,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'which is very nice of her, and I hope she will always find us cheerful and comfortable, Gussy. Where is your sister? for after all she must want most to see Ju.'

'Don't trouble about Ju all at once, mamma,' said Miss Gussy, 'there is plenty of time, and we are just going to have tea. Won't you take off your boa, Miss Summerhayes? Mamma's room is always too warm, I think. Have you had a long journey? We could not quite make out how far it was.'

'Only since twelve o'clock,' said Janet; 'it is not so very far.'

'Gussy! the poor child can have had no proper lunch. Tell Priscilla to bring some sandwiches with the tea.'

'Oh, no, please! I have had sandwiches and everything I could want. I came from the kindest friends, who could never do enough for me,' said Janet. She felt, and was pleased with herself for feeling, that at thought of the kind vicar and his wife a little water had come into her eyes.

'Well, that is very pleasant to know of,' said Mrs. Harwood. 'I always like to hear that people with whom I am connected have kind friends, for those who have very kind friends are generally nice themselves; and it is a great quality to be able to appreciate kindness. I am sorry to hear that you are an—an orphan, Miss Summerhayes.'

'Yes,' said Janet, 'but I must not claim too much sympathy on that account, for I have

never known anything different. I have been an orphan all my life.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Harwood, slightly checked in the flow of ready feeling. 'But you have lost a—a—dear relation; a—a—some one who has filled up the place?'

'I have lost the dear lady whom I lived with always. She was my mother's cousin, but she let me call her my aunt. Nobody could be more good. I shall be grateful to her as long as ever I live,' said Janet, with a little emotion.

'My dear, I hope I have not recalled painful recollections; but one always likes to know. It is very pretty what you say about this good lady. Still, it is not the same thing as losing your mother, and I hope you will soon be able to look at things more cheerfully,' said Mrs. Harwood, feeling that this was a little out of the regular course, and not knowing what to say.

The tea had been apparently in the course of being carried in to the other end of the room

while this conversation was going on, for there was a jingle of china and teaspoons, and a little movement of furniture, and a figure flitting across the opening from time to time. When this point had been reached, a faint glow of light suddenly sprang up behind the curtains, and Gussy appeared once more.

'Are you going through your examination, Miss Summerhayes? We all have to do it—but mamma might have let you off for a little. Come into this room and have some tea. It is not so warm here. I'll bring you yours directly, mamma.'

'Attend to the traveller first,' said the kind old lady, and Janet followed Gussy into the other room, where there was a lamp burning. The end of this room seemed all window, an ample bay, almost to the ground, though tempered by the shade of a verandah outside. The glow in the west had just died away, the definite contrasted domestic light came in. In the shining of this, which was reflected in a large mirror over the mantelpiece, and another

opposite to it, Janet saw what Miss Harwood was like. She was very fair, hair scarcely more than flaxen, eyes blue but somewhat pale, soft features not too correct, with a little droop and sway of her tall figure when she moved which was not without grace, and suggested the soft swaying of a tall flower in the air, though matter-of-fact people regarded it sometimes as a sign of weakness. She drew a chair near the tea-table for Janet, and poured out tea for her, and pressed all the good things on the table upon her acceptance—then disappeared for a moment to the other side of the curtain to take her share of these good things to her mother. Janet, with her quick ears, heard the whispered conversation between them which was only half put into words. 'Yes, I like her'—'Don't make too much'—'You are a nice one to say so, mamma!' This last phrase was distinct enough, and Janet with a smile acknowledged its truth. She also recognised the perfect justice of the observation, 'Don't make too much of her'—which, of course, was what had been said. No;

it would be foolish really to make too much of her. She felt like a young lady coming on a visit—not in the least like a little governess without friends, arriving among strangers, to a new life. If this was all which was meant by going out to seek her fortune—going out to meet her fate!

Gussy came back and sat down and began to talk to the new-comer.

'This is where I always sit,' she said, 'and where our visitors come, unless when they are mamma's great friends. Mamma is not very strong, but it is only right to admit that she is lazy and won't try to get up out of her chair.'

At this a voice came from the other side of the curtain, slightly affected by the fact that the mouth was full.

'Don't forget, Gussy, that I hear every word you say.'

'Oh! I know that very well, mamma. She has had rheumatism, and she is stout, and she is lazy—oh, not in any other way; neither in talking, nor in working, nor in thinking. She

manages everything at home, and she will be quite willing to manage all your affairs if you wish it; but she is lazy about moving. She won't walk——'

'Gussy, how unkind, when you know I *can't!*'

'That is all a delusion, Miss Summerhayes: but we need not discuss it. She has to be wheeled about in her chair, and nothing but a visit from the Queen will make her get out of it. Now we've disposed of mamma. I won't say anything about myself, for you are forming your opinion of me all the while, as I talk. I don't think I am very hard to get on with; but we must tell you, and that is the chief point of all, that the most difficult of the family is Ju.'

'And Ju is——?' said Janet.

'Of course your pupil. She is fourteen, and she is as obstinate as a pig. We can do nothing with her, mamma and I—it is not that there is any harm in her. Perhaps if we did not think so much about it things would go better; but we think, and we consult, and we

compare notes, and end by worrying ourselves very much—at least mamma worries herself. We hope that some one quite new, whom she is not accustomed to, who is a novelty to her, and whom she must be civil to, will produce quite a different effect.'

Janet felt a little thrill run over her at this description.

'I hope you know,' she said, somewhat faintly; 'I hope Mr. Bland told you—that I have really no experience at all.'

'We think that is all the better,' said Gussy. 'She is up to all the ways of the experienced people. We don't like to say anything against governesses, but they run very much in grooves, like most other people, for that matter. Now you are not professional at all; you have not got into any of their dodges. Oh, don't say anything, mamma; I must use the handiest word. You are just a girl, like any of us: I don't see how she can be nasty with you—at least not at first,' said Gussy, reflectively, 'and by the time she is familiar enough to begin

her tricks we hope you will have got an ascendancy.'

Miss Harwood stopped for a moment and listened.

'Hush! don't look as if we had been talking in particular; she is coming.'

Janet did not know what to expect. She listened, thinking of the whoop and crash of some young savage; but there was nothing of the kind, and she gave a little start in the most spontaneous manner, and rose up quickly, when Gussy said, in her soft voice:

'My sister Julia—Miss Summerhayes.'

CHAPTER IV.

She was a tall girl, taller than Janet, but considerably less so than her sister, with a well-knit and active figure, clad in the shapeless garments which are considered appropriate to her age, a great mane of light brown hair falling on her shoulders, and a pair of grey eyes, which were not soft like Gussy's, nor with any tone of blue in them; but with a glimmer of that yellow light which makes grey eyes fierce. Her eyebrows were slightly puckered, giving a keen arch over her eyes, to which this gave (when one was looking for it) a look of repression, a hint of a possible blaze and spring. But otherwise there was no sign in Miss Julia of anything out of the way or alarming. She thrust

out a hot hand to Janet, said 'How d'ye do?' because she could not help herself, accepted without any thanks her tea from her sister, and retired at once to the background. Gussy gave a significant look to Janet, and elevated her eyebrows; but the new-comer saw nothing remarkable in the drawing back of the half-grown, shy girl who established herself at a table, ingenuously set up an open book, which she had apparently brought in with her, so that she could read while she consumed her cake and bread and butter, and made herself comfortable in a way which Janet envied, but did not feel herself called upon to disapprove. To-morrow, perhaps, when she was the governess in charge—but at present her mind was still free of any responsibility. A certain restraint, however, seemed to fall upon the conversation after the entrance of Julia. The very monologue of Gussy, the little chirp of protest from the other side of the curtain did not seem so free. They asked Janet a few questions about her journey, which had been inconsiderable,

which was absolutely so unimportant, and then it was suggested she might like to go upstairs.

It was evident that the Harwoods intended to be very good to their governess, for she found a pretty room, well furnished and warm with firelight, awaiting her—a better room than had been hers at Rose Cottage, or even in the vicarage.

'I hope you will be comfortable, and I hope you will like us,' said Miss Harwood, as she left her.

Janet sat down in a comfortable chair by the fire. She felt very comfortable, in a state of pleasant exhilaration, but also with a faint consciousness of having had, so to speak, the ground cut from under her feet. If this was what it was to go out governessing, what was the meaning of all the fables which she had been told from her childhood? From *Jane Eyre*, to the *Family Herald*, they had all been in one tale—there had been compensations of an exciting character, no doubt, always, or almost always—but never a reception like this. She laughed to

herself as she sat and watched the firelight dancing in the mirror over the mantelpiece, and in the dressing-glass on the table. Quite as nice as coming on a visit, in short, just the same, though perhaps had she come on a visit she would not have been at once and so fully taken into the family concerns of her hosts. At the same time there was a trifling disappointment in Janet's little soul. She had fully intended to conquer fate, to make a brilliant fight, to come out triumphant and victorious more than words could say. And to find that there was nothing to fight about, that all was to be easy and agreeable, every authority on her side, and circumstances in her favour—took the wind out of her sails, to change the metaphor. It brought a little ridicule into the whole matter. To think that she had been so screwing up her courage, fortifying herself, and that her heart had beat so high, and that she had walked into this new world with such a determined little step, as if she were marching to military music, with her colours flying and her bugle sounding, all to fall

into a lap of luxury, to be received with open arms and almost caresses at the last!

In course of time, however, Janet reminded herself that instead of being the last, this after all was only the very first of her new experiences. Mrs. Harwood might turn out to be very different from the amiable and jocular old lady she appeared at first. Gussy, instead of being the nicest of fair-haired girls, might develop the falseness and treachery which some people thought went with that complexion. Other complications might arise. And then there was Ju.

Ah! Ju! Janet felt a little injured, wounded in her pride, when that consideration suddenly came in and thrust itself upon her. She had anticipated a great many evils, but she had never thought that to master an unruly girl taller than herself would be the chief or the first feature of her warfare. It was almost ludicrous to think of Ju, that child, in her short petticoats and flying hair, as a synonym of fate. Janet had been accustomed to be the favourite

of the children wherever she went. The little ones had always liked her, gathered about her, petitioned her to tell them stories, to sing them some of her funny songs, to make up games for them. She was famous in Clover and for quite twelve miles round for this quality. 'Delightful with children!' that was what was said of her. And in looking forward upon the future she had never taken into account any difficulty in that respect. The difficulties she had expected had been in (perhaps) the exacting and unjust mother, (perhaps) the jealous and spiteful girl, (perhaps) the undue admiration of the male persons about, and their universal feeling that the governess was much better worth looking at and talking to than the ladies of the house.

These are the difficulties chiefly set forth in novels, and, after all, it was from novels that Janet derived her chief conceptions of life. But a struggle with a wayward pupil had not occurred to her as one of her possible trials. After all, to look at it impartially, it was a not un-

natural difficulty. She ought to have considered it one of the things most likely to happen, but it was a poor unromantic difficulty with nothing at all spirit-stirring in it. To wrestle in spirit with a naughty girl, to fight for obedience, for nice manners, for lessons learnt! Oh dear, oh dear! These were no doubt things as distinctly belonging to a governess's business as her grammar or her book of marks—but Janet had not taken them into account, and they seemed disappointing and ignoble trifles after the things for which she was prepared.

The dinner was good; the table was nicely served. It was apparent that the Harwoods were not people of yesterday. Their silver was heavy and old, marked not with a crest, but with a solemn 'H,' as a family perhaps not deeply acquainted with fantastic trophies of heraldry, but extremely conscious of the credit of their name. And everything shone and sparkled with that nicety of good usage which is never more perceptible than in those well-to-

do English houses where splendour is never aimed at.

Mrs. Harwood was wheeled in in her chair, and, now that Janet could see her, proved to be a pretty old lady, rather different from her daughters, not, indeed, a similar type at all —a woman with lively dark eyes and warm tones of colour in her complexion, and, even in her crippled condition, much more active in her movements than her eldest daughter at least. They had all dressed for dinner, according to that all-prevailing English practice which no other country knows—Gussy, in a pretty blue dress, which lent a little animation to her extreme fairness; Julia, in a white frock; even Mrs. Harwood, in a changed cap and shawl. How strange it was to sit down in the midst of this unaccustomed company, amid all these unknown surroundings, in one's mourning—a little black figure unlike any of them, yet one of the family! It gave Janet once more a thrill of novel sensation that ran all over her. She sat

opposite to the mirror which was over the mantelpiece (there were mirrors over all the mantelpieces), and as it was tilted forward a little Janet could see herself, which gave her much amusement and encouragement. She looked very different from all the rest in her black frock. The second time she looked she had a vague perception that certainly she looked no worse than the rest—perhaps better. At all events, there is no harm in being consoled about your appearance and feeling that you are no worse than the people about you. Janet felt disposed to have an occasional laugh and pleasant little remark now and then between herself and the little girl in black opposite to her in the glass. Somehow she liked the looks of that little thing the best.

And the talk flowed on, all through dinner and afterwards in Mrs. Harwood's room, where they sat after dinner round the twinkling fireplace, all made of shining brass and steel. How it shone and twinkled and reflected every flame, and threw off glimmers of concentrated light!

The mother was wheeled back to her usual place. Gussy took up her position by a screen on the other side, and Julia and Miss Summerhayes found their places between. This nomenclature had been adopted at once, to Janet's great amazement. It was as if a partnership had been made which nobody could interfere with. Mrs. Harwood and her elder daughter were distinct personalities, but the other pair were Ju and Miss Summerhayes.

'It ought to be Miss Summerhayes and Ju,' said Gussy, 'but it does not run so well. One can't end off well with a ridiculous little syllable. This is where I always sit, and you must find a place according to what you like best. We live very quietly, partly because mamma will not get out of that chair.'

'Can't, Gussy. Don't let Miss Summerhayes form such a bad opinion of your mother.'

'Miss Summerhayes will form her own opinion quickly enough. I only give her a sketch of the circumstances. This is how we are night after night, often the whole winter through. It

ought to be very dull, and it must look very dull to you, but, somehow, we are hardened, and don't feel it, except when Dolff is at home. When Dolff is at home, we ought to tell you, Miss Summerhayes, that there are sometimes a few parties—dinner-parties, not very interesting, friends of the family: and on those occasions—it is better to say it to Miss Summerhayes just at once, without waiting till the time comes—don't you think, mamma?'

'Miss Summerhayes has so much sense. I am sure she will understand the size of the room and all that sort of thing,' said Mrs. Harwood.

'Just so. I was sure you would think it best. It is just this, that when Dolff is at home and there are dinners, sometimes we may be unable to ask you to make one, Miss Summerhayes.'

'Oh, is that all!' said Janet. She laughed with almost a little relief, for she had not known what she might be about to be told. 'I did not expect even to dine downstairs,' she said. 'I was told a governess never did. Mrs. Bland told me all I should have to do—to dine at two

with my pupil, perhaps to come in to afternoon tea, then to disappear upstairs and be seen no more. The vicar and she are saying to each other at present: "Now Janet will be feeling very lonely. She will be finding out what a solitary evening is." Dear people! I wish they could only see me now.'

'Yes,' said the old lady; 'and all you say, my dear, about them, and about your arrival and everything, is very pretty. But your friends were really quite right, for that is usually the case when a—young lady—is in a family in this way. For you know every family has its own ways—and—and a person, a lady who is not acquainted with them may be—well, made uncomfortable, or the others may be obliged to stop speaking with freedom when she is there. It does not matter among us, who are all ladies together—and no secrets to discuss. But occasionally, my dear, when my son is at home, or when circumstances require it—you won't think it means any unkindness?—but we are obliged to recur to ordinary rules—for a few

days—for a little while—perhaps only for two or three times. It is just a sort of necessity. We can't help ourselves. I always think it easier to explain everything and set everything on a simple footing at once.'

This was a very long speech for Mrs. Harwood to make, and Janet strove to interrupt her a dozen times, to declare that she understood and that no explanations were necessary. But it came to an end at last, and the old lady pushed back her chair a little, and made a slight flourish with her handkerchief, in the satisfaction of having relieved her mind. Gussy immediately took up the *parole* without a pause.

'You said "Janet," Miss Summerhayes—what a nice little prepossessing natural name to have! Do you know what *we* are called, the unfortunate members of this family? Oh, I see, she can scarcely keep from laughing, mamma.'

'I! no, indeed; my name is dreadful, like a Scotch housemaid; everybody says so,' said Janet, in some trouble, not knowing what was coming next.

'Wait till you know. I am Augusta, which is Minerva Press of the finest water. And that poor child is Julia, and our only brother is Adolphus—conceive such a thing!—born John if ever man was; such an honest countenance, no pretension about it, and Adolphus put on him like a pinchbeck coronet. It is too bad. Mamma denies any responsibility. She says it was all my father's fault.'

'I say,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'that it was the family—don't blame your poor father. The Harwoods were always queer, and it was they who liked those grand names.'

'You call them grand! I have to sink to Gussy, and she to Ju, and Dolff, poor boy! did you ever hear a more miserable thing for a name? Dolff! There is nothing in it, neither meaning nor sense. I know he would come home a great deal happier if he were Jack.'

'What can the boy's name have to do with his happiness?' cried Mrs. Harwood, testily, pushing back her chair a little more.

'If he were in a more exalted sphere he would

be called Dolly,' said his sister, sadly. 'Dolly! imagine, a man's name!——Now if we had been born in mamma's time we would have been Mary and Elizabeth and John—how much better! Or we might be, had mamma insisted on being in the fashion, Dorothy and Mabel and Harold: not bad, though perhaps a little artificial. But Augusta, Julia, and Adolphus! Can you wonder, Miss Summerhayes, that we are all sometimes on the eve of rebellion, and if mamma was not really so good might be tempted even to assault her, though she declares it was not her fault?'

'Ju,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'get up and read by the lamp. The firelight, I am always telling you, will destroy your eyes.'

Julia was stretched out on the carpet with a book laid out close by the gleaming, dazzling fire. She had her head supported in her hands, and had not moved or shown any sign of life while this conversation was going on. She took not the smallest notice of what her mother said.

'Ju,' said Gussy, 'do you know that your

hair will be ruined in that heat? Nurse is always complaining it is scorched off your head.'

'And that is why you have such dreadful headaches. Get up and sit at the table beside Miss Summerhayes.'

But Ju neither moved nor spoke.

CHAPTER V.

It is one of the most curious sensations of modern life to find one's self engulfed in a new family, wrapped round and round by novel circumstances, made, momentarily, to feel as if the centre of the world had somehow changed, and its most important features were now the peculiarities of a single race, or even of a small division of that race. People who hurry through visit after visit, it is probable, do not feel this amusing change in the direction of all things which takes place when an unsophisticated spirit suddenly leaves its own small centre, where the revolution of the planets has been round some well-known local or domestic sun, and plunges

into another, where the forces are all the other way, and a circle of completely novel phenomena comes into sight. Janet, who still felt as if she were a young lady visitor come from one star to another to discover a new life, went upstairs that evening wrapped up in Harwoodism penetrated with a new flavour, feeling these new figures of Gussy, Ju, and Dolff, Augusta, Julia and Adolphus, one of whom was as yet entirely in the mists—and the ludicrous family grievance of their names, and their unaccustomed ways of living, and the blaze of firelight, and the comfort, and the sober limits of their life, surrounded apparently by the garden wall, and extending no farther—to turn her round and round, absorbing her own individuality into theirs. It seemed quite impossible to believe, when she reached her own room, and found herself alone, that she had left a totally different world that morning, and indeed, up to half-past three in the afternoon, had never heard of Gussy, or Ju, or Dolff, or known that such persons existed. Janet sat down to think it all

over in her comfortable arm-chair by her blazing fire. Surely there never had been such fires. Her own grate was old-fashioned, too, bright brass, which reflected the flames and the glow of red-hot combustion, with which it played with a brilliancy which seemed to redouble the heat: the whole room was full of the leaping light, in the midst of which two white candles burned pale, like quite unnecessary things. Gussy and Ju, and Dolff—Dolff, Gussy, and Ju, their names made a sing-song in her head as the ruddy light darted and dazzled in her eyes. It was not even as if she had begun to speculate on the effect upon herself and her own life which these new surroundings would have. It was simply that she was enveloped in them, swallowed up, feeling it almost impossible to believe that there was still room in the world for Clover and such places, with their old-fashioned interests. When she tried to think of the vicarage, it had become like a faded old photograph to her mind—far away, at least a year, if not an age beyond any-

thing she could recall. The new centre of the world was in St. John's Wood. And all the air was filled with circling reflections and echoes of Gussy, Dolff, and Ju.

This rhyme was the first thing that came into her mind in the morning when she sprang up a little confused, not quite sure where she was. But Janet was now as fresh as the morning, having shaken off her youthful superficial fatigue, and feeling quite ready for a more reasonable view of her new surroundings. The garden upon which she looked out was getting into trim winter order, though the lawn was still liable to renewed showers of falling leaves, and the late mignonette all weedy and straggling along with long shoots of nasturtiums and heads of geraniums, disorderly with decay, were still lingering in the borders. Some tall trees at the end lent a respectable background to the broad but closely enclosed space with the very visible boundary of its brick walls. It all looked bright in the misty ruddy sunshine of the November morning. The gardener was moving

about at his work, a boy after him, trundling a little wheelbarrow, with weeds and rubbish: the most familiar sights and sounds in the hazy morning air. The new world had thus some points of junction with the old, which made it look more real, not so much like a story. Janet felt her heart jump to meet the new day. She was going to be exceedingly comfortable at least, and amused at first, even if it should be a little dull after. But perhaps it would not even be dull. She herself would have something to say to that—and it is impossible to tell at twenty in what unsuspected circumstances 'fun' may be lurking. It is one of the inextinguishable elements in life always to be found in one corner or another.

Janet did not make this reflection in so many words, but she was more keenly alive to the fact than is her historian; and with this confidence went down to breakfast, when Gussy met her with all the kind greetings possible. The breakfast table was quite brilliant to behold, with a silver tea-urn of old-fashioned

form, silver tea-pot, coffee pot, a glitter of silver everywhere: and so well kept! and so heavy and respectable! with such an air of sober, modest, consciously undemonstrative comfort and wealth!

Gussy's dress was still too light for Janet's taste, being an exceedingly pale grey, which was not very becoming to a person with so little colour; but she looked as *nice*, and purled forth her soft speeches just as on the night before. One thing she said, however, which was of more importance than all these friendly purlings, gave Janet the first touch of the real in this mild domestic elysium. She put out her long soft hand from behind the urn, and laid it on Janet's arm.

'Before she appears, just one word, Miss Summerhayes. Please strike your blow at once.'

'What blow?' asked Janet, amazed.

'To get the upper hand of Ju. You are quite a novelty; she does not know you at all. You might startle her into submitting, if you

took advantage of the circumstances. Don't ask anything unreasonable of her, but never give in when you have insisted on anything. Don't let her beat you. She's coming down now; I can't say any more. And there's really no more to say. Never let her win the day.'

These words tingling in her ears gave Janet the strangest little shock, like the sudden touch of an electric battery, in the midst of the comfort and quiet. She could scarcely keep from jumping up, starting out of her seat. Her black sleeve, when Gussy took her long fingers from it, seemed to give out sparks. To strike a blow, to win a battle, never to allow herself to be beat. What curious words in this absolutely quiet and ordinary domestic calm?

Ju came in with a nod to Miss Summerhayes, and said nothing at all while she despatched her breakfast. But then Gussy was talking all the time, and there was not much room for anyone else. She was certainly a most self-absorbed young person; but, save her silence and that

acute small curve over each eyebrow, caused by a sort of permanent frown, there seemed nothing else to alarm a stranger.

Janet's heart still beat more quickly than before, but she gradually got more calm, and assured herself there could be no real danger. In some families all the molehills are made into mountains, and perhaps that was the case here.

It was with a little excitement, however, that Janet walked into the school-room, which she found communicated with her own room by a short passage, and which occupied a corner of the house with one window to the garden and another in the other wall, from which a view could be obtained into the outer world, meaning in this case the exceedingly quiet suburban road between two lines of garden walls which had reminded Janet of a country town. The young governess of twenty came into this room, which was still in the shadow, though expectant of a gleam of sunshine from the south when the sun should have made a little more progress,

with some excitement, of which, however, she was able to conceal the signs. It gave a brightness to her eyes and a little thrill to her upper lip, but that was all. She had not the least idea of what she was going to encounter. The young knight in the story of the Sleeping Beauty was not more ignorant, nor was she at all sure that she knew how to fight, or had the coolness and the courage necessary for an important encounter. With a child of fourteen! she tried to say to herself with a laugh. But, after all, twenty is not so very far elevated over fourteen, and the child was taller and almost more developed than the woman. It was at ten o'clock that lessons were to begin, and at ten minutes to ten Janet opened the school-room door. Mystery and expectation made her heart beat. She stepped in once more, feeling the thrill as of an electric machine; and her breathing was slightly affected, though she would not show it. She had almost feared she would find emptiness which would have been the most embarrassing of all, for how fight when your

opponent does not show? But, fortunately, Julia was already there. This was what Janet found: a table set out in the middle of the room, with books and writing things, all in good order; the piano open at the back, with music upon it. Meanwhile, at the south window, seated at another table, with both her elbows resting upon it as if riveted to the mahogany—Julia, her head supported on her hands, a book lying open before her, in precisely the same attitude in which she had lain on the previous night scorching her head in the heat and blaze of the fire.

Janet stood for a moment looking at her pupil with an internal shiver. Her pupil—to whom she was not at all sure of being able to teach anything—whom in any circumstances she would have felt an alarmed respect for, as a being probably destined to find her out, and expose her little pretences. Julia remained like a statue, immovable, not turning to see who had come in according to weak mortal usage, far too strong in the instincts of rebellion and

individuality for any such betrayal of weakness. Miss Summerhayes then moved a little about the room—looked at the music, took up the books on the table, glanced out from the window. Ten o'clock had not yet struck. She finally went and seated herself in the chair placed for her, and waited until the ten tiny strokes, tingling from the clock on the mantelpiece, had been answered by all the church towers in the neighbourhood. Then there came an awful moment.

'Julia, it is time for lessons.'

Janet heard her own voice falter, but the tremor was not audible to any listener. Julia did not move nor reply.

'I am waiting to begin lessons,' Janet repeated more sharply, after a moment.

Dead silence—not by the merest quiver of movement did Julia betray that she had heard.

'It is ten o'clock, and I am waiting to begin lessons, Julia!'

Julia sat like a figure of wood or stone.

Miss Janet Summerhayes rose from her chair,

pale, with her eyes shining. Her little temper came to her aid. The fun disappeared. The moment of conflict had come.

CHAPTER VI.

JANET had as pretty a little temper of her own as you could meet anywhere. It flashed up in a moment into her eyes. No one, schoolgirl or otherwise, was likely to get a cheap bargain of this little governess. She rose, and, turning the key in the door as she passed, walked up to the table at which Miss Julia sat with her book. The girl was not aware that her own absolute immovability proved to her antagonist that she was not absorbed in her book but in the battle which had begun. Miss Summerhayes stood opposite to her for a moment looking down upon Julia's bent head. She felt the key of the door in her pocket, which, perhaps, was rather

a desperate step so early in the fight; as in doing this she had at once burnt her ships, and committed herself to a policy of absolute no-surrender; but still it inspired her, for she could now neither draw back nor temporise.

'Julia! I have told you three times that it is ten o'clock, and I am waiting to begin lessons.'

There was still not a movement, not a sound. Julia sat as if made of stone. Then Janet made the great *coup* she had been contemplating. With a sudden swift movement she took the book from under the reader's bent face, closed it, and carried it away. In a moment Julia was erect, getting to her feet with a bound, her grey eyes dilating into great globes of gold, her spring like that of a tiger. Janet had scarcely time, though her movements were very quick, to get back to the shelter of her arm-chair. But she managed to do so, and to lock up the offending volume in a drawer, with Julia's grip on her shoulder, and a shriek of 'How dare you, how dare you!' ringing in her ears.

'Miss Summerhayes! give me back my book.

How dare you take my book? Give it me this moment—do you hear me! do you hear me!' cried the girl, passsionately, holding Janet's shoulders in a grasp of steel.

'I hear you perfectly well—as you heard me just now. Take your hands from my shoulders. I did not touch you; if we are to fight, let us fight fair.'

Julia's hands dropped, and a shade of consternation came over her eyes. Then she stamped her foot violently upon the floor—'Miss Summerhayes, give me back my book!'

'Sit down,' said Janet, not uncheerfully, 'and we can have it out.'

'Give me back my book!'

'Well,' said Janet, 'now we have both got through that formula, *trois sommations*—though I am afraid not very *respectueuses*. Do you know what that means? I called you three times and you have called me three times. We are equal, so far. Now sit down and let us talk it out.'

'Equal!' said Julia, with a shriek, 'me and

you, Miss Summerhayes! You are only the governess—that's no better than a servant. You may suppose they think different downstairs, because of their way of talking, and because Gussy thinks it's grand to be like that. But they think just the same. And mamma will stand up for me. She pretends she wants me to be mastered, but she doesn't, and you'll find the difference when you go to her with your complaints.'

'But I don't mean to go to her with any complaints,' said Janet, putting on the best smile she could. 'If we are to get on, we must manage it between ourselves; if not, there is a very easy remedy for me. You had better sit down, and discuss the matter, so that we may know what we are about.'

'What's your remedy?' cried Julia, breathing hard.

'It will be quite effectual, as far as I am concerned: but I don't like to be beaten, so I shall try some others first. Sit down there.'

'I shan't,' Miss Julia said.

'Well, stand on your head then,' said Janet, 'perhaps you may like that better: only let us get all the necessary tricks over, and come to business, for it may as well be decided once for all.'

'How dare you talk of tricks! What do you call my tricks?'

'They are quite easy to describe. To pretend to be deaf, dumb, and blind; to pretend to be a wild beast; to shriek and snort and talk loud. I don't know what others you may still have to get through, but you must know as well as I do that all these are tricks, and of no consequence. When they are exhausted, then we can begin to talk.'

'Me a wild beast! Me of no consequence! I should like,' cried Julia, with her eyes blazing like red-hot flames, and her fingers clasping and unclasping, 'just to give it you hot, for once! just to stamp upon you, and tear off your fal-lals and pitch you out of the window!'

Janet nodded her head at each threat, not by

way of approbation, but of acquiescence as in an argument she had foreseen.

'I know,' she said, 'I told you so. It would be a great saving of time if you would consider all that sort of thing as said, and come to the real question.'

'What is the real question?' said Julia, staring, with her hands grasping the top of the chair on which she had been requested to sit down—whether because she was checked in her childish rage, or whether because she meant to use it as a weapon, it was difficult to say.

'The real question is, whether we are to be able to get on together or not. It's the only one of any importance. I want to come to that.'

'What an awful fool you must be,' said Julia, bending over the back of the chair towards Janet with flaming looks of wrath.

'Yes,' said Janet. 'One of us is so, that is very evident: but why should it strike you at this moment?'

'To think that it isn't settled already, to think I would ever give in to you for a moment. Knuckle under! me! Oh! you think you can come over me with smiling, when you are in as blue a funk—— You, a bit of a governess hired just like the housemaid: and that's exactly what mamma will say.'

Janet yawned a little in the girl's furious face, a gentle little yawn which did not at all distort her own countenance.

'My poor child,' she said, 'if you would only consider that I understand all that, and that we'd so much better come to business! You can't frighten me, and though, of course, you can insult me, that's of equally little use, for I don't care.'

'Because you're used to it,' cried Julia.

'No—once only before. It was a tramp on the road, an old woman, and I would not give her any money. It is curious to think where you can have learned the same sort of thing—brought up, I suppose, more or less like a lady—but it must be in the blood.'

'Do you mean to say I'm not a lady—you—? Oh-h!' for Janet had gently shrugged those little shoulders which still felt the young fury's grip. 'I'll go,' cried Julia, fiercely, 'I'll go this moment and tell mamma.'

Janet sat quietly in her chair awaiting the discovery of the locked door, and somewhat alarmed lest there should ensue a physical struggle which would be undignified and unladylike. Then followed a whirlwind of noise, stamping, shrieking, and wild talk.

'Give me the key! Open the door! I want to go to mamma. Mamma! Let me out. Let me out! I want to open the door,'—then a furious kick upon the panel. 'Mamma! Gussy! I'm locked in; come, come, and open the door.'

'It is a pity that all the servants should know you are in trouble, Julia. Let it remain between you and me,' said Janet, laying her hand upon the girl's shoulder.

'Open the door!'

'No, I shall not open the door—nor shall any-

one else, if I can help it. Let this remain between you and me.'

'Mamma will send and order you to do it. Mamma! mamma! I am locked in. I can't get out. Come and open the door!'

How it was that no one heard these outcries Janet could not imagine: but they were at the top of the house: the kitchen was thoroughly occupied with its own affairs, and Mrs. Harwood, as she found out afterwards, had been wheeled out for her morning airing, so that silence alone replied to Julia's passionate appeals. She rushed to the window and flung it open, but the gardener was not visible in the garden. After half-an-hour of tumult, an enforced silence fell upon the school-room. But Julia was not yet overcome.

'I shall keep you here all your life—you shan't go—not a step. If I am to be shut in, you shall be shut in too. You shall have no lunch; you shall have no tea; you shall have no dinner!' said Julia, *crescendo*, rising to a climax.

'Well,' said Janet, 'if you think it better to put off our conversation till to-morrow, I make no objection. It will be very uncomfortable—but there are worse things than discomfort in this world. I have done without my dinner before now.'

'Yes! often, I shouldn't wonder—when you had nobody to give you a dinner,' cried Julia.

Janet looked at the furious girl with a glance of astonishment in her eyes. She laughed a little.

'You silly child,' she said.

And then in the midst of the agitation and tumult there occurred a moment of quiet. Julia was at the end of her resources. She was worn out with her own passion, dismayed by being thus left to the tender mercies of the governess, and discouraged beyond description by the indifference and contempt of the stranger whom she had been so certain of subduing—a little thing not so big as herself, a little governess without a friend—a subject creature whom it was safe for everybody to jump upon. Julia's

experience contained no stronger picture of the governess than that of the one who ran away next morning after complaining to Mrs. Harwood that she was not accustomed to such young ladies. The others had all coaxed and cringed and endeavoured to temporise.

Julia went and sat down panting at the other table, and watched this new kind of human being seated in the middle of the room as if nothing had happened, calmly writing, not a hair turned upon her head, not a bit of frill crumpled about her neck. It was natural to Janet to be neat, and her self-control was wonderful. Besides, of course she knew that she was being looked at, watched with all the keen observation of a vindictive child to see where her weakness lay. That she had supported this struggle so long without moments of weakness it would be vain to say—that she had not felt the stings and resented the blows. Her heart had beat as if it was bursting from her breast. She had felt herself trembling all over with excitement and alarm. But she had managed somehow to keep

calm all along, and she was still calm now, keeping in her breath, holding herself with all her might to look indifferent. Julia's observation was keen, but not so keen as to pierce Janet's armour of mail. The girl sat staring at her with eyes that became less and less like orbs of flame, and more like ordinary big grey eyes with a golden glow. And Janet wrote a letter. It was the only thing she could think of to give her the support of an occupation. She wrote a narrative of what had passed, writing 'Dear Mrs. Bland' at the top to give herself a countenance, though the last thing in the world she would have done was to send the vicar's wife such a description of her first day in her new situation. She smiled, however, to herself involuntarily as she went on with her story, making it very amusing. And Julia saw her smile, and something like awe came over the exhausted spirit of the little rebel. To go through all that, one tithe of which would have broken the spirit of any other governess, and yet to smile!

After a long interval of silence, and when Janet began to wonder with some alarm how she would meet a long strain of passive resistance had Julia strength of mind to keep it up, a sudden voice once more made itself heard.

'Miss Summerhayes! the first thing I shall do when I get out of this will be to tell mamma.'

'That is exactly what I should recommend,' said Janet, looking up from her writing; 'one's mother should always know everything,' and with a little friendly nod she returned to her letter.

Julia could not tell what to think: there was more in it than her puzzled understanding had ever encountered before. After a while she said, with some hesitation, 'Miss Summerhayes!' again.

'Yes,' said Janet, looking up once more.

'What did you mean about conversation? I hate you! I shall never speak to you three words if I can help it; but what did you mean about putting off the conversation? I want to know——'

'Perhaps it will be better to put it off till to-morrow.'

'I want to have it now. Conversation! as if there ever could be any between you and me.'

'That is what I have just said. It will be better to put it off,' said Janet, without raising her head, turning over the page of her supposed letter.

The next thing she heard was a stamp on the floor, suppressed so that it was scarcely a stamp, and an exclamation,

'I prefer to have it now.'

'I cannot talk to anyone so far off,' said Janet, and there was another pause.

Presently she could hear the faint rustling of a person about to get up from a chair, which went on for some time, there being an evident and great reluctance to move. Then there was a sudden plunge. Julia alighted opposite her, on the other side of the table.

'I want to know what it is—— I want to know what you want with me.'

Janet sat up, raised her head, putting down her pen.

'Honestly, and without any more preliminaries?' she said.

Julia's eyes gave a single dart of fire.

'No one ever said I was a thief. I want to know what you want with me.'

'That is what I call honestly,' Janet replied, and she put away her writing things for the second encounter, the first having thus been successful beyond her hopes.

CHAPTER VII.

'WELL,' said Janet, when she found herself looking into the blurred and flushed countenance of the passionate girl. Julia had given vent, in spite of herself, to some tears, and had dashed them away with her hand or her sleeve, leaving a smear, and her hair was hanging wildly round her face, and there was a general air of dilapidation and ruin, though accompanied by few actual signs of warfare. She ought to have torn her frock from top to bottom to justify the general aspect of affairs, but she had not done so, and the smeared cheek and the ragged hair were the only physical certainties of the conflict past. There was still a pucker over each eye, but it was not an assured and dauntless pucker.

The fortunes of war, for once, had not turned the usual way.

'Well—you have been behaving like a fool, but a fool has no meaning. When one can behave like a fool with a meaning I think there must be some sense at the bottom. If I am right, nothing matters that has happened; but if I am wrong——'

Julia stared with faint comprehension and much impatience. She said—

'Don't palaver. What do you want with me?'

Now, Janet had expected to exercise a little feminine philosophy upon the girl when she had got her in hand—a little banter, a little seriousness—to make her ashamed of herself in the first place, and then to make her see. She was taken a little aback. If she could not make her ashamed nor make her see, what was to be done? The question grew a great deal more serious thus than when it concerned only a locked door. She ran over the circumstances rapidly in her mind, and she saw it would not

do to answer according as it at first occurred to her, that she (Janet) personally wanted nothing at all with Julia, except as little to do with her as might be.

'What I want is simple,' she said, with a smile. 'I want to do the work I have been engaged to do, and that is to educate you for as many hours as your mother has fixed for your education. How am I to get that done? for, you may be sure, I mean to do it one way or other. I want to talk it over and discover how it is to be done.'

'I don't want it to be done at all.'

'Neither do I,' said Janet, facing the rebel bravely, and bursting into a laugh. 'But if you will reflect,' she said, 'that does not get us a bit further on, for it must be done. Unless it is done you will grow up like the tramp woman I was telling you of—not at all an interesting person—and I shall break my word. Now, I don't like to break my word. You don't care at present about becoming like a tramp, but you will later on.'

'How dare you say——'

'Julia,' said the little governess, 'I dare to say anything I think proper, or to do anything, so you had better make up your mind to that at once. Such questions are silly. I am not afraid of anyone or anything.'

Janet threw back her head, which was smaller —as she was smaller in every part—than that of her tall pupil. There is nothing so fearless in life as a girl who is without fear. It is true that the kind of dauntless courage she possesses is largely made up of ignorance, and also comes a little perhaps from the conventional precautions which defend her, though she does not know it. However, the quality is absolute, and Janet had it. She feared nothing, as she said.

Julia, from under her puckered eyebrows, glared into the clear brown eyes, which had something in them like the sparkle of a Highland stream, and admired the valour which she did not possess: for she was afraid of the coercion which she was always fighting against. She stared, but she said nothing in reply.

'You see,' said Janet, 'I will do what I've promised: and if I were you I'd say I will too. It's much nicer than to have to say I must——'

Still Julia stared; her lips moved as if she would have spoken, but she uttered no sound.

'Downstairs,' said Janet, 'they expect us to fight. I am afraid you have been so silly that they think you are a fool, and don't understand anything about what is expected from a gentlewoman. That's not my opinion, as I told you: but as I shall not give in, whatever you do, it would be very silly to go on fighting for ever. We can make something better of it: if you will be convinced that I never shall be afraid of you —no, nor of anyone else,' Janet repeated, with the colour mounting in her cheeks.

Julia continued silent for some time; then, with a sudden burst of harsh sound, asked, 'What do you want of me?' and was abruptly silent again, as if a spring had been touched to give forth that voice.

'I want you to speak when you are spoken to,' said Janet.

The girl, who evidently expected something of much larger scope, cried 'Oh!' but said no more.

'I want you to do as I tell you—for so many hours in the day—from ten to one, is it? That's not very long. You can be a demon after that, if you please, and dance your war-dance.'

'What do you mean by—dancing my war-dance?'

'Behaving like a fiend, or a Red Indian, or a tramp in the roads: so long as you are in your senses from ten to one.'

Julia stared again, but made no reply.

'But you must remember,' said Janet, 'that in the place I come from, where there are no Red Indians, there is a point of honour; and whatever one undertakes to do one does. If you see the sense of what I say, and give me your word, it is once and for ever; not promise one day and break it the next. That is a sort of thing I don't understand. One promises, and

it is for life and death. It does not matter what comes in the way. If you were to be killed for it, it would have to be done.'

Julia stared for a few moments more, and then—

'I can see the sense of that,' she said.

'To be sure. I knew you would when you gave yourself time to look at it. Well, then, you can see that to call in other people or other considerations is of no use between you and me. At the last we should always have to talk it over between ourselves. If you like, you can make it quite easy and rather pleasant; if you don't, I must think of some other way.'

When the hour of luncheon arrived, the respectable household in St. John's Wood was considerably excited as to the fate of the new governess. Perhaps the servants had not been so completely out of hearing as had appeared. Perhaps some stray notes of the fray had been blown out of the open windows or conveyed through the chinks of the woodwork. At all events, there was a prevailing curiosity

in the house, which became apparent almost as soon as the governess and her pupil left the shelter of those rooms in which already so many varied scenes in the life and education of Julia Harwood had taken place. Mrs. Harwood's maid met them on the stairs, and gave Janet an inquiring look, to which the governess, you may be sure, made no reply. Half-way down they were again met by the parlour-maid, who, looking somewhat 'flustered,' announced that Mrs. Harwood was afraid they might not have heard the bell.

'Oh, yes, we can hear the bell perfectly,' said Janet.

She went into the dining-room with Julia so close behind her that they formed one shadow. Mrs. Harwood's face was turned anxiously towards the door. Gussy, more astute, had her eyes intent upon the mirror, in which everything was reflected. There was a long breath of relief drawn by both, not, perhaps, audible by any uninterested spectator, but affecting the entire atmosphere to Janet's excited consciousness.

She felt as if her triumph must be of more importance than the mere victory over a naughty child, and wondered, with a passing thrill, was there any mystery involved? But in face of the decorous, gentle household, so correct, so punctilious, which had not a fold awry, or a corner neglected in all its careful economy, it was ludicrous to think of any mystery. However, there could be no doubt that her entrance was greeted with extreme pleasure.

'Sit here, my dear Miss Summerhayes,' said the mistress of the house. 'This is the warm corner; there is no draught at this side. Well, you have got over your first morning's work. And how do you like teaching? It's very tedious, I'm afraid.'

'Oh, not where there is intelligence and brains,' said Janet, with great composure. 'Children who cannot keep up their attention are very trying; but not anyone who is old enough to understand. There has not been much teaching, however, this morning, we have been chiefly talking things over. Two strangers

forced together without any mutual knowledge, I thought it best that we should understand each other first.'

This statement, which was given with the most natural air in the world, was listened to by all her audience with the most flattering interest, but perfect decorum, the only transgressor of which was the parlour-maid, from whose direction there came one or two faint muffled sounds, whether of painfully suppressed laughter, or of something giving way in the effort of controlling emotion, Janet could not tell. Gussy fixed the culprit with a glittering eye from behind the screen which sheltered her from the blazing fire, and Mrs. Harwood cast a cursory glance behind her. None of these things would have been noticed at all by a stranger who was less prepared than Janet, but she perceived everything in her own suppressed excitement. There was something amusing, however, in the comment made by the strain upon the parlour-maid's stays.

'That is so sensible,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'it

is for want of getting to understand each other that so many relationships go wrong. Ju, push your chair back a little, the sun is in your face.'

Julia paid no attention to this command.

'Ju, the sun is in your face, sit nearer this way; your eyesight will be gone before you are twenty. Child, do you hear me!' Mrs. Harwood cried.

'And her complexion: you will have none at all left, not a tint,' said Gussy, 'before you come out.'

Julia did not betray by a movement that she had heard either speak, but put her head forward into a brilliant ray of sunshine which streamed across the table, so as to get the full glow upon her face. She had not much to boast of in the way of complexion. Whether it was the blaze of sunlight and firelight combined to which she loved to expose herself, or whether it was nature, her face thus brought into prominence was sallow and freckled, only relieved by the golden light in her grey eyes.

'The winter sun cannot do much harm,' said Janet, with a friendly impulse. 'It makes a pretty picture.'

'Ah,' said Gussy, shaking her head, 'you should have seen that child once; she had such a colour. We have nothing to brag of in the way of complexion in our family, but I once thought Ju would redeem us in that respect. Alas!' and Miss Harwood shook her head.

'And did you find her very backward, Miss Summerhayes? and is there any special thing you think she is more fit for than others? I always like young people to have some particular turn. Do you remember, Gussy, how we used to try and try with Dolff to get him to say what he would like to be. But he never would take an attitude of his own. "Whatever you please, mother," he used to say.'

'That was all his goodness, mamma,' said Gussy. 'What he wanted was travel and that sort of thing—and he knew you would not like it. We have never travelled much in this family. And then he knew he would not

have any great occasion to work for himself.'

'We never can tell that,' said the old lady. 'Land's gone down, and perhaps the Funds may soon go down. In these dreadful times, you never can know. Ju, take your elbows off the table. You sit like a washer-woman. I never saw such shoulders.'

'The Funds are the country,' said Gussy, 'they can't go down, or England will be ruined. Ju, do you hear what mamma says? Her shoulders are something dreadful. Take your elbows off the table, for goodness' sake!'

Julia took not the slightest notice of these remarks. She sat with both elbows on the tablecloth, eating bread-and-butter at an elevation of many inches over her neglected plate.

'I have heard,' said Janet, 'that the people who are called smart people do that now. It has become the fashion: so Julia is in advance of us instead of being behind, as you think.'

'Ah,' said Mrs. Harwood, shaking her head, 'bad manners are the fashion, and that is a

dreadful thing to say. I remember in my young days—but fortunately we don't know anything about smart people here.'

Julia's elbows had disappeared with the rapidity of magic. She would not have it supposed that she meant to be smart or in the fashion whatever anyone might say.

CHAPTER VIII.

JANET found after this experience was over that she had perhaps discounted too quickly the excitement of her position. She had gone too fast, as was the impulse of her nature. Julia Harwood, who had been used to continued 'nagging,' which never came to anything, a continual and frivolous demand to which obedience was never exacted, had been taken entirely by surprise by the rapid movements of the little governess. Reason, which had never before been applied to her case, had made a considerable impression upon her; but still more the conviction that Miss Summerhayes would 'stand no nonsense,' the wholesome sense of a force which she could

not overcome: and between the two the temporary effect produced had been great. And a certain amount of order had followed in the school-room. When the two were alone, Julia replied when she was spoken to, and did more or less what she was told. There was a framework created of lessons and rules which helped the hours along, and to which the girl gave a sort of submission. But apart from this, which occupied the mornings of her new existence, poor Janet found herself immersed, submerged, drowned in a sort of tepid bath of Harwoodism which was an experience quite unlooked-for and unthought-of.

Some families, and those perhaps the most amiable in existence, have this tendency so strong that there is no escape from it; they compare everything, judge everything, estimate everything by the rule of their own case—'in our family we do,' or 'we don't do,' so and so, were words continually on Augusta Harwood's lips. She was a very good, considerate, kind young woman, trying to make everybody

comfortable about her, eager to anticipate every want, to see that the stranger was warm enough, cool enough, had just the right amount of sugar in her tea, was not over-tired, did not have damp feet or wear too thin a dress, or get the sun or the firelight in her eyes. Gussy achieved the difficult feat of making a dependent perfectly at her ease, and obliterating almost every trace of that embarrassment which attends the position of a governess. It was not that she fell into one of those sudden enthusiastic friendships which sometimes unites the daughter of the house with the stranger in it, but only that she was constitutionally kind, thoroughly good-hearted and good-natured. It would seem difficult to say any more in her favour than this. And yet, from her gentle, amiable, and good-humoured sway there arose one fixed impression: and in her pleasant person there breathed out, embracing all things, one mild, universal atmosphere of the family.

It was as if she knew nothing but Harwoods in the world. Church—even church!—and

State, and laws and governments, and business and books were outside of the oasis in which she dwelt—the universe in general lay beyond, as great London lay beyond the brick walls of the garden in St. John's Wood. London existed for the advantage of that house, and so did the universe in which London is but a point. But they were outside, and of secondary importance. The Harwoods, their habits, their ways, their ancestors, their relationships, and, above all, their characteristics were within, and everything without took a tinge from this prevailing atmosphere.

It might be some time before the spectators found out what it was. It was like the transparent veil of tarlatan which is sometimes stretched between a drawing-room assembly of spectators and an exhibition of *tableaux vivants*, to give distance and softness to the mimic scene; it was like the tint sometimes supposed to be becoming to the complexion, which faintly rose-coloured glass gives to the air of a boudoir: it was a medium, an atmosphere, all pervading,

something from which there was no escape.

Janet had been prepared, as has been seen, for many of the deprivations of a governess, none of which she was called upon to bear. The letters she received from her old friends at Clover, to whom she had narrated her first experiences, were almost enthusiastic in their congratulations.

'You seem to have been fortunate above anything that could be hoped for,' Mrs. Bland wrote. 'I never heard of such kind people.'

And so they were, Janet assured herself. Never were people so kind; they cared for her comfort as if she had been a favoured visitor; they never allowed her to feel herself *de trop*. They accepted her into the bosom of the family with the most open as well as the most considerate kindness. Nevertheless, it was not very long before Janet began to feel the creeping in of something not strong enough to be called miasma, a sort of closeness in the air. She felt the heavens contracting round her, and the horizon closing up. These sensations were

more or less physically justified by the fact that there is a great deal of vegetation in St. John's Wood; that the trees grew too close in a hundred gardens, and that though their foliage and greenness were delightful in summer, the fall of the leaf was attended with disagreeables there as in other leafy places; but that was not the heart of the matter.

Janet began to feel herself drawing long breaths of relief when she got outside the garden gate. This was generally in company with Julia, who did not share in the family worship, and whose conversation was very jerky and irregular, leaving the governess free either to lead the dialogue or to refrain from any. And when Janet escaped altogether by herself, as sometimes she did, to go to church, sometimes to the circulating library to get a book, sometimes to the nearest repository of art needlework to match some silk or crewels for Mrs. Harwood, she was still more delighted and relieved.

To escape for an hour from the Harwoods—to become once more conscious of her own indi-

viduality, and of the existence of crowds, nay, worlds of people who did not bear that respectable name, became the greatest refreshment to her. She would run out even in the wet if anything was wanted in the most cheerful and, as the family thought, self-denying way.

'But, my dear, it rains. I couldn't possibly let you go out in the rain, to take all the stiffening out of your crape, and, perhaps, catch cold, all because I want that book,' Mrs. Harwood would say, divided between her desire for a new novel (which is so doubly acceptable on a wet day) and her concern for Janet.

This was a thing that the gardener could not do, nor even her own maid—could that functionary have been persuaded to wet her feet—for maids and gardeners never know what books you have read, even though they themselves have brought them from the library, and produce the same three volumes again and again, as Mrs. Harwood complained, till you are nearly driven out of your senses.

'If you really think you would like a run,'

the old lady added, with a sudden sense of the advantage. 'I remember when I was your age I never minded the rain—but it will take all the stiffening out of your crape.'

'She has no crape on that dress,' said Gussy, 'which I very much approve of, for what is the good of a thing you have always to be thinking of? We never go in for mourning very much in our family. But, mamma, I do think, what with your books and your crewels, and so forth, you impose very much on Miss Summerhayes.'

'Oh, I like it,' cried Janet, 'it gives me the greatest pleasure. I only wish I could run on errands all day long, if I could be of any use—you are all so good to me.'

'That is a grateful little thing, Gussy,' said Mrs. Harwood, as Janet, wrapped in a mackintosh, with her skirts drawn up, and a little felt hat upon her head which could not be spoilt, ran lightly along the glistening path to the garden door.

'Yes,' said Gussy, sedately, 'she is a kind little thing: and I am sure she would do any-

thing to please you, mamma. And such a good influence over Ju. Dolff will not believe his eyes when he comes home and sees her actually doing her lessons like any other girl.'

'I hope Miss Summerhayes does not humour her too much,' said Mrs. Harwood, with a sigh.

In the meantime, Janet was running along with the rain in her face, and a sense of freedom which made her heart dance. It was not an attractive day to be out, and the long roads in St. John's Wood, between the garden walls, with here and there a little oasis formed by a few shops, were not, perhaps, exhilarating to pedestrians generally. On a wet day there was nothing at all to be seen or met with in these roads any more than had they been the suburbs of a country town. On fine days the children and their nurserymaids made a great deal of variety, and the old ladies going out for their airings in their bath chairs. It is not, perhaps, a very gay kind of traffic which is represented by bath chairs and perambulators. But there were the tradesmen, too, and occasional cabs

passing to add to the effect. But when it rained everything was desolate. The garden doors were closely shut: the houses invisible behind among the bare branches of the trees from which the last shabby leaves were tumbling like rags among the droppings of the rain. What it is to be twenty, and to have a heart free of care! Janet ran along the glistening pavement with her skirts held up, delighted, glad to be out, though she breathed almost as much rain as air, glad to have escaped from the all-enveloping Harwoods, and to be herself for a moment. She was only going on an errand for her employer, and her return was anxiously looked for, so that she knew that she must not be long: but every moment was good. She carried her umbrella shut; she would not lose the feeling of the soft rain on her forehead. A conviction that this was against all the traditions of the Harwoods made it doubly agreeable. They were all afraid of catching cold and getting wet, but not Janet. She liked it. It meant a mark of freedom and independence.

It meant being herself without a thought of Harwoodism, as she had been in the old days.

Janet skipped into the stationer's shop to which she was bound, and which stood only (alas!) about a quarter-of-a-mile off in one of the oases already described. In St. John's Wood there are a great many stationers' shops. They are doubled with a circulating library, usually a branch of the all-pervading Mudie, and they sell all manner of 'fancy' articles, cardboarding of every description. There is a great sale for menu cards, for little mounts and frames, for calendars and almanacks, and every sort of little composition of paper, pictures, and mottoes in pretty colours, in such districts. Pencils in boxes and out of them, with little holders, with silver cases, and unadorned for drawing purposes: writing materials in pretty coloured covers: little books such as innocent minds love, with texts for every day, or pretty verses, or scraps of genteel philosophy. It would fill all my space if I were to give a catalogue of half the things in these stationers' shops. In addition to

all this and the library, with its rows of novels, a little dilapidated, there was a counter for music in this particular example of the stationers of St. John's Wood, and another one for newspapers, both these things forming a portion of the well-established business carried on by the Misses Mimpriss in Laburnum Place.

When Janet skipped in, her face fresh from the rain and cold air, her eyes dancing with freedom and satisfaction, she almost ran against a gentleman who was standing inside turning over the music, and who turned round quickly with a mixture of surprise and curiosity. He was a young man and rather handsome, Janet thought; not very tall but strong and well built, with dark hair and a fine complexion, a little like, perhaps, the male beauties in the hairdressers' shops. She was so much taken by surprise to find a man in that feminine place that she was, perhaps, a little severe in her hasty judgment. He interfered with her satisfaction somehow, though he was perfectly well-bred, and after the one glance of surprised attention—which

was quite justifiable surely when a girl came like a bombshell into a little shop, where no such projectile could have been expected on a wet day—returned to his music and took no further notice. The momentary shock, however, made Janet's fresh countenance blaze with its surprise and unexpectedness. She went back into the further part of the shop to look over the novels and choose one which Mrs. Harwood would like, which was no easy task. She had to ask for the help of the disengaged sister, who presided over that shrine of fiction, and had a long consultation with her to see which books Mrs. Harwood had already read. Finally, she chose one with much internal doubt, intensified, she could scarcely tell how, by the presence of the man who stood with his back to her, certainly not interfering in any way with that simple operation. And it happened to make matters worse that the sister whom Janet was consulting was not the sister whose business it was to enter the books. Accordingly, when Janet's Miss Mimpriss said to the other Miss Mimpriss

'391,121 for Mrs. Harwood,' the gentleman who was buying music turned half round again, exactly as if he had said, 'Oh!' and gave Janet a look, not like the former look which was merely conventional, but one which was personal to herself, and meant several things. It was a glance full of understanding, as if he knew all about her, and of criticism, and amusement. His eyebrows went up a little, and he seemed to say, 'Oh! so that is who you are? It is you, is it?' which made Janet very angry, though for the life of her she could not have told why. She took her three battered volumes in her hands and left the shop, feeling her little expedition to be quite spoiled. She had meant to make an investigation herself among the music and to look over the 'fancy' articles. She was only after all a country young lady; and she believed that among the many pretty things which the Miss Mimprisses sold at a cost of from one to two shillings, she could have found something which Mrs. Bland would have set upon the drawing-room mantelpiece in the vicarage,

bidding her visitors look what a pretty thing Janet had sent her from London, and was it not kind of the child?

Janet could not linger, however, to make any such purchase under that man's eye. She would not have liked to do it before anybody, and had, indeed, jibed at the fancy articles when she had entered the shop with Miss Harwood; but she felt much aggrieved to be so balked.

'Very like a barber's block,' she said to herself; the sort of man whom you might expect to see in that respectable part of St. John's Wood, buying music, which perhaps he was going to take with him to some tea-party, to sing to the ladies.

When she had exhaled her annoyance in this angry criticism, Janet recovered some portion of her pleasure, and walked home, but much more slowly, in order that she might have the enjoyment of every moment of her freedom, and not go in too soon. We are all much displeased when maids and page-boys, and other light-hearted but slow-footed messengers, do this,

and keep our letters or our novels from us, forgetting that these functionaries too might, like Janet, have need to feel themselves now and then, and be able to think, as they walk along Acacia Road, that they are John or Mary, and not mere officials executing our will.

That night began just as other evenings had begun after dinner. The family group was very comfortable, warm and safe from all contention of the elements which had settled into a downpour outside, from all inharmonious noises or interruptions within. Mrs. Harwood and Gussy at opposite sides of the fire, Miss Summerhayes seated at a little distance with the book upon the table, the very book which she had got from the library, and which she had volunteered to read aloud while the others worked. Very comfortable, but rather dull, but for the book, which was something, and lent an interest to the monotonous night.

When lo! all at once, in the midst of this monotony and unbroken calm, the stillness was

suddenly broken by the tinkle of the house bell. Somebody at the door! Late in the evening, nearly nine, an hour at which no stranger step or sound ever disturbed the house. Janet stopped reading involuntarily, and grew pale in her surprise, looking round upon her companions with a sort of appeal.

'Bless us,' cried Mrs. Harwood, 'who can this be so late at night?'

'It is, perhaps, a telegram,' said Gussy. And then she glanced at the clock, and added, 'It is not so very late. We have had people come later than this.'

Gussy had a little light, not usually there, kindled in her eyes. She let her work drop upon her knees and listened. The sound of the unwilling parlour-maid sallying out in the wet to unlock the door, the sound of a voice and another step, even of a dripping umbrella placed in a stand, and an overcoat being taken off, were listened to by the ladies with much unanimity of interest. Even Janet was glad

that something was coming to break the calm routine. When this last stage of suspense was reached, Gussy said,

'It will be Charlie Meredith and his songs,' and laughed a little, as it were, under her breath.

And then the door opened, and there walked in, with the assured step of one who knew himself welcome, the man of the music and the stationer's shop, the man who had looked round upon Janet as she got her novel, saying, 'Oh!' with his eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

JANET drew instinctively a little out of the way of the new-comer. It was not, we fear, with any intention of effacing herself, but to satisfy the spectator's privilege of watching all that happened and understanding every new situation. The change that had come over Gussy's countenance took her by surprise. She had not thought it possible that such an illumination and transformation could take place in so calm a face, and it betrayed Miss Harwood instantly to Janet's quick perceptions. She was a little person whose reflections were very rapid—who saw in a moment a whole succession of possibilities. Her mind flashed from one to another

in sudden surprise, conviction, imagination, asking herself was the man worth it? almost in the same flash of intelligence with which she perceived that to Gussy he was the first of men.

Janet saw various other matters in the moment of pushing back her chair. She saw that the stranger, now in the act of approaching Gussy, whose interest in him was so visible, recognised herself, and was surprised, with the slightest, scarcely visible, elevation of his eyebrows, as if asking an explanation. She saw also that Mrs. Harwood made a slight movement of pleasure in the chair which she never quitted, as if in her mind making the same little start of welcome which her daughter actually did. Janet would not perhaps have gone farther than this if her attention had not been called by another movement of a different kind. Julia, who had been lying as usual on the rug with her book between her mother's chair and the fire—a position which she could not be persuaded or forced to resign—suddenly disappeared with a sort of scrambling sound and movement, which came in not

unlike a hiss into the very different sentiment with which the welcome of the others was given. Did she actually make some such sound between her closed teeth? At all events, Janet's rapid judgment flew to the conclusion that Julia detested while the others cherished the visitor. Her own keen eyes made an inventory of him and all his visible qualities in a moment. Was he worth it? He was well-looking, nay, very good-looking, she concluded in that instantaneous survey: but a little of the order of the barber's block—good features, very white where whiteness was becoming, very bright in colour where colour was necessary: good eyes, dark, and with considerable power of expression, which he entirely understood and could manage; the whiskers of respectability carefully kept under, disturbed by no extravagance of moustache or beard; dark hair that curled in a very attractive way in close vigorous rings; not tall. This, in Janet's opinion, was the worst thing about him; for a girl's hero has always six feet of stature at the least. And he was perfectly well dressed

in well-fitting evening clothes, which, though so generally objected to in matter of form, are yet, with their large foreground of dazzling linen and background of blackness, almost always becoming to men. All these things Janet remarked in a glance; but as for her first question, was he worth it? she had not yet come to any decision at all.

Gussy made no movement to present the stranger to the governess. She gave him a chair so near herself that Janet was obliged to draw back a little more to get herself out of the way. It was the first time that she had found herself *de trop* in the little circle. She was not, however, at all wounded by this, being very curious and much excited by the little drama which thus seemed to come to light under her eyes. It must have been existing for some time, Janet thought. They must have reached at least the end of the second, if not the third, act, and with quite a flush of interest she settled herself to watch its progress. Was she *de trop?* Would they rather she went away? Was Julia's

disappearance a signal for her—a hint that she was not wanted. These ideas passed through Janet's head, but without disturbing her. She wanted above all things to follow this story out.

'I have only just got back to town,' said Mr. Meredith. 'I have had a longer holiday than usual this year.'

'So we suppose, or I made sure we should have seen you,' said Gussy, with undisguised pleasure in her face.

'That seems like making a claim of right upon Charley's time,' said Mrs. Harwood; 'we must not do that, for it is the last thing that young men like.'

'I think Gussy understands me best,' he said, 'so far as that goes. Of course I should have come in any case the first evening I had.'

Janet said to herself that they must at least have begun the third act, as they called each other by their Christian names.

'You say in any case?' said Gussy, with an inquiring look.

'Yes; fancy what was the first thing I heard

to-day. I went into Mimpriss's on my way to the Temple to get some pencils, and there was some one inquiring for books for Mrs. Harwood: so I knew that you also had reached home.'

'Oh, yes, we have been at home a long time!' said Gussy. 'Mamma never likes to be long away: and Ju—you know Ju—was going down hill like an express train, getting more and more unmanageable and refractory every day.'

'But I am happy to tell you, Charley, that Miss Summerhayes seems likely to work marvels.'

This was the only thing that approached an introduction, and Janet did not know whether to take any notice. Mr. Meredith, however, jumped to his feet, and made her a bow.

'It was Miss Summerhayes I saw changing the books,' he said.

Gussy made no remark. She was not in the least disturbed by this greeting. Janet had not even the satisfaction of thinking that Miss Harwood did not wish her to seek the visitor's acquaintance. She ignored her altogether, as if she was of absolutely no importance—which

was much harder to bear, and a great surprise to the governess, who had hitherto been treated with so much regard.

'Mamma cannot do without her books,' she said, calmly. 'As for me, I have not heard a note of music since you have been away.'

'We must take order about that,' he said. 'I brought something with me to-night, a new thing by—what's his name—one of the men you like. The soprano part is very nice. We can try it over to-night.'

'And how did you leave your Aunt Owen, Charley, and what are they doing down in that part of the country? Dear me, what changes I should find, to be sure, if I were to go down there again. All the Plinlimmons swept away, and my friends at the Grange, and Agatha Lloyd, and——'

'Don't think of it, mamma,' said Gussy, humming over the air with the music in her hand, and interrupting herself to run in a few words between the bars. 'Think of your own people, and how well we all are—tum—tum—

ti-tum—tum—and don't let us distress ourselves about strangers, tu-tu—tu-tu—tum-tum. Yes, I think I shall like this.'

'Your friends at the Grange have not been swept away, Mrs. Harwood. They are in perfectly good case, and made the most tender inquiries for you. I came home full of Welsh news for you; but it blows away after a day in chambers. Ask me as many questions as you please, and it will all come back.'

'Oh, never mind!' said Gussy, with an impatience quite unusual to her. 'Tell us rather what you have been doing yourself. Have you had any sport? Have you met any nice people while you have been away? Have you been singing a great deal, or met anybody whose voice goes with yours?'

'Not one like you,' he said, with a glance that made Gussy's colour rise. He added, after a moment, 'There were some ladies at the Lloyds' who were very good musicians. We had a little practice now and then.

'Young ladies?' asked Gussy.

'Well—yes, some of them were young. One was a capital accompanist, and her sister's voice was something quite remarkable. We managed that duet, don't you know, that *we* never could master, of Brahm's.'

'Oh!' said Gussy. The colour went slowly out of her face, leaving her very pale and grey. 'You must have enjoyed yourself very much,' she said, in a subdued tone.

'Not so much as I do—here,' he said, lowering his voice and bending towards her: and Janet, ever watching, saw Gussy's face take fire again and glow with a tender flush. Was the man worth it? He seemed to play upon her like an instrument, blowing her upwards one moment, the next bringing her down to the ground.

All this time not the least notice had been taken of the governess, who went on with her sewing with a little thrill of observation and attention in her which ran to her very finger points. Even these finger points seemed to be roused into seeing and hearing, reading mean-

ings, and judging looks. Janet felt as if she were sitting apart at the rehearsal of a play. In this end of the room where the personages of the drama were sitting everything was light and brightness; but the other was like an unoccupied auditorium, the lights low, and the space vacant, though quite in the depths of the scene there was an open piano with a gleam of white keys showing out of the dimness. Had Gussy left the piano open on purpose? She had been in the habit of scolding Julia for that injurious habit, but Janet now remembered that it had been left open for several nights. And where was Julia? and was it, perhaps, understood that she should vanish with her pupil? All these things perplexed and disturbed Janet, who did not know what was meant.

Presently the scene changed, the dim background lighted up, and there were two people between her and the gleaming white keyboard of the piano. The episode grew more exciting than ever, for the two—lovers? surely they must be lovers—were going to sing together.

Janet's attention, however, was distracted for a moment or two by the same little stifled sound which she had heard before, and looking up she saw Julia glide from behind the curtains and come back to her place on the rug.

'Julia,' cried Mrs. Harwood, 'you will end by making me frightened. What do you mean by that elfish way of stealing out and in? Can't you have a little respect for your sister? It is not so often that she sings.'

Julia fixed upon her mother her usual dogged look, lifting her head from her book, then, to Janet's supreme surprise, vouchsafed an answer.

'She's so silly,' the girl said, with a glance of scorn.

'Do you hear, Miss Summerhayes?' said the old lady. 'She is incorrigible. I thought we had come to an end of all that, Ju?'

Julia gave her mother another look, then returned to her book, with again a faint hiss from between her closed teeth.

'She is so much interested in her book,' Janet made haste to say. 'When one gets into the

heart of a story at her age one thinks of nothing else.'

'Do you think, Miss Summerhayes, that Ju ought to read so many novels?'

'I thought,' said Janet, faltering, 'that it was with your permission.'

'Oh,' cried Mrs. Harwood, 'I thought you might have seen by this time how little they care for anything I say.'

She looked irritable, cross, disturbed, as Janet thought she had never seen her before, and moved uneasily in her chair. But she had shown no such annoyance when the visitor came in. She had received him with a cheerful welcome, and he had seemed in no doubt on that subject. Indeed, the young man had come in and had taken his place among them with the familiarity and complacency of a favoured visitor who expected to confer as well as receive pleasure. That line in Mrs. Harwood's brow had not appeared till Julia, with her dogged look, had stared into her mother's face.

'I wish,' cried the old lady, 'oh, I wish that

Adolphus would come home!' and she wrung her white, plump hands with almost a tragic gesture, which was so strangely unlike her comfortable person, and all that Janet had hitherto known of her, that the little governess had hard ado not to laugh.

'Do you expect Mr. Harwood soon?' she asked.

'They are all very self-willed, Miss Summerhayes. You must have seen that, already. Gussy of course will not be guided by me. She thinks that things are meant which probably are not meant at all—except to pass the time. And Julia, though she is not more than a child, sets herself up in judgment as if she were—do you think I can do anything to stop it?—even if it were desirable to stop it. And why should I, for that matter, even if I could? It would be suitable enough. How am I to tell, Miss Summerhayes, with no one to advise me, and such self-willed children to deal with? Oh, I wish—I wish that Adolphus were here!'

Janet did not know what to make of this

sudden burst of confidence. She was afraid to seem to wish to pry into her employer's concerns, yet, with the impulse of youth, which is at once a kind meaning and a movement of vanity, wanted to say something which should be consolatory—to put forth her own little hand as a guide in the circumstances of which she was so entirely ignorant.

'I am sure, dear Mrs. Harwood, no one would do anything which they knew you really disliked—you are so good. Perhaps they don't know that you really dislike—anything that may be going on.'

To Janet's surprise, Mrs. Harwood received this enigmatical utterance as if it had thrown real light upon the situation. She put her handkerchief to her eyes.

'I daresay you are right, my dear. I always said you were full of understanding for so young a thing. Perhaps that's what it is, after all. I don't speak out. It would be much more sensible if I were to speak out.'

There was a momentary silence, and the

sound of the singing came in, the two voices 'going' together, rising into a burst of melody in the higher notes which made Janet pause and hold her breath. Mr. Meredith had a beautiful tenor voice, and Gussy's, though not so good, aided the effect with a somewhat tremulous second, twining out and in of the clear and liquid masculine notes. Janet let her work drop and her attempt at consolation together, and sat rapt gazing at the pair. She was too young, too energetic, too ambitious for pure sympathy. She gazed with impatient longing to be in the midst of it.

'Oh! what a weak accompaniment!' she said to herself. 'Why don't they ask me to play it for them? She might sing to her heart's content; but *why* doesn't she ask me to play?'

Janet forgot Mrs. Harwood, whom she had been in the act of advising and consoling, and Julia, who was her special care. She could scarcely restrain herself.

'It is too much for Miss Harwood to sing and play both,' she said, with a sudden impulse,

dropping her work upon the floor, half rising as if to rush to the rescue. Her own movement, however, brought her to herself: for what right had she, a stranger and a hireling, to interfere?

'Miss Summerhayes!' said Mrs. Harwood.

As this was all that was said, Janet detached her eyes from the scene at the piano, and looked at the old lady in the chair. Mrs. Harwood was talking energetically with her eyes and gestures, though she said nothing. She indicated Julia with a glance, then looked towards the door. She put her plump hands together with a little pantomimic prayer. Janet saw and understood, and sighed. She wanted to have a hand in the music; she wanted to watch the story which was going on, which as yet she did not understand. But no. Her duty lay in another direction. It was the first time that she had felt her chains.

'Julia, come, come; it is our time,' she said, briskly.

Miss Harwood at the piano, who had her back

turned, took no notice of the little commotion of the withdrawal; but Mr. Meredith turned round, still singing, and gave Janet a look out of those eyes which she had declared to herself were too black, too bright, too ostentatiously fringed with eyelashes—a look which meant respectful regret, a tinge of remonstrance, a veiled entreaty to stay, a sort of *au revoir* unspoken but eloquent. He could not make more than a slight inclination of his head, as he was singing, but the effect was that of the most deferential bow. Janet was taken altogether by surprise. Had he appreciated her position all in a moment, read her abilities in her eyes, longed to have her at the piano as she longed to be there? or was it a mere impulse of subjugation, the instinct of the conqueror who desired another victim? She was so startled that her heart jumped up suddenly like a bird as she left the room, and made one or two big beats in her ears. And then she laughed to herself apparently without any meaning at all.

CHAPTER X.

'MISS SUMMERHAYES! why did you laugh as we came upstairs?'

'Oh!' said Janet, quite restored from that momentary impression. 'I don't know. Because it is curious to come into the middle of a story; it is like beginning a book, as you do sometimes, at the third volume. One wonders what has happened before, as well as what is going to happen now.'

'You think that's a story!' cried Julia, with scorn; 'because Gussy's a fool, and that man—I can't endure that man.'

'You make that too easy for anyone to see.

I think you made a sound like what they do in the theatre.'

'I hissed him,' said Julia, her lowering eyebrows closing down over her eyes. 'I always do. He can't bear to be hissed. He is just like an actor: it makes him mad, and that is why I do it, and I always shall. I don't care what anyone says.'

'That is a pity,' said Janet; 'for it will not harm him, but you. You forget that people care very little for the opinion of a girl at your age, especially when it is rudely expressed.'

'They don't care much for your opinion,' said Julia, furiously.

'No; I did not expect it; and I have no opinion, expect that you must learn to be a gentlewoman—if that can be learnt—or else I must go away.'

Julia received this, as she usually did Janet's remonstrances, with a look of rage, a flush of shame, and then a sudden self-subdual.

'You want to go away,' she said. 'You are

the only nice one that has ever been here; and you want to go and leave me. I know you do. You'll go before Dolff comes home, and then he'll never know you, and will think—will just think I am a stupid and don't know anything, as they all do!'

'Well, my dear child,' said Janet, who understood this broken speech perfectly well, and knew that she was being represented to 'Dolff' in the brightest colours, a thing by no means indifferent to her, 'they are not very far wrong if they think so; for a girl who hisses—even in the theatre——'

'I did once,' cried Julia, 'in the theatre! They had a hideous ballet in the pantomime like what one reads of in books—a woman making a show of herself—oh!' The girl's cheeks blazed crimson at the thought. 'And I hissed—like this.' Here Julia uttered a sound, in comparison with which a whole serpent-house in highest exasperation would have retired defeated, with the whole force of her youthful energy and breath. 'Gussy pinched me black and blue to

stop me, and I wouldn't. They never would ke me to the theatre again.'

'I don't wonder,' said Janet. 'So now you hiss the people who come to call.'

'Only Charlie Meredith,' said Julia. 'And,' she added, subduing her tones, 'if he came in the morning I should not mind: but he comes at night without being invited, with his music, as if mamma was obliged to have him whether she liked or not. And he gives himself such airs, as if he knew that Gussy—you think I don't care for Gussy, Miss Summerhayes—but I do. I could kill her when she looks silly like that! A woman! to let a man see that she—— oh! I could kill her when she looks at him like that!'

'That is a pleasant way of showing how much you care for her,' said Janet. 'It is quite natural that at fourteen you should think you know best; but if I hear you hiss again,'—the governess kissed the tips of her fingers—'good-bye, my dear; that's all that there will be to say.'

'You say that to beat me down,' cried Julia. 'You don't really care, not a bit, whether I behave myself or not. I am not sure that you are any better than Charley Meredith. I don't know that there is not just a pair of you. Well, then, do it if you like, there! take him away from Gussy, break everybody's heart, make Dolff think me a stupid for all I've said. I can see in your eyes that's what you'd like to do.'

'You have made me out a very pretty programme,' said Janet, laughing. 'I think I shall begin by looking over your exercises, and giving you double black marks for everything. We need not have come upstairs so early but for that pretty habit of yours; and, for my part, I would rather listen to the music than to a little girl storming. Oh, yes, my dear, I know you are taller than I am, but that makes no difference. Be quiet; we can hear it mounting up now that I've opened the window a little. Ah! bravo! that was well done.'

'Do you really care for that squalling?'

Julia demanded, with a mixture of wonder and scorn.

Janet was standing by the window which she had opened. The school-room was over the drawing-room, though on the second floor, and in the quiet of the night Mr. Meredith's fine voice came out like the blast of a silver trumpet. The night was mild and very still, and perhaps Janet's youthful bosom was still a little fluttered by that sudden surprise which had made her heart beat. She leaned a little out, listening, with a natural self-pity that she was not there, and realisation of the different fate of Gussy, to whom music and love and all the softnesses of life were open, while she was sent away out of sight with a naughty child. Janet had far too much strength to give in or permit anyone to see that she suffered from this, nor, indeed, did she suffer more than the vague and momentary sensation of being at a disadvantage. But she leaned out to listen with a little wistfulness, impatient of the childish vehemence, and as yet but little awakened to the deeper

nature of her unmanageable pupil. This pensive mood, however, was soon to be interrupted. In the very midst of the liquid notes ascending from below, there came suddenly, as if it rent the air, a wild and wailing cry—the cry as of a spirit in pain. It seemed to Janet to rise almost from her side, close by. She started back from the window and turned round with a scared and terrified exclamation,

'What is that? What is that?'

For a moment it occurred to her that some terrible accident or hurt must have happened to the girl by her side.

'I—don't know,' said Julia, stammering as if she could not get out the words. But she was not terrified as Janet was. The governess did not notice this at first in her own panic. She ran to the door of Julia's room, from which direction the sound seemed to come, and flung it open crying, 'Who is there? Who is there?' then shut it again in terror of what she might see.

'Oh, run and fetch some one! oh, go and

alarm the house, Julia! there must be something dreadful in there.'

'There's nothing,' said Julia. 'What are you making such a fuss about? It's—a boy outside —they make such hideous noises—it's——'

She stopped, for the same sound was repeated, this time lower and further off, as it seemed—a cry of pain dropping into a low prolonged wail. Janet rushed to the school-room door and out upon the staircase, calling for help, for some one to come. She was wild with alarm. There was no doubt in her mind that some wretched creature, a madman, probably, had got into the rooms.

But all was quiet in the house below, the doors all shut, everybody occupied with their own business, singing going on in the drawing-room, talk in the servants' apartments downstairs —nothing it would seem had been disturbed but Janet alone.

'It's nothing,' repeated Julia. 'Oh, Miss Summerhayes, come back, please, and don't make a fuss. Mamma is so angry if there's any

fuss made. If I go into my room and look all round, and convince you there's nobody, will that do? There's nobody, I know. It's either a boy passing outside, or it's an owl or something that lives under the ivy in the wing. Mamma knows. If you ask her to-morrow she'll tell you; but, oh, for goodness sake, Miss Summerhayes, don't make a fuss to-night.'

'Your mother knows? Do you mean that—it has been heard before?'

'You look as if you thought it was a ghost,' said Julia, who, however, was very pale. 'We have no ghosts in our house.'

'It was like the cry of a mad creature—it was ——Julia, if it comes again I can't bear it. It must be some madman who has got in.'

'If it's a madman he can't get near us,' cried Julia, 'for he's in the wing.'

Janet came back into the school-room, still trembling with her fright. She dropped into a chair, unable to support herself.

'You know—you know what it is,' she said, faintly.

'I know—it's something in the wing. It does no harm. Sometimes it will cry like that—oh, once in a year, perhaps. It can't do any harm. Oh, Miss Summerhayes, do be reasonable when I tell you. What does it matter? I don't know what you mean, to be so taken up with their squalling and shouting, and in such a state when you hear a cry. I don't care either for one or the other,' Julia said.

It cannot be said that Janet showed much interest in the 'squalling and shouting' of which her pupil was so contemptuous after this. The two changed their *rôles* completely for the rest of the evening, during which Julia, though not without a titter for her companion's weakness, soothed and patronised Miss Summerhayes, and addressed to her many philosophical admonitions, which naturally were much more self-confident even than the exhortations of Janet, in themselves by no means deficient in the certainty of youth.

'What can it matter to us,' said Julia, 'what a noise is?—unless you happen to like noises

which people make, squalling at the top of their voices and call music. A noise can't hurt you; it can't do you any harm. You hear it, and that's all—especially when it's only like a voice. I am not fond of thunder, myself, for a thunderbolt might fall on the house or crush you; but a cry—what does it matter? People are always crying out, or making some nasty noise. You should pay no attention to it. I never pay any attention; it is not worth while. Why, you might spend your life thinking of such things, if you were to be disturbed by every sound you hear.'

This discourse did not satisfy Janet or even calm her mind, but she reflected after a while that it was not the part of a governess to put visionary terrors into the mind of her pupil, and so far recovered herself with an effort as to satisfy Julia that it was safe to go to bed and leave Miss Summerhayes. Poor little Janet, when left alone, felt for the first time how terrible it was to be so young, so impressionable, and among strangers. She dared not run down-

stairs, as a girl at home would, to shake off her terrors by confiding them to some one who could authoritatively calm and reassure her. Mrs. Harwood had been very kind to her governess, but to go down again after she had been dismissed, to meet Gussy's astonished look turning round from the piano, and the mother's suspicious glance which would ask what she wanted, why she came?—was impossible to Janet. She felt to-night, for the first time, what it was to be a governess, although to-night, for almost the first time, she had realised what she had expected when she came out into the world, how amusing it was to watch a story going on. How soon had all interest in the story disappeared from her mind in face of this terror which froze her very blood! What was it?—was it a spirit or a living creature in pain? Where was it?—in this tranquil house, as Julia seemed to allow? And worst and most dreadful question of all—would it come again? This last thought was the one that kept all her faculties awake. Might it at any moment burst

once more out of the quiet? Janet thought that if she had to undergo that moment of horror again she must go mad or die. She was afraid to go to bed—afraid to close her eyes—lest she should be awakened by that cry. The singing went on late downstairs, and Janet listened anxiously to the departing of the visitor, the bolting of the door behind him, the little bustle as Mrs. Harwood was wheeled to her room on the ground floor, and Gussy came upstairs. But she did not come as far as the school-room, which she sometimes did to see if all was well. It was too late to disturb anyone—to wake up the sleepers. Janet heard Miss Harwood coming upstairs singing softly over to herself her part in one of the duets. Gussy was happy; no alarm or sense of desolation was in her.

'If I were happy like that I would come upstairs to see how the poor little governess, all alone, was getting on,' Janet said to herself, opening her eyes in the dark. But, indeed, she would have done nothing of the kind. She would have been perhaps more indifferent than

Gussy was to the governess in causeless trouble, feeling 'out of it'—or else in a visionary panic thinking that she had heard a ghost.

The night wore away gradually, and nothing happened. When it was between three and four, Janet, worn out, fell fast asleep. She slept till the breakfast-bell rang, and had to hurry her dressing and hasten downstairs with an apology, wondering at herself and her own foolish terror in the red light of the wintry morning. Gussy was very ready, it was evident, to be questioned about last night. She began herself by expressing her distress that Janet had been hastened away for '*that* child,' and narrated to her with subdued triumph how many 'things' Mr. Meredith and she had gone through, and what good practice it was.

'The Harwoods generally are so unmusical,' Gussy said; 'I never did get any encouragement at home. But fortunately mamma likes Charley, and he may do what he pleases. I do enjoy a musical evening so. Hasn't he a delicious voice?'

'It is a charming voice,' said Janet.

'And he is so well trained. To sing with him it is like getting a lesson. He wanted to know whether you were musical, but I said I feared——'

'I used to be thought pretty good for accompaniments,' said Janet.

'Oh, really!' but Gussy did not receive this statement with much delight. 'Perhaps you'll help me to practise my part,' she said, and returned to sound the praises of Charley.

Janet would not introduce the subject of her own terrors, and if she had been ever so intent upon doing so, there was no opportunity, for Charley and his songs and his perfections left no room for any other discourse. And when Mrs. Harwood appeared matters were not much better. The old lady remarked that Janet was pale, and feared that she had not been able to sleep for the singing.

'The fact is that Mr. Meredith has not been in London for a long time, and I could not cut them short, could I, the first night?'

To describe the impatience with which Janet heard all this would not be easy. She said to herself, what was Mr. Meredith to her? What were his songs, his attentions, the grief of his absence, the joy of his return? She listened with a great eagerness to interrupt, to break through this eternal burden of the self-occupied to whom their own little affairs were everything, with her own questions. But when Mrs. Harwood's voice stopped Janet did not find hers. What could she say?

'I heard a dreadful cry last night. What was it? You know what it was!' It seemed to her when she turned this question in her mind that it was a thing impossible to say. 'I heard—last night,' she began.

'Ah, the singing!' cried both ladies together. 'I hope it did not keep you from your sleep, my dear,' said Mrs. Harwood. And, 'I'm sure you could not hear me, and Charley's voice is always a pleasure,' cried Gussy.

Janet's mouth was closed, and she could say no more.

CHAPTER XI.

JANET'S life seemed to herself to change from this day, though no one else seemed aware of any difference, and all its outward expressions went on as before. For a few nights she was afraid to sit alone upstairs, and hurried to bed in the hope of getting to sleep, and thus avoiding any repetition of the cry which had so rung through and through her on the night of Mr. Meredith's first appearance; but, as the days and nights passed in perfect tranquillity, this scare passed away from her mind, and she began to be able to explain to herself that it must have been some boy in the road outside, belated and anxious to make a sensation in that still neighbourhood, or perhaps that fancy had exaggerated

the fantastic wailings of a love-sick cat into something portentous and terrible. Both these things were possible, but that anything mysterious could exist in this comfortable, modern, respectable house, where everything went as on velvet by carefully kept rule and order, was an idea too ridiculous to be entertained. At night, it is true, Janet had various fallings back from this confidence, and reminded herself with renewed panic that Julia had heard and had not been astonished as she was, but evidently was aware of some explanation which she did not give. These grew fainter and fainter, however, as one week passed after another, and nothing occurred.

There was one thing, however, which Janet only remarked after this period, though she was afterwards assured that it was no secret, but might have been seen from the first day, and that was the appearance of a man-servant in the house where none but women ever waited upon the family. She met him one day going across the hall, a respectable, serious

man of middle age, just such a butler as Mrs. Harwood ought to have had. But the ladies had no butler; they had a highly-respectable parlour-maid, just such as, failing the butler, a family in St. John's Wood, entirely *comme il faut*, must have had—tall, staid, good-looking, but not too good-looking, well-dressed, and thirty-five. The man, who had all the air of perfect familiarity with the house, and who was in indoor dress, with noiseless shoes, went across the hall from the servants' quarters towards the side upon which was the wing, an apparently unoccupied part of the dwelling.

After that first meeting, which startled her, Janet saw this man again and again. There was no explanation of him, he was never seen but in these chance encounters, yet he was no secret, nor was his presence in any way concealed. What, after all, had a stranger to do with it? It was nothing to Janet. But her strong sense of spectatorship, and the curiosity of imagination which made her keen to find indications of a story anywhere or everywhere,

caused a half-conscious groping on the part of the governess among unexplained incidents. It was some time, however, before she began to associate the mysterious man-servant with the alarming outcry which had almost, she thought, deprived her of her wits, ringing as it did into the silence of the night. After a few weeks had passed, she asked herself if, indeed, she ever had heard it at all—whether it was not a delusion of her senses, the reverberation of some well-known and vulgar sound. Needless to say that Janet had read 'Northanger Abbey,' and had been taught to smile at the investigations of our dear little Catherine, and their amusing issue: though, to tell the truth, her sympathy in Catherine Morland's thirst for romantic adventure had been more strong than her amusement in the result, which disappointed her a little too.

However, not even a romantic imagination disposed towards discoveries can survive the uneventful progress of weeks in which nothing happens. And Janet meantime had the other

story going on before her eyes which she could study at her ease. Mr. Charles Meredith and his visits became now the chief interest of life in the house in St. John's Wood. He dined once or twice, but only in company with another visitor; and on those occasions Janet did not form one of the party. Gussy explained that it would 'put out the table.'

'If I were to invite gentlemen for you and Ju, it would make quite a party, and mamma does not like parties when Dolff is away. And then Ju is too young to dine when there is company,' said Miss Harwood.

'Oh, you must not think of me!' Janet would reply; but when she heard the gentlemen arrive, and the increased sound of voices as the servants went out and in of the dining-room, and the little cheerful commotion, it is undeniable that Janet remembered Mrs. Bland's little sermons about the fate of a governess.

She did not like it. She had never been left out in her life before. Janet was not shy; she had always been used to take a somewhat privi-

leged place in the little society she was acquainted with. She could talk; she was not afraid of anybody who might drift into the little world of Clover; and she loved variety, which is a thing not permitted to governesses. On these occasions supper was brought up to the school-room for Miss Summerhayes and her pupil. It was brought late, and they had to wait and yawn on opposite sides of the table for the cold and tardy meal. On such occasions it was difficult to make herself amusing to Julia, or to find Julia amusing. It was dull. It produced a certain mortification in Janet's mind to find that she cared. She said to herself, with a little bitterness of which she was ashamed, that she had no doubt it was a very dull party, and that the two strangers were not in the least interesting. She recalled to herself her previous conviction, that to be left alone to do what she pleased, to read a novel or write a letter, would be a pleasant relief. No, it was not so; she wanted to be in the dining-room with the rest, hearing what was

said, even if she had to remember her own position and take little part. She wanted to see how the drama was going on, and how the hero looked when there was some one to compare him with. That scene would glide in her imagination in front of her novel, with the attraction of a pleasure out of reach. And Julia was a dull companion on these occasions. She yawned and wondered when they would bring the supper.

'It's disgusting to be kept so long waiting, and all the things like stones when they do come,' Julia would say; 'I shall complain to mamma. If all the others are so busy, Vicars might bring it up, once in a way.'

'Who is Vicars?' said Janet.

'Oh, he is the man; he never goes into the dining-room except when Dolff is here—but he might bring up our supper if all the rest are so busy. As if there was any reason to make such a fuss! Two men to dinner! You would think there were twenty, all fine ladies and gentlemen, to see how Gussy goes on.'

'They are probably great friends, and more important than twenty ladies and gentlemen,' said Janet, with her most correct governess air.

'Oh, you know well enough! It is Charley Meredith, and they will caterwaul afterwards till it makes me quite ill to hear them. And Gussy will look so silly. Oh, why does a woman look so silly when there is nonsense like that going on?'

'It is generally the man who is supposed to look silly,' said Janet. Involuntarily she thought of poor Dr. Harding and his proposal; and the hard-hearted young woman laughed in spite of herself.

'What are you laughing at? You are remembering something. Tell me, tell me, Miss Summerhayes! I suppose,' said Julia, with deep discrimination, 'that the man looks silly when it is he who wants it most. Now, here it is Gussy who wants it most.'

'Julia, you have no right to discuss your sister.'

'Oh, but you can't stop me doing it!' said Julia, with composure; 'you can stop me when —when I'm silly myself. I was a great fool, I know. I thought once I could drive you away —no, I didn't want to drive you away. I wanted to get the upper hand; but you've got the upper hand of me, and I don't mind now. However, that's quite different. This is a free country, and I can say what I please of Gussy. I say that it's she——'

'As it is a free country, you can't compel me to listen,' said Janet; 'but there is one thing in which it is not a free country, and that is that you are not permitted to be ill-bred. It is not allowed to be vulgar.'

'Oh!' cried Julia, colouring to her eyes, but affecting to laugh, 'as if there were not hundreds and thousands!'

Janet shrugged her little shoulders in a manner which her pupil, rebellious, but admiring, thought irresistible.

'Out in the streets, perhaps: so are there applewomen, and people who sell matches.

But in good time here comes the tray, and something for you to do.'

Janet, however, was not far from being of Julia's opinion. Miss Harwood, who had been so calm, who had explained that the quiet family life so unbroken, the long evenings of needlework and talk, might appear dull to Janet, but were never dull to her mother and herself, now went through these evenings as in a dream. Meredith came twice, sometimes three times, in a week, after dinner, as he had done on his first appearance. He had privileges which were extended to no one else, and it was never known on which evening he would appear. He even took pains, Janet thought, to have no rule, to appear suddenly when he was not looked for. But to this spectator, whose attention was fixed upon Gussy as on the heroine of the drama, it was very easily apparent that there was no evening on which he was not expected. She worked, she talked, she made her little disquisitions as usual, but there was a certain fixed attitude of her head, a little almost

imperceptible pause now and then in the movements of her hands, which showed that she was listening for the summons at the door, the step outside. In the quietness of the semi-rural suburban road the step of the rare passenger was sometimes heard even outside the garden wall. Sometimes Mrs. Harwood would say,

'I wonder if that is Charley Meredith?' to which Gussy would reply, with beautiful composure,

'Oh, no; he is always engaged on Thursdays!' or, 'This is never one of his free nights.'

But it was not lost either upon Janet or Julia that her hands were for a moment still, that her downcast eyes were fixed not on her work, and her entire frame rigid with intent listening. The attitude relaxed in a moment when the welcome sound of the bell pealed into the silence, a little faint sigh of ease and happiness came from the bottom of her heart, her head regained its easy poise. Whether the mother also saw these indications of supreme suspense and then of delightful relief, even Janet, whom

no circumstance escaped, could not tell. Perhaps, like Gussy, she thought that the visitor was of more account than the other bystanders believed him to be.

A little of the same enchantment hung over Gussy through all the ordinary affairs of life. There was a liquid softness in her eyes that had not been there before; her want of colour, which was her great deficiency, seemed to be half-compensated by the faintest rose-flush of feeling and sensibility which had come to her, no one could tell how. Was it a sign of better health, greater vigour, than her tranquil temperament usually enjoyed? Her mother said so, rejoicing over the fact that Gussy was 'so well.'

'She has quite a colour,' the visitors said. 'What a good thing you went to Malvern this year; it has quite set Augusta up.'

But the governess and her pupil knew it was not Malvern. The piano in the larger drawing-room was always open now, the lights were always prepared, and Gussy practised her songs in the morning with a devotion for which Janet,

a little moved by the *esprit de corps*, and unwilling that a woman should betray herself, blushed sometimes when the unwearying watchfulness of Julia, to whom no such awakening had come, pointed out the performance going on below.

'She's practising again,' Julia would say, in the midst of a lesson.

'She knows how necessary it is,' cried quick-witted Janet. 'I wish you were half as sensible.'

But these little snubs, which were frequent, did not turn aside Julia's keen perceptions or break the unspoken sympathy of spectatorship that was between the two.

Julia, however, made no further demonstration of her dislike to the visitor, and Mrs. Harwood's satisfaction with the 'good influence' which Miss Summerhayes had acquired over the rebellious girl went on increasing.

'She looks no more than a girl herself—and so she is, quite young, and never was out before—but her power over that unmanageable child

is something wonderful. You know, my dear, what poor Ju was.'

'Oh, yes, I know what Ju was!' replied, with fervour, the friend to whom Mrs. Harwood confided her satisfaction. With too much fervour, perhaps; for when the person we blame is our own child, we desire no warmth of conviction, but rather a good-natured deprecation, as who should say, 'I never remarked it,' or a warmer assertion, 'She was always very nice to me.' But the mother's confidant was not enlightened in this case. She acknowledged her perfect consciousness of the demerits of Ju.

This checked Mrs. Harwood in full flow.

'She had always a great many defects of manner, but she was right in her heart, poor child, and as soon as you could get to that—— Well! Miss Summerhayes has just that knack. She divined my poor Julia's warm heart, and to see her now you never would believe there had ever been any trouble. She was always more sensible than most girls, but self-willed and too frank. Now, I think you would say there are

few girls with better manners, and all that little thing's doing, who really sometimes looks far more a child than Ju herself.'

'Dear me,' said the visitor; 'but I am glad, with my houseful of sons, that I have not got such a fascinating personage. What is so good for the girls might be dangerous for the boys. When do you expect Dolff to come back?'

'Not before Christmas,' said Mrs. Harwood; but she did not take the good-natured insinuation; she was too full of her present subject. 'He will be so delighted with the improvement in his sister. Dolff is very fond of his sister; he is so domestic. Sometimes it is a little difficult to get him back from Oxford. They enjoy themselves so much in their college with all their friends about them. But, when he does come home, he is so good in taking Julia about and giving her treats. Julia was always his favourite, even when she was most hard to deal with. He will be quite delighted now.'

'And Miss Summerhayes will go away, I sup-

pose, for her holidays?' said the far-seeing friend.

Mrs. Harwood looked across the room at Gussy, with a half-alarmed, half-inquiring glance. But Gussy, who was once so quick to perceive all possible imbroglios—Gussy shook her head. She had been thinking with satisfaction that Miss Summerhayes would amuse Dolff, that her own pursuits need not be interrupted for the sake of her brother. She shook her head in answer to her mother's unspoken question.

'Oh, no; she never thought of wanting a holiday so soon,' Gussy said.

And so, unmoved by any warning, the Harwood family rushed on their fate.

CHAPTER XII.

THESE musical evenings became now the central events in the life of the house in St. John's Wood. When they did not occur, and the evening passed in its former quiet fashion, with the mother knitting in her chair, and Gussy and Janet on the other side at their work, and Julia on the rug with her book, it was to all of them as if life were arrested, and that day did not count. Everything went on as usual, but nothing was of any consequence. That this should be the case to the heroine of the drama who had the first *rôle* to play, and whose future might perhaps be entirely shaped and coloured by what took place on these occasions, was

natural enough; but it may be thought strange that an entire household should hang, as it were, on the comings and goings of a presumed lover whose actions could affect materially only one individual, and to whom one at least of the lookers-on was indifferent and one hostile. But the hostility quickened the interest, and the indifference did not take away from it. The course of a wooing is always an excitement to a household of women. It is 'as good as a play.' After it is concluded, in that moment of absorption when two engaged people follow each other about, and parade their special privileges and rights, it becomes odious, we are ready to allow; and the only desire in the minds of all reasonable persons is to get the marriage hurried on and the turtle-doves disposed of. But when all is still in the mists of uncertainty, when it cannot be asserted that the entire fabric of the drama may not melt away again, and new complications take place, then it is that the spectators gather round, and every woman keeps a watch under her eyelids upon

the progress of the affair. This is especially the case when there is little doubt about the sentiments of one of the parties, and more so still when that one is the woman. The story will then acquire a sometimes painful interest, and the women who watch will feel something of humiliation, something perhaps of resentment, against the girl who has given her affections without sufficient warrant, or the man who is dull enough not to perceive, or wicked enough to disregard, the gift thus bestowed upon him.

Thus the party of women in Mrs. Harwood's drawing-room were diversely moved, but all to the same end. The mother herself felt nothing but anxiety about her child. She was not an enthusiast for Charley Meredith, though she liked him well enough. His blue-black hair, his fine moustache, his bloom of roses or wax, his seductive eyes, and fine voice were not much to the old lady. And she thought him too fond of music and society, not sufficiently anxious to establish his practice and make his

name known at the Bar, which was to be his means of living. As she sat and knitted, and listened, and looked on, her mind was full of calculations, often gone over, as to how much the two could scrape together between them to begin housekeeping upon, and whether it would do? Mrs. Harwood naturally knew to a penny what her daughter's fortune would be, although she was not without anxieties lying deep in her soul, even upon that point, which nobody guessed. And as she was well acquainted with his Aunt Owen and his other relatives in Wales, and knew how the family had been 'left' at his father's death, she had a tolerably good guess as to what young Meredith was worth in the way of money, and wished it had been more. Still, if, when this period of courtship was over, he would more or less give up music, and devote himself to work, what with Gussy's little fortune, and the remnants of what he had from his father, they might do. It was not a very brilliant conclusion, but yet it might do. When she had come to the end of one such long course

of calculations and thoughts, Mrs. Harwood would nod her head and say, 'That is very pretty; what is it? Who is it by?'—questions of which in a general way no one took any notice; and then she would begin with her calculations again.

Janet naturally approached the question from an entirely different side. She said to herself that there was not the least doubt about Miss Harwood's sentiments, but she herself was generally treated as if she were a cabbage on these musical evenings. There was no notice taken of her. Though they were so kind in all other ways, and though even Gussy never wavered in her friendliness on other occasions, on these she ignored Janet altogether. Mr. Meredith made her a bow when he shook hands with Mrs. Harwood, and, if he were not absolutely in the middle of a song, he would make a rush to open the door for her when Julia and she retired with their candles. But that was all, and Gussy went on all the time with her accompaniment (which she played so badly!), and

took no notice, except to call him back sometimes, the governess thought, with a little sharpness. But that was all.

Was it all? In the depths of her heart Janet felt that it was not. Mr. Meredith's eyes were fine, with almost too much eyelash for a man; they were undeniably like those bold orbs which shine from waxen faces in a barber's shop: but they had a way of opening very wide and expressing a great deal of sentiment, which is not given to those representations of manhood, though at first Janet was wicked enough to think that if the waxen busts could look sentimental they would do it in a similar way. When Janet, however, found that these great eyes were made for herself—when she discovered that Mr. Charles Meredith was asking pardon of her for his scant greeting, and throwing a good deal of respectful admiration into the momentary but intense gaze which was from time to time directed upon her—and when, finally, she found herself almost by this same medium taken into his confidence, made to

sympathise with him when, having settled down for a comfortable chat, and secured a place near herself where he could conduct these telegraphic communications easily, he was carried off without compunction by Gussy to the piano—Janet's opinion undeniably changed a little.

There is nothing more flattering than to be made the confidant, to be put behind the scenes, to have the *dessous des cartes* revealed to you; and the piquancy of the revelation, which was never put into words, which was half her own quick perception, which could not have been made to anyone whose understanding was less vivid, charmed her imagination, which was still mischievous and curious like that of a child. Sometimes, when Gussy led him away triumphant, he would give a rueful glance, and it was hard ado for Janet to restrain her impulse to laugh. Gussy swept him away in her train as if he had been her own property, as if his visit had no other object than that piano, always open in the background, which afforded such an easy mode of separation from the others, and

the suggestive delightful semi-privacy in which the two voices mingled as the two hearts were learning to mingle. That was Gussy's view of the question, but it did not long continue to be Janet's. When poor Gussy made, as now and then she did, a false note, when she went wrong in those somewhat elaborate accompaniments which Janet knew she herself could play so much better, a momentary gleam from Mr. Meredith's eyes, the pointed shrug of his shoulders or elevation of his brows, gave Janet once more that inclination to laugh which it was so difficult to restrain.

It did not at all occur to the girl behind backs that she was an accomplice in a piece of domestic treachery. It was ludicrous to see the unconscious performer, full of complacency in her accomplishment, producing those false notes; it was at once horrifying and laughable to hear the strange discords with which the piano came in. Janet, who could have done it so much better herself, felt a little shiver steal over her at the first jarring thrill, and what so natural as

that he, who was evidently a good musician, should discover it, too, and seek her sympathy. As these communications grew more frequent, it is true that Janet did feel a little shame now and then steal over her. Poor Miss Harwood! She would not like it, the governess felt sure, if she surprised one of these glances; and thus, in the complacence of knowing better, in the secret superiority of divining the sentiments of Gussy's lover even better than Gussy did, the girl felt it almost impossible not to burst into a little laugh again.

Were these two floating on—as Gussy thought in her confident tenderness and glamour of love, as Mrs. Harwood thought in her anxious calculations and adding up of this and that to see whether it would do, as Julia, in her eager dislike and scorn and childish inexperience, was certain of—towards a happy *dénouement* and a life of harmony together? This was what Janet did not know. She sat and wondered, going on with her needlework. Janet, who was not at all without experience, and who had

seen that people in most things consider their own advantage and pleasure first, as the protectress of her own childhood had done in adopting her, did not jump to the conclusion that Meredith had not the intentions which the others attributed to him. But she had a doubt which none of the others had. She sat and wondered, working on, anxious to be a little nearer, and hear what they were saying, longing to be asked to take that accompaniment, to be in the middle of what was going on. The uncertainty lent the scene, which in any case would have been as good as a play, a still more vivid interest. Her heart beat with the sensation of knowing so much more than the others, with wondering from day to day what would be the next event, and how it would end. Strangely enough, she did not enter at all into Gussy's feelings, or conceive any sympathy for her. Like Julia, like the very young in general, Janet was angry with Miss Harwood for being 'silly,' for letting the visitor see his advantage. She could not forgive the woman who made the advances,

who was deceived and fancied herself beloved, and flung herself at the head, or at the feet, of a tardy lover. She was more impatient with Gussy for the glamour in her eyes, than with Meredith for having none, for shrugging his shoulders at the false notes.

It came about, however, one evening, in the most natural manner in the world, that Janet, trembling with impatience behind backs, and longing to be in the midst of it, achieved at last the active share she desired in what was going on. She never could tell whether it was accident or whether Meredith had chosen on purpose a duet of which the accompaniment was extremely difficult, such as Miss Harwood was quite incapable of.

After a few trials and failures, the practising came to a sudden end, and a little controversy evidently went on over the piano. He proposed something which she did not consent to willingly. By-and-by Gussy's voice, a little raised in vexation, reached the other end of the room.

'I have no reason to suppose she can play at all,' she said.

Then there was a murmur from Meredith and the name of Julia.

'Oh, yes! enough to teach Ju: but Ju has no ear and no taste, and never will do anything.'

Again the lover made a representation, inaudible, in Gussy's ear.

'Well, if you like, we can ask her; but it's always introducing a third, and spoiling——'

Janet's ears were so quickened by this time that she heard, or thought she heard, him say, stooping close to Gussy's ear,

'Who can feel that like me? But she's only —seems to know her place.'

Heavens! how the heart jumped up in Janet's breast! She was sure she heard him say, 'seems to know her place.' Her place! and he who had made her his confidant, made her the judge, making fun of Gussy to her, as he now set her down so contemptuously to Gussy! The blood boiled in Janet's veins, a flood of thoughts and resolutions rushed through her mind. She would

not play for them! They might break down, and Miss Harwood might jar him to death with her discords, for anything Janet cared. Her place! behind their backs, without notice, without a word! Oh, yes, she would keep it, she would understand what it was, she would do nothing for them! And then the pendulum swung the other way. Yes, she would play for them. She would show Gussy what a bungler she was. She would let them both see that it was quite simple, nothing to make any fuss about, to herself no more than the easiest exercise! She would play, but never betray again that she was conscious of Mr. Meredith's existence, never seem to see his looks, treat him as if he were the cabbage——

All this ran through her thoughts in the moment, while Miss Harwood turned slowly round on her music-stool, and he advanced a step, turning towards Janet a look of entreaty, and at the same time of private intelligence, such as all her resolution not to look could not prevent her from seeing. Gussy had never treated

Janet with unkindness, never shown any want of consideration, save in ignoring her on these occasions; but at present her voice sounded careless, disrespectful, almost insulting.

'Miss Summerhayes!' she called out, carelessly.

Janet, with still that tumult in her breast, did not lift her eyes or move in her seat.

'Miss Summerhayes!' cried Gussy again.

'My dear,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'my daughter is calling you. I think you did not hear.'

'Oh!' said Janet, and looked up as if she had heard for the first time; indeed, the force of her indignation gave her something of the feeling of one awakened from a dream.

'Will you come here, please?' said Miss Harwood.

Never before had there been between them the tone of command and obedience. Janet reflected to herself bitterly that she was supposed to know her place, and rose, but with a reluctance that anybody could see.

This reluctance softened Gussy. She thought

the other girl felt all the inappropriateness of being made the third between two——

'Please come and look at this accompaniment. I have never seen it before, and it seems difficult. Will you try it for us? You said you could play.'

'Yes, I can play.' Janet went slowly towards the piano. He might make eyes as he chose, she would not see them. She looked at the music while Gussy rose and left the place for her. Easy? why, it was child's play! 'I will play it if you wish me to do so;' her fingers were crisp with impatience to get at the keys.

'Oh, do, do, Miss Summerhayes! we are waiting for you. A new accompaniment and a new song at once are too much for anyone. Is that the proper height for you? is the light as you like it? Ah!' he said, with a deep breath, 'that is something like; now, Gussy!'

He took her hand to draw her to his side, and over Gussy's colourless face there sprang anew that light as if it came through rose-leaves, through some ethereal medium, a light ineffable,

which neither sunlight nor lamplight ever gave.

Poor Gussy! this was the look which made her sister's childish countenance lower, which was 'silly,' which moved Janet to mingled ridicule, wrath, and shame. These young critics had no mercy. But as she stood by her lover's side and sang, all unkindly thoughts and every little irritation went out of Gussy's soul. She was the only one of them whose mind was in true harmony with the music; the others were better performers. She forgot that she had been displeased to have Janet called in. She touched the girl's shoulder tenderly, gratefully with her hand; her heart went out in the song, though she was not so very certain about the notes.

It was not at all with these beautiful emotions that Janet plunged into the mazes of the notes. She played with rage, with fury, beating down the man who had wounded her, helping out the tremulous soprano; and Meredith, roused to the conflict, sang against her, till he, too, excelled himself. It was like a musical duel, carried out

to the last note with an intention which the two chief performers only were aware of; and Janet was ringing out the last symphony with her cheeks burning and her heart beating, when suddenly she sprang up from the piano and covered her face and her ears with her hands.

'Oh, there it is!' she cried, 'there it is again.'

'There is—what?' said Miss Harwood. She had been standing a step apart contemplating with mixed feelings the performance from which she herself had dropped. She came forward and laid her hand on Janet's shoulder. 'What is the matter, Miss Summerhayes? Have you done too much? are you ill? What is it?'

'The voice, the voice!' said Janet, still with her hands on her ears.

'The voice? I heard the wind in the chimney, if that is what you mean.'

'And I heard nothing at all, except Miss Summerhayes' brilliant performance,' said Mr. Meredith.

'Miss Summerhayes is not so complimentary to you. She evidently was not thinking of your

brilliant performance. Why, you are quite upset,' said Gussy, with the faintest tone of contempt.

'What is it? What did she hear?' cried Mrs. Harwood, sharply, from her chair.

CHAPTER XIII.

THIS little incident could not be said to have much effect upon Janet's relations with the family in which she was living, but yet it was not without some influence on the new order of things. She had an interview next morning with Mrs. Harwood, who complimented her very much on the beneficial influence she was exercising over Julia.

'I begin to hope that, after all, she will become a reasonable creature, and like other people,' said the mother. 'I need not tell you that she has been a great trouble to me, and nobody we have had has ever got such command of her before. She is growing very fond of

you, Miss Summerhayes, and I hope nothing will occur to disturb this good understanding,' she continued, with a little significance in her tone. Then, after a pause, she resumed, as with an afterthought, 'Oh! there is just one thing I wanted to speak to you about. I am afraid, my dear, from what happened last night, that you are a little fanciful, easily-frightened, terrified, they tell me,' she said, with a little laugh, 'for ghosts, and that sort of nonsense.'

'No—oh, no! indeed, indeed I never was.'

'Then, my dear,' said Mrs. Harwood, laying her hand, not unkindly, on Janet's arm, 'don't begin now. They told me you heard something that frightened you. Be quite sure that there's always a perfectly natural explanation of anything you may hear. There is nothing whatever in this house to be frightened about. Make yourself quite sure on that point, and we shall always get on perfectly well, I am convinced. Now run away, you and her. I won't keep you longer. I am sure it is time for your walk.'

'But, Mrs. Harwood——' said Janet, with some timidity.

'No,' said the old lady, 'I won't keep you any longer. You must not lose the sunshiny part of the day.'

Janet lingered a moment longer, but her courage failed her. How could she insist upon a thing which nobody paid any attention to but herself? Perhaps, indeed, nobody but herself heard it at all. It might be something which was addressed to herself alone; some mysterious warning; something which could not find any other utterance. The little governess, however, was so sensible and so perfectly modern in her views that, though such a flattering and thrilling idea did occur to her, she did not entertain the notion. Why should she have a ghostly voice all to herself? What could there be that she required to be warned about in such a way? Janet knew very little of her family, but they were not distinguished enough to possess a ghost. She did not believe that it was a ghost at all; it was something in trouble,

something that had been caught in a trap, or perhaps the cry of some one who was mad, which was a very terrible suggestion. To see a ghost would be exciting indeed, though even the youthful imagination of the nineteenth century has overcome these kind of terrors—and there would be a distinction in the vision of something supernatural which would more than make up for the strain upon the nerves; but to encounter a madman about the house or garden would be very different, a horror which would have no compensating superiority. How could she ask, however, of that calm old lady in her chair whether she was quite sure there was no dangerous madman about? Such a suggestion might bring on something terrible; it might produce a fit, or something; it might kill Mrs. Harwood. Janet made up her mind it was better to forbear, to wait a little longer, to see what might happen. And she had not been insensible to the significance of Mrs. Harwood's tone when she hoped that nothing would occur to disturb their good understanding. Janet

was very quick-witted, and the tone was not lost upon her. It brought before her very distinctly the fact that Mrs. Harwood, if she pleased, could send her away, and that it would not be pleasant to be sent away. To go of her own accord might be supportable, though she did not by any means desire it: but to be sent away would not do at all. She knew what all the gossips at Clover would say. They would say they knew from the beginning that Janet Summerhayes never would do in a situation; that she had been too much spoiled ever to get on in a place where she had to consider other people and not herself, and that they were quite convinced she would soon turn up to be a burden on the good Blands, who were foolishly kind to her. Rather any self-denial, Janet said to herself, than encounter this! So she restrained her alarms, kept a careful eye upon all the dark corners when she went up or downstairs, always carried a light with her wherever she went, and determined to say nothing, whatever might happen, so long as she could bear it. In this

way she kept herself calm, although she could not divest herself of an alarmed expectation and sense that at any moment she might be startled into overpowering terror again.

Another consequence, however, followed, which she did not become aware of at once, yet which was of more practical importance—and that was that her presence in the drawing-room in the long evenings was not so much a matter of course as it had been. The little dinner-parties, at which the guests consisted only of Mr. Charles Meredith and one other man, or sometimes of Mr. Charles Meredith (as she discovered) alone, took place more frequently, and it was occasionally discovered by Miss Harwood or her mother that Julia ought to prepare her lessons better in the evening, which meant, of course, the exclusion of Miss Summerhayes too. When Janet saw that this had become a system she was, of course, disturbed by it; but she was so reasonable that she did not take offence, as some young women might do. She concluded, on the whole, after the first prick of annoyance,

that it was quite a natural thing, and one that she had no right to complain of. Miss Harwood liked to have her suitor (if he was her suitor) to herself. She did not want a third person coming in between them, especially a third person who, in one particular at least, surpassed herself. Janet acknowledged that it was quite natural. In such circumstances she too, she felt, would invent reasons why the other girl should not come downstairs, why she should not be allowed to interfere. It was a pity, and she did not like it. It was dull with Julia in the school-room, and not to be able to note how the play was going was a disappointment. But she behaved herself like a little heroine, and did not complain. It certainly did not occur to her, at this period of her history, that to be prevented from improving her acquaintance with Charles Meredith was a grievance of which, even to herself, she could complain.

It happened to her, however, during this period, when again she had volunteered to match crewels for Mrs. Harwood, on a day

when nobody else was going out, to meet Meredith exactly as she had done when she saw him first. She had run into the little shop on her mission—the St. John's Wood shop, with all its little merchandises, like a superior village repository: and there, once more, exactly in the same spot, looking over the music, was the now well-known figure, correct yet easy in his morning suit, with his black hair and dark eyes and waxen bloom. The old ladies in the shop thought Mr. Meredith a model of manly beauty, and even Janet could not refrain from an involuntary glance of satisfaction. She was half-ashamed this time of having thought that he was like a barber's block. And his eyes lighted up with such evident pleasure at the sight of her that it would have been impossible for a little girl long abstracted from any look of admiration not to be pleased.

'Come and help me to choose a new song for to-night,' he said, after a warm greeting. 'I have not seen you for a fortnight, Miss Summerhayes. I hope we shall meet to-night.'

'Not if you are coming to dinner,' said Janet, demurely; 'we do not come down to dinner when there is company, Julia and I.'

'Oh, that is the explanation?' said Meredith, and, with a widening of his eyes and elevation of his eyebrows, he added, 'Then I shall not come to dinner to-night.'

Janet said nothing, for what had she to say? She had no part in these arrangements of her superiors. She gave a glance at the song he held in his hand.

'It would be better to practise those you have than to bring anything new.'

'Ah, if you could persuade her of that! and if we singers could be left free to think of the song without hammering at the accompaniment! How well you play, Miss Summerhayes.'

'I can do nothing else,' said Janet; 'I was taught only for that.'

'Yes,' said Meredith, 'that is the right way —to do one thing well, and stick to it; but, unfortunately, everybody is not of that opinion.

Most ladies think that they can do anything—or, at least, try.'

'No more than most men,' said Janet, quickly.

'Oh, don't you think so? I think you'll allow we've a different way of setting to work. We do what we can, what we have studied; but you ladies try a little of everything without having studied at all. Miss Harwood has a nice little voice, but no science even in that, and she knows no more of the piano than of the steam-engine. Don't contradict me, Miss Summerhayes, for I am sure I must know best. I have suffered from it too much.'

'You have no appearance of suffering at all,' said Janet.

'Ah, that's all my power of dissembling,' he said.

Janet had got her crewels by this time, and she had a vague consciousness that it would be well not to continue this conversation, so she said, 'Good morning!' and was about to pass him on her way home when he put out his hand to detain her.

'Miss Summerhayes, don't run away. I am going in the same direction. We are prevented from making friends in the evening, but I should not like to let an opportunity slip.'

'Who keeps us from making friends, Mr. Meredith? You are making a great mistake.'

'Am I? If you think you know Gussy Harwood, it is you that are quite mistaken, Miss Summerhayes. How quickly you walk; I can scarcely keep up with you.' He laughed, and took a stride or two which made Janet's attempt to hurry away ridiculous. 'There is no harm in walking along the same pavement, even with a person you disapprove of.'

'I don't disapprove of—anyone,' said Janet.

'Oh, that is more than I bargained for. You must promise to play for me to-night.'

'But you said you were not coming to-night,' said Janet.

'So I did,' he answered, laughing; 'but never mind—not to dinner, certainly. You must promise me to play, and not to stop short all at

once, as you did the other night, whatever you may hear.'

'Oh, did you hear it too?' Janet cried, clasping her hands.

'I don't think I heard anything. There are queer sounds sometimes about that Harwood house—and old Vicars is queer; don't you think so? Never mind, Miss Summerhayes, you and I have nothing to do with that.'

'I don't understand what you mean,' said Janet. 'I have nothing at all to do with it; but you, who are a great friend of the family, and have known them so long, you ought not to talk like that.'

'What am I saying?' said Meredith; 'that you and I have nothing to do with the secrets of the family, if they have any. Isn't that quite true?'

'We are not at all in the same position,' said Janet, indignantly. 'I am a stranger and the governess. You are their—dear friend.'

Mr. Meredith laughed low, with vanity and self-complacence.

'Am I a "dear friend"?—you flatter me very much, Miss Summerhayes—of Julia, for instance, who says the prettiest things about me. I see you've been working in my favour, for she's no longer so uncivil as she used to be.'

'Oh, Mr. Meredith, she means no harm; she's only so—so——'

'Sincere,' he said; 'so she is, and I am half sorry you have taught her to mend her ways: for she is less amusing when she behaves like other people. The brother, too—but you've not yet made acquaintance with the charming Dolff—I know what will happen to that young man before he has been two days in the house.'

'What?' cried Janet.

She felt more than ever that the conversation was undesirable; but she was full of curiosity, and her companion had ways and modes of securing the feminine attention. He made great play with those eyes of his, which expressed so much more than his words. Even now he answered her question with them in a way which made Janet blush before he had said a word.

'What will happen to him? Oh, I know; but I will not forestall the pleasure of the discovery. I suppose it's always more or less a pleasure to a young lady when she finds—— Oh, I am not going to say any more. You need not blush, Miss Summerhayes.'

'I am not blushing,' cried Janet, angrily, feeling her countenance blaze.

'Oh, no, I see; it is only the effect of walking so quickly, which brings the most agreeable colour to the cheek. About Mr. Dolff, we shall see what we shall see. But keep your head, whatever you do, Miss Summerhayes, and we shall have some fun. It will be as good as a play.'

'You are as good as a play,' cried Janet, indignant, eager to give him a prick in return.

'Who, I?' He gave her a momentary stare, then laughed. 'We,' he said; 'I don't pretend not to understand. I daresay we give you a good deal of amusement as you sit and make your remarks. I saw the very first night what a keen pair of eyes had come into the scene. But do not be too sure of anything. People

who look on don't always see the whole of the game.'

'I think I see a great deal of the game; and I don't like it at all,' Janet cried.

'You don't like me at all, Miss Summerhayes. After that home-thrust I have nothing for it but to make my bow and take my leave.'

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS HARWOOD came into the drawing-room in the afternoon, at five o'clock, when the little party were all assembled, with an open note in her hand.

'Fancy, mamma, how annoying,' she said, 'Charley cannot come to dinner. Some engagement, business, has turned up; and he says, since you kindly allow him to dispense with ceremony——'

'Oh, I should think so,' cried Mrs. Harwood. 'Let him keep any business engagement, for goodness' sake. He has not too many of them, I fear.'

'He has more than you think,' said Gussy. 'His time is far more taken up than you suppose.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'he might have let us know sooner, and then I should not have ordered those partridges. Game is thrown away upon women. You all like a chicken just as well.'

'I'll tell cook,' said Gussy, 'to put them aside for to-morrow; but I don't suppose he knew till the last moment.'

Janet had been going on with her work very demurely, taking no notice, feeling somewhat guilty, yet recognising with a throb of elation that she was not the unimportant person they all thought her. Janet was of opinion that it was best to have no secrets, for secrets have an infallible certainty of being found out. So she lifted her voice at this point, and said,

'I saw Mr. Meredith in Mimpriss's when I was there for the crewels. He was choosing some music.'

'Did he tell you he was not coming?' Gussy asked, somewhat breathlessly.

'He held up a song,' said Janet, 'and said, "This is for to-night."'

Which was quite true. To keep back a little is very different, she said to herself, from telling a fib. And now any gossip might tell them she had been seen with Mr. Meredith, and no harm could come.

'Ah! you see it must have been quite sudden, mamma. Did you notice, Miss Summerhayes, what the song was?'

'I saw Tosti's name at the bottom of the page, but I did not look at it more closely,' said Janet. 'He held it up to me while I was getting my crewels, and said something about your voice.'

'He should not speak of my voice or of me at all in a shop,' said Gussy, with a bright look and an air of flattered grievance. To think that he could not refrain from speaking of her, even in a shop, to anybody whom he might meet, was sweet to poor Gussy, as it was also sweet to blame him, and resent his foolish, lover-like weakness. 'Well,' she said, 'I suppose it will be for to-morrow night. I will tell cook about the partridges, mamma.'

There could be no doubt that Janet felt a little guilty as she dressed for dinner—guilty and curious, too. He had said he should not dine, but he had meant to come all the same. Would he come, after all? and on what pretence? How would he make it seem consistent with his business engagement? What would he do? It was a curious question, and she could not help feeling that her *rôle* and that of Gussy were reversed, and that it was she who would listen for the step and the ringing of the bell, though solely out of curiosity to know what would happen. Janet made herself a little more smart than usual; she could scarcely have told why. She relaxed a little the profound gloom of her mourning. There was a little additional light in her eyes. She was curious, very curious, to know whether he would do it, and how he would do it. Her instinct was mischievous—perhaps a little malicious—a sort of drawing-room wickedness, mere fun, not anything else. It would be interesting to see with what ingenuousness he would account for

his unlooked-for appearance, how gravely he would recount the manner in which he got rid of his business engagement. Janet felt that she would have difficulty in keeping her countenance while he ran through his excuses. And she realised to herself Gussy's serious attention, her congratulations to him on having been able to get away, and Mrs. Harwood's remark that she hoped he would never neglect any business engagement which was of importance. Janet held her breath in anticipation, to keep down the laugh which she knew would try to come. And he would look at her with audacious eyes, lifting his eyebrows, claiming her as a fellow-conspirator. There could be no doubt that it would be 'fun.' All of them so serious, taking the matter in the gravest way, while she would receive that glance aside, that reminder that they were in a plot together. Yet it was no plot. Janet could truly say that she had nothing, nothing to do with it. If he was so impudent as to cheat his friends, it was no fault of hers:- and no doubt it was very wrong of

him. But it was a piquant break upon the monotony, and Janet could not deny even to herself that the fun was uppermost, and that she expected to be much amused.

It all happened exactly as she had foreseen. Gussy took her place opposite her mother with the most absolute tranquillity. Her usual little strain of expectation, which was always there, even on the evenings when he was not expected, when it was only possible that he might come, had altogether fallen to-night. She looked at her work with eyes which had no other meaning, never held her breath at a passing sound, nor paused to listen; became, indeed, again the mild Gussy, undisturbed by emotion, with whom Janet had first made acquaintance. The sight of this relapse into quietude gave Janet a great compunction; more even than had Miss Harwood shown acute disappointment; and she felt in herself, as she had foreseen, all the signs of the suspense and expectation from which the other had escaped. In the stillness of the night she heard, or thought she heard,

steps coming from a long distance: she caught her breath at every passing sound. When a cinder fell from the hearth, she gave a little jump, as if it were some one coming. Her ears were keener than they had ever been in her life. The sense of fun gave way in Janet's mind to a sense of guilt as she thus listened and watched in spite of herself. And yet she had done nothing wrong; the fault, she said to herself, if there was one, was not at all her fault. But Janet felt like a little conspirator, sitting there among them, knowing the surprise that was coming and that they were about to be deceived.

When nine o'clock struck, however, which it did very audibly, in the long pauses of conversation, Janet said to herself, half with relief and half with disappointment, that now he would not come. Gussy had closed the piano before dinner; there was no glimmer from the white keyboard. The evening was going to pass over quite tranquilly, like one of the quiet evenings before Mr. Charles Meredith appeared.

Just as she had concluded upon this, with, to do her justice, quite as much relief as disappointment, the sudden sound of the bell came tingling through the quiet, making Janet jump, who was off her guard. Gussy, who expected nothing, scarcely stirred.

'Who can that be so late?' said Mrs. Harwood: 'It can't be Charley Meredith to-night.'

'It must be a parcel or something,' said Gussy, 'or perhaps a telegram from Dolff to say when he is coming. He is fond of telegrams—It is some one coming in,' she said, after a pause, raising her head.

'Perhaps it's Dolff himself,' said Julia, getting up with one spring from the rug. She rushed to the door, while they all watched. Julia opened it, looked out, and closed it again with indignation. 'After all, it's Charley Meredith again,' said the young lady, 'and now, I suppose, we shall have to go to bed.'

Gussy rose up, her quietness all gone. She said, 'Ah!' in an indescribable tone, as if coming from the bottom of her heart.

'Ju, how rude you are, shutting the door in his face!' said Mrs. Harwood. 'You seem to wish to make the very worst impression, as if you were a savage. Well, Charley! this *is* a surprise. We made sure we should not see you to-night.'

'I hope it's not disagreeable,' said Meredith, coming in briskly with his roll of music, as usual. He managed, even in that first moment, to give a side glance at Janet, which she somehow caught trembling under her eyelids. Oh, it might be fun! but it was horrid, too. She felt herself a conspirator, a deceiver, all that was most dreadful, and did not dare to raise her eyes. But nothing could be more assured and easy than his explanation. 'I found I could shake off my man sooner than I expected. Talks about business, don't you know, Mrs. Harwood —you ought to know—mean endless maundering on one side, and half-a-dozen words on the other. If your advice is worth anything, it can always be said in half-a-dozen words.'

'I would never hurry a client, Charley,' said

Mrs. Harwood, shaking her head; 'in all I've had to do with the law I've always seen that; and my brother, who, you know, was a Q.C., always said so. Never hurry a client; let them get it all out.'

'Oh, I think he got it all out, and we parted the best of friends. He's only in town for a few days, and he wanted to go to the theatre; so I took him to the "Gaiety," and gave him my blessing. And here I am, not much later than usual. I beg your pardon, Miss Summerhayes, I did not see you. How do you do to-night?'

What a look he gave her as, pretending to see her for the first time, he made a step in her direction. Gussy afterwards took him much to task for slighting the governess.

'Just because she is the governess one ought to be more than usually attentive not to hurt her feelings,' said Gussy.

But, then, she did not see that look, which so tempted Janet to laughter, yet overwhelmed her with a sense of guilt. His eyebrows went up

almost into his hair as he looked at Janet. He gave her the slightest nod of understanding. 'You see!' he seemed to say. Janet felt herself drawn into his circle, made his comrade, his confidant. And it *was* funny; but, oh, so horrid, too!

'Clients come, more or less,' he said. 'I am not quite so briefless as I was. I think I may say I am getting on, and my devotion to my work is boundless. I know how much depends upon it.'

He gave Gussy a look as he said this, which caused two blushes instead of one, for the colour came crimson to Janet's face as she stooped over her work, as well as in a soft rose to Gussy's colourless cheeks.

'Ah! it's more music, I fear, than law,' said Mrs. Harwood, again shaking her head.

'Well, both are best,' said the young man, looking at Gussy again. 'Music gets me on in one way, law in the other. I have to consider what is needed all round.'

'You can always make out a good case for yourself, Charley.'

'I hope so, Mrs. Harwood; and for my clients, too.'

Gussy was silenced by these allusions, which were so very plain. Her eyes seemed to swim in a soft and liquid brightness. Her face had the rose-tint which makes up for all deficiencies in character and colour. This evening, which had begun in resigned dulness, was it to end more brightly than any other? She was silent in the flood of silent happiness that filled her heart. And Janet sat by, the little conspirator, who was behind the scenes and knew the difference! Oh, how wicked, how angry, how helpless she felt! It was not fun at all, but treachery, a falsehood that made her ashamed to the very bottom of her heart; unless this, indeed, was the truth, and Janet the little dupe whom he was making a fool of, which would be better than the other, yet even more exasperating. She kept her eyes fixed upon her work, and her needle flew, and her cheeks burned. Never, never, never, thought Janet, would she speak to Mr. Meredith again.

There was at least half-an-hour spent in conversation, and then the visitor unrolled his new song.

'I wish you would try this,' he said; 'our concert is coming on, and we must settle what we are going to do.'

'Gussy is to sing in the quartets,' said Mrs. Harwood.

'In more than quartets. She is to perform a duet with me.'

'Oh, is that what you are thinking of? Isn't it a little conspicuous? These things are all very well in a drawing-room—but on a public platform!'

'Mother—it is to amuse the poor.'

'Oh, yes. I know what you mean with your amusements for the poor. You amuse yourselves very much first of all, and then you call it an act of charity. I am not a great person for amusing the poor. It would not amuse me at all to go out in a cold night and listen to your concert, and I don't think a woman of my age in the back slums would like it a bit better.

We would both prefer our fireside and our work.'

'But suppose the poor creature had no fire, Mrs. Harwood?'

'Then give her some firing, which would be far more sensible. She wants coals, and you give her a song. Of course you will do it your own way. Singing to them is the fad of your generation. Coals and groceries have always been mine.'

'But about this duet,' said Meredith, with an indulgent smile.

'As for it being conspicuous,' said Gussy, 'that is nonsense, mamma: for people sing according as their voices suit, and not for any other reason. And Charley and I are such old friends. We surely may sing together.'

'Or do anything else together,' he said.

'Oh! have it your own way,' said Mrs. Harwood. 'It is quite useless for me to interfere.'

'You mean a much more gracious permission, dear Mrs. Harwood, than you say. Ah! here is Miss Summerhayes to play for us, if she will be

so good. And I think you will be so good, for nobody could play so well without liking to do it. No, I can't have you bothered with that, Gussy. You must give your whole attention to the song. Come! Why, the piano is shut up, and there are no lights.'

'You forget,' said Gussy, 'we did not expect you to-night.'

'And you never have any music except when I am here! That is a pity, though it's a great compliment. May I light the candles? Now, come—it is to be a lesson to-night. Miss Summerhayes will play, and I shall coach, and correct, and do all sorts of dreadful things, as if I were Cantalino. You shall have everything over again that Cantalino inflicts upon me.'

In this way, with every kind of seduction, Gussy was got to the piano, and received her lesson, which was half a gratification and half the reverse, for Miss Harwood did not quite like to be put in the place of a learner before Janet, while it made her happy to be 'coached,' and trained, and interrupted, praised, and encour-

aged by her lover. Was he her lover? Janet seated with her back to them, with a new and difficult accompaniment to occupy her fingers, could not resolve this question to herself; sometimes men are not at all loyal and yet are in love. They discuss their beloved one, or even their *fiancée*, with the first comer. They ask other men's opinion of her. They talk of their own execution, when they are to be 'turned off,' and similar vulgarities, and yet are lovers in the curious contradiction of nature. Was this all? Was his criticism of Gussy only his unmeaning banter? and his joke played upon her to-night, did it mean nothing?

Janet sat at the piano, and thumped and pondered, with her cheeks blazing crimson and her hands flying from one end of the instrument to another. She was a very good accompanist. She might not, perhaps, have any instinct of self-sacrifice in life, but she had learnt that it was of the first importance in art. She played for the singer, not for herself, supporting her in her weak notes, giving place to her strong ones,

making her own performance the background of the other. And, as Janet felt much ashamed of herself and of the part which she had been made to play in this night's performance, she was more self-sacrificing, more bent upon making herself secondary and the singer first than ever. When the singing was over, even Mrs. Harwood applauded.

'You should always have Miss Summerhayes to play your accompaniments, Gussy. She does it beautifully. She brings out your voice as I never heard it before. I begin to think that no one can sing and play too. You brought out her voice quite beautifully, Miss Summerhayes.'

'A word of applause for the coach, too,' said Meredith, with a laugh.

Gussy, pleased with her little success, stood, with an uneasy glance at Janet, not knowing what to say. She was more disposed to applaud the coach than the little governess. She stood hesitating between them, now and then giving Janet a doubtful look. She was far too much

assured in her own superior place to be jealous of Janet. Jealous of Janet! She would as soon have thought of being jealous of a cat. But still it annoyed her slightly that Janet should have such a share even in this little drawing-room triumph.

CHAPTER XV.

JANET was not at all satisfied with herself after this performance. She understood, if nobody else did, the attitude of Gussy towards her; the half-defiance, half-sympathy, and entire doubtfulness with which the young lady of the house began to regard her. All the events of the evening, taken together, had given Miss Harwood a sensation of doubt. She was not clever enough to put one thing to another, and divine that there was a connection between the meeting with Meredith and the sudden engagement which prevented him from coming to dinner, and his unexpected appearance at night: but she had a vague feeling of doubt, which origin-

ated in the instinct of her emotions rather than in any exercise of reflection. She blamed neither of them, unless, indeed, a faint sensation of displeasure, too little to deserve that name, towards Janet could be called blame. She thought that the governess wished to be of the party, to thrust her services upon them, to share the amusement without consideration that something more than amusement was beneath. Her mind did not go any further than this, but it gave her a slight soreness towards the other girl, who did not understand—a soreness modified by a kind of uneasy gratitude to Janet for having really served her after all. Whatever her motive was, Janet, in her compunction for her behaviour altogether (though, after all, there was nothing for which she could blame herself, the fault lay entirely with the other, or almost entirely), was, after this, very anxious to put herself at the service of Gussy. She put aside occupations of her own to play these accompaniments again and again. She it was who urged upon Miss Harwood the unceasing

practice which was necessary to bring her song to perfection.

'It is so different when you are standing up before a crowd of people, and it all seems to float away from you; so different from singing at home.'

'Then you have done it yourself?' said Gussy, surprised.

'Oh, only at our little concerts at Clover, where I knew everybody: and I only played, which is not nearly so bad; but I have seen people who, for a minute, forgot everything, and looked as if they would run away.'

'I don't think I shall want to run away,' said Miss Harwood, with dignity.

'Oh, no, I didn't suppose so; but you will feel so much more comfortable if you know your song well. Shall we go over it once again?'

'It is very kind of Miss Summerhayes,' said Mrs. Harwood, feeling a want of warmth in her daughter's reception of this generous offer. 'It is very nice of her,' the old lady added, 'for it

can't matter a bit to her. It is not as if she were teaching you, when she might get some credit from it. It is entirely good feeling.'

'I am sure I am—much obliged to Miss Summerhayes,' said Gussy. And she was aware that what her mother said was quite true. She was not an impulsive person in general, but a sudden movement of remorse for her own ingratitude and appreciation of the other's unselfishness seized her all at once. 'I don't see,' she said, 'why we should go on calling her Miss Summerhayes when she has been three months in the house, and always so nice. I am sure she would prefer it, mamma, if you at least were to call her Janet; and it is a pretty name, too; not like our solemnities in the Harwood family.'

Janet was taken very much by surprise. She was not quite sure that she was so much gratified as she expected to be, and it took her a certain effort to get up the little burst of pleasure and gratitude which was becoming. It is a sad thing to be expected to be grateful for a favour

which does not appear to yourself in that light. Janet had always been called Janet by everybody all her life, so that she rather preferred at present to be Miss Summerhayes. However, she succeeded in assuming the air of delighted surprise which was necessary in the circumstances, and when Mrs. Harwood kissed her, and said, with her motherly smile, 'I shall like so much to call you Janet, my dear,' the genuine kindness touched her heart.

'I hope I shall never do anything to vex this dear old lady,' she said to herself.

The silent prayer was not realised, but still it may be put on record as a real moment of feeling in Janet's very contradictory little being. She was very uncertain what Gussy could mean in thus opening to her the gates of intimacy, and receiving her, as it were, on a new footing. What did she mean by it? But Miss Harwood herself could not have told. She meant a momentary compunction, a half-apology, and to compensate the girl a little for the involuntary doubt she had of her. If there was

anything more in it, Gussy herself was unconscious of further motive. It was something in the nature of a penance, no doubt; for Miss Harwood loved the governess a trifle less as Janet, in the intimacy of the closest intercourse, than she had done as a stranger and Miss Summerhayes.

Thus a vague mist of feeling rose between the two which did not in any way interfere with their present relations, and was, in fact, founded upon almost nothing, yet was full of undeveloped elements in which mischief might lie; while all around this nebulous region of uncertain sentiment shone the easy light of the household, untroubled by any mist, a sober, steady glow, not excessive, of good-humour and kindness, chiefly proceeding from the mild moon or household lamp of Mrs. Harwood, which reflected many different coloured rays, reducing them, by the action of a steady, pleasant, good disposition, taking all things soberly and kindly, to a light which was warm without extravagance, and bright without dazzling. How happy were all

her friends in Clover to hear that Janet had thus 'fallen on her feet!'

The vicar called at the house in St. John's Wood about this time, and carried back the most delightful report with him. The impression he himself produced was the best possible, for he was a handsome old gentleman, and perfect type of a country vicar, well got up and well-to-do. Mrs. Harwood was anxious that he should come back to dinner, and would have liked to pay him a great deal of attention, and Janet rose in everybody's opinion, from that of the head of the house down to Priscilla, the parlour-maid, and Owen, the gardener, to whom Mr. Bland gave a shilling for calling a cab for him.

The vicar assured Mrs. Harwood that he and his wife felt towards little Janet as if she were a child of their own. And when he went back to Clover he assured an anxious party assembled at afternoon tea that he had seldom been more favourably impressed than by the charming family with whom Janet had found a home.

'A delightful, refined house, an admirable mother, and a charming young lady, quite the sort of friend I should have chosen for Janet. I scarcely saw her pupil, but I have no doubt, judging by all that I did see, that she was a sweet child, and worthy of the rest. No complications such as so often beset a young girl's path; indeed, I should say that if we had chosen from one end of the country to the other we could scarcely have selected anything so desirable as Providence has procured for her—by chance, as we say. It is a lesson to me of trustfulness and dependence upon a higher guidance.'

The ladies were all deeply edified with this speech, feeling that what the vicar said, especially about Providence, was beautiful: and when they heard that Janet was called by her Christian name, there was a universal chorus of satisfaction. Dr. Harding, who had come in as he passed on his afternoon round, said 'Humph!' behind their backs, shaking his head; but then he, as we are all aware, had reasons for think-

ing very ill of Janet's foolish determination to measure her little strength against the world.

The concert took place shortly after the vicar's visit, and Janet and her pupil, in the charge of a neighbour, Mrs. Hunter, from next door—as Mrs. Harwood was unable to take care of them herself—were present, happy spectators of Gussy's success: for the duet was quite the success of the evening, everybody said. And the pair appeared on the platform together, with a little halo of romance about them, a pair of lovers, as the audience believed, though nothing was as yet announced, or positively known.

'Of course, we shall soon hear that it is all settled,' the friends of the family said to each other. 'He is never out of the house, and singing together night after night; there is only one way in which that sort of thing can end.'

Some thought that Gussy Harwood, who would have a very tolerable fortune, should have secured something better than a briefless barrister. But others added that Charley Meredith had

very good connections, and knew a number of solicitors, and was a pushing sort of man, one of those who always get on. And they looked very well together, quite a model couple; she so fair, almost too fair, but very well dressed to-night in a dark dress, which threw up her fairness and neutralised her want of colour; and he, on the contrary, with so much colour, such dark hair and moustaches, and such a fine bloom. The natural attraction of opposition could not have been more pleasantly set forth. Janet sat in her place among the audience, and looked at them with eyes a little—just a little—envious, yet pleased to shine in the reflected glory. The dark dress which was so successful was her doing. She had wanted Gussy to look her best, with a certain *esprit de corps* and desire for the credit of the house: and it was she who, with much ado, had persuaded both mother and daughter that the pale dresses in which Miss Harwood delighted would be out of place. Also it was she who had trained her in her song. It would not have been half so good but for Janet's

painstaking, and her determination to have it fully practised.

Janet sat all impatient not to be on the platform along with them, longing for an occasion to show herself, half-believing to the very last that there would arise a commotion among the performers, and that some one would walk down the room to where she sat to ask if she would kindly come and accompany Mr. Meredith and Miss Harwood in their duet. She kept on expecting this until the very moment when they stood up, and the pianist who had accompanied everybody struck the first notes. Oh! said Janet to herself, impatient, what a mistake they were making! The pianist was a nobody, and did not know their voices, and could not half bring them out. If only she had been there! But she had to sit quiet and listen, which is very hard when you know that you could do it much better.

Janet was not thinking of Mr. Meredith any more than if he had been a cabbage, but she did want to share the triumph, she who had really

brought it about, and she wanted to do what she could do so well instead of the inferior performer who did not do it half so well. But this is a trouble which accomplished persons must put up with continually, and after the first mortification was over Janet sat it out bravely, and even led the applause with a most energetic pair of hands, at the points where it ought to come in, and was most wanted to stimulate failing courage or cover a weak point. In this she behaved with the utmost generosity and desire that, notwithstanding their neglect of herself, the performance should succeed; and she listened to all the remarks with eager attention, especially those about the one way in which things of this kind must end. Was this the way in which Gussy's romance was certain to end? Janet felt that she herself would not be nearly so much interested, not to say excited by it, if the conclusion was as certain as people thought. But she perceived clearly that if it did not end so it would be wrong, and Mr. Meredith much to blame. The drama altogether was breathless in its interest to

this little spectator, because she felt that there was no certainty in it—that probably Mr. Charles Meredith was (so to speak, in the language of the stage) a villain, and Gussy, perhaps, a victim. Who could tell? It appeared, however, that Janet herself was the only person who had any doubt on the subject, and, an inexperienced little guesser as she was, how was she to know?

'Do you think Gussy and Charley are in love with each other?' said Julia suddenly, on their way home.

'Julia! one doesn't talk of such things till—till they are publicly known.'

'For I don't,' said Julia. 'Gussy, yes, she is too silly. I could kill her when she looks at him so; but, Charley, no—and he's the most important of the two, isn't he, Miss Summerhayes?'

'I don't know why he should be the most important; they are both equally important,' said Janet, in her *rôle* of governess; 'besides, it is not our business to discuss any such matter.'

'Oh! that is all bosh,' said Julia. 'Of course, I must discuss it when it's my own sister. I'll

tell you what I think. He has not made up his mind; he thinks he'll do it, and then something makes him think that he'll not do it. He knows that whenever he likes to put out his hand Gussy will——'

'Julia, I can't let you talk so.'

'Whether I talk or not, I know it all the same,' said Julia. 'I hate Charley Meredith, with his red cheeks. I can't think what she sees in him; but, though I could kill her for being so silly, I don't want our Gussy to be disappointed. I should like him to propose and her to refuse him; but, oh! I'm afraid there is not the least chance of that. Do you think a girl should accept the very first offer, Miss Summerhayes?'

'I don't think at all on the subject,' said Janet.

She paused, and gave a little laugh, not a sigh, which would have been more appropriate, to the memory of Dr. Harding, who had procured her that gratification.

'Oh, nonsense!' cried Julia; 'why do you laugh? You were thinking of some one, Miss

Summerhayes. Look! there's a light in the room over the porch. Don't you see?' The girl gripped her instructress by the arm. 'Look, look, Miss Summerhayes; don't you see?'

'Don't be so excited,' said Janet. 'I see perfectly well: but I don't know why you should excite yourself.'

'Oh, wait a bit!' said Julia; 'wait a bit, and you'll be excited too. You don't know what it means yet. Janet—I'm going to call you Janet now—I'm so glad. Why, Dolff must have come home—that means Dolff!'

And Julia suddenly flung off from Janet's side, and fled along the road like an arrow from the bow.

CHAPTER XVI.

JANET had no very strong curiosity about Dolff. What she had heard of him had not been calculated to rouse her interest, and still less the photographs about the house in which Dolff appeared in every phase of boyhood and early manhood: for he was still very young, only two-and-twenty, and consequently a mere boy to Janet, who was closely approaching her twentieth birthday. She had no interest in young boys. Manhood, in Janet's estimation, did not begin till twenty-five at earliest, and before that period the male youth, who could not in any way be taken seriously, was always more or less objectionable. She lingered a little in the hall, and then she said to herself that it

would be better to go upstairs at once, and not disturb the family reunion. Sounds of a loudish voice, bass and rough, an altogether new tone in this feminine house, and of a laugh still louder, came from the dining-room, when Julia rushed in. Priscilla, when she came out, had a demure smile upon her face. There was a little air of excitement about the house, a portmanteau still standing in a corner of the hall, great-coats and railway-rugs, and railway-novels thrown about.

'I don't think I shall go in to-night,' Janet said to the parlour-maid. 'Mrs. Harwood must want to have her son to herself. Will you send me up some little thing by Jane, and I shall not come down again to-night.'

'Oh, miss,' said Priscilla, 'I hope you will go in. Mr. Dolff is a most affable young gentleman, he wouldn't wish to keep anybody away.'

'Please do as I say,' said Janet, running upstairs.

It may be supposed that the description of Dolff as an affable young gentleman who would

not mind the governess's appearance did not mend matters. When she went in with her candle into her room to take off her hat and the large shawl which she had wrapped round her over her evening dress, Janet could not help seeing a piquante little face, which glanced at her carelessly from the dark depths of the glass. Her black dress was a little open at the throat, and amid all the surrounding dark her throat was of a dazzling whiteness, and her eyes shone with the excitement of the evening, and many thoughts that were careering through her mind. Janet did not stop to admire herself, but the glance made her realise more deeply the contrast of her circumstances with those of Gussy, who would come in presently accompanied by Charley Meredith and receive all the applause.

'Though she would never have done it but for me,' Janet said to herself.

She had much wanted to see them after they came home, to watch how they looked at each other, and whether they would take any notice

of the good effect of her teaching. And, therefore, it was with a little sigh that she sat down at the school-room fire, and contented herself with the solitude which was her legitimate surrounding, and in which she was far more safe from any snubs or disappointments than elsewhere.

She was prepared not to like Dolff. Even Mr. Meredith's malicious prophecy of what 'would happen' had increased her prejudice against the son of the house. Janet had not that admiration of an Oxford man which is common among young ladies. He was of the least agreeable kind which that refined university produces, she judged by the sound of his voice; and to have him hanging about 'paying attention' to the governess, for something to occupy the spare time that would hang heavily on his hands, was an anticipation that made Janet furious. When Julia came up, full of excitement and news of her brother, Janet was so deeply occupied with the book she was reading as to pay scarcely any attention.

'Why didn't you come in,' said the girl. 'Dolff wanted to see you much more than me. He has heard so much about you. He was so disappointed. He wanted me to go up and bring you down.'

'How good that was of Mr. Harwood; but I can't be brought down to be shown like a new cat,' said Janet, glancing over the top of her book.

'Oh, Janet, how unkind!' said Julia; 'Dolff is not a boy like that. He may not be quite serious, nor work as he ought, but he always was a nice boy. And Gussy came back all in a glow. They had been praising her so. But mamma said you ought to get at least half the credit, and so Charley Meredith thinks too.'

'Oh!' said Janet, coldly.

She relapsed into her book, which she declared to herself was far more interesting than all the Harwoods put together. What a thing it is to have a book to retire into when you are a little out of humour with your surroundings—a book full of romantic conditions in which you can compare how you would yourself have behaved

with the manner in which the heroine behaved! Janet sat up till midnight reading, till the fire went out, and all was silent in the house. Her candles, too, were nearly exhausted before she perceived and started up in dismay to find one flickering in the socket, and to feel that the room was very chilly and the silence very eerie. It suddenly came into her mind how terrible it would be if at that moment, in the dead of night, the cry should come again which had scared her so twice before. When an idea of this kind gets into one's mind at such an inappropriate moment it is very difficult to shake it off. Janet hurried into her room to prepare for bed, to get rid of the alarming suggestion. Her room was next door to the school-room, and she stole out very quietly, not to disturb the dead silence. But when she came out upon the corridor with her little remnant of candle, she was startled to find that the house was not so dead asleep as she believed it to be. A light was visible downstairs in the hall, and a stealthy sound as of some one moving about.

Janet looked over the bannisters with her heart beating, instantly asking herself what she should do if it turned out to be burglars robbing the house. It was, however, something quite different. It was the respectable man-servant whom she had already seen at long intervals, whose presence nobody explained, and whom Julia, the only one of the family who had ever referred to him, called Vicars. He was going across the hall towards the part of the house which was called the wing, carrying a large tray. The candle which was on the tray shed its light upon sundry articles of food and a bottle or two of wine, which he was carrying very carefully, steadying as much as he could the little jar and tinkle of the dishes. Janet looked down in great consternation at this unexpected scene. He went straight across the hall to a door which Janet had been told was done away with—the door that led to some rooms which were never used—but which opened to Vicars at a touch, closing again upon him and his trayful of food and his twinkling candle.

Janet watched him disappear with a chill of horror. What did it mean? Was he a thief who kept his spoils there? Was he some secret enemy hanging about the house pillaging it in the dead of night? And what, oh, what ought she to do? Should she rush into Mrs. Harwood's room and rouse her, or, at least, her maid? Should she communicate at once the fact that there was a thief in the house? The thing that Janet did eventually was to retire hastily into her room and lock the door. While the bit of candle lasted she made a hurried investigation, feeling it quite possible that some accomplice might be lurking under her own bed or behind her dresses in the wardrobe. And then she jumped hastily into bed, and covered herself over, so that at least, whatever dreadful thing might happen, she should not see.

But nothing happened, dreadful or otherwise, and Janet awoke in the morning in her usual spirits, not remembering at first that anything had ailed her on the previous night. She only came by degrees to recollect the last inci-

dent at the end of the others which occurred to her one by one as she opened her eyes upon the foggy, wintry December morning. First of all, the concert, Gussy's singing, and the applause, which she felt was due to herself half as much at least as to the singer, and then the return home, Dolff's arrival, her own withdrawal upstairs, and then——

She sat suddenly bolt upright in her bed, with something of the shock of the previous night, and made up her mind that she would tell Mrs. Harwood, that it was her duty to prevent the house from being robbed; and, in the force of this idea, jumped out of bed, and got through her morning preparations hastily, that no time might be lost. But before Janet saw Mrs. Harwood the impression once more had been effaced. She forgot in the morning aspect of the house that anything could happen in it that was not commonplace and ordinary. Gussy, who was the housekeeper, and must know everything, had her keys in their little basket on the table before her, and Janet felt that to

suggest any trickery in the house would be to offend that perfectly competent domestic ruler; and, after all, what had the governess to do with it? So once more she held her peace.

The breakfast-table was, as usual, surrounded by the three active members of the household—Miss Harwood, Julia, and the governess. The new-comer did not appear.

'My brother is always late, especially at first when he comes home,' said Gussy. 'I don't suppose they get up very early at Oxford; but he behaves as if they did, as if he had to take a long rest when he gets beyond the reach of lectures. Young men are all lazy in the morning. They sit up half the night and waste their health. They never can stand the fatigue that women do.'

'Dolff is always at his football and things—he is very strong; he is as strong as all of us put together,' said Julia.

'Oh, yes, in that way,' said Gussy. 'I hope you liked the concert, Janet. It went off very well, don't you think, on the whole?'

'Your duet went off very well. You sang delightfully. I was so pleased, so happy.'

A little flush came over Gussy's face.

'It is very nice of you to say so. I saw you looking at me, and it kept me up, for you looked as if you were pleased. It was once suggested to ask you to come and play, but I thought it would only make a fuss, and that you would not like it. A fuss is what I cannot bear.'

'Oh! I should not have minded,' said Janet; 'but,' she added, generously, 'it did not matter; it went very well as it was.'

It was once suggested! Janet retired with her pupil to their lessons with this little revelation in her mind. It continued in hers that sense of being in the confidence of Mr. Charles Meredith, and knowing more about him than Gussy did, to whom he was paying his court in all the forms, which was half-agreeable and half-humiliating to the governess. She would have no more of it, she said to herself. He ought to ask Gussy to marry him, and be done with it. He ought not to give those side glances,

those unspoken avowals, to anyone. It had been 'fun' that first time to think that he had upset all the arrangements, and disregarded everybody's convenience, and deceived his friends with smiling assurance for the sake of Janet. It was wrong, but it was amusing, and at twenty a mischievous pleasure in a trick of this sort is not out of date. But Janet felt now that it must not go on. She made up her mind not to go down to the drawing-room in the evening, or, at least, not to be beguiled to the piano, nor to take any part. If the accompaniment was spoiled, if Gussy did not do justice to her voice, if the duets were unsuccessful, what was that to Janet, any more than Vicars with his laden tray going across the hall! She had thought that one of the amusing things in the life of a governess, as she had pictured it to herself, would be this very spectatorship, the glimpses behind the scenes which she could not help having, seeing more of the game than the players did. But now it appeared that there were great inconveniences in the *rôle*, and

Janet made up her mind that she would play it no more.

Her first sight of Dolff was in this wise. When she came in with Julia from their morning walk, blooming with health and fresh air, she found the Harwood family in the hall. Mrs. Harwood, in her chair, looking on with maternal smiles; Gussy on her knees before the opened portmanteau, which had been left there on the previous night; and a young man with his hat on, perched on the back of his head, seated upon the edge of a table, swinging his legs, and directing the process of unpacking. He was evidently in the happy position of one who was monarch of all he surveyed. He had come home to his kingdom: his vassals were ministering to him in various ways. Priscilla, the parlour-maid, was gathering up an armful of books to carry them away. Mrs. Harwood had got some gloves in her hand, which had evidently been given to her to mend. Dolff, with his hat on his head, and the suspicion of a cigar in the air, gave his orders lightly from his throne.

But when the closing of the hall door, done somewhat loudly by Julia, aroused his attention, and he looked up to see a young lady unknown, with a bloom unknown to the house of Harwood on her cheeks, coming in, Dolff started from that presiding seat, or, rather, slid from it, with a movement of consternation, and his hand stole up to his hat, removing it with evident embarrassment and confusion. It is to be supposed that he had no idea at first that this was the governess of whom he had heard much, but only officially under that name. His hat disappeared as if by magic, and he himself would have disappeared too, had that been possible in his abashed and troubled state. He looked at his mother helplessly, falling half behind her for protection. Janet, it may be believed, was not abashed at all.

'Oh, this is Miss Summerhayes,' said Mrs. Harwood. She thought, perhaps, that her son required no introduction in his own house.

'And that's Dolff,' said Julia, who was more conscious of the claims of the governess.

The young man himself stood and grinned feebly, an image of confusion and shamefacedness. Janet gave him a bow, a bow which was half a curtsey, with a sweep of grandeur in humility, excessive politeness intended to accentuate the informality of the presentation—and, having said her good morning to Mrs. Harwood, hurried upstairs. That was all so far as she was concerned, but it was far from being all for the unfortunate Dolff.

'Mother,' he said, 'why didn't you tell me she was a swell like that?'

'You silly boy! She is no swell at all; but a nice little girl with, now that I think of it, a well-bred air.'

'Excessively formal—for her situation in the world,' said Gussy.

'Well—I never thought of it before—she has very nice manners; but she has been used to a good deal of attention, and perhaps——'

'You always spoil everybody, mamma. Janet is very nice, but she does not quite know her own place.'

'That's not the sort of person a fellow expects to see when he's told there's a new governess,' said Dolff. 'You might have said something, not to let me in for it like this. She'll think me a regular know-nothing, an ignorant cad; everything that's stupid.'

Gussy looked up from the unpacking of the portmanteau, now nearly finished, with widely-opened eyes.

'What can it possibly matter what Miss Summerhayes thinks of you?' she said.

'Oh,' said Dolff, 'I don't see that! Why, she's a—— You mayn't mind, but I do. Let a fellow in for looking as stupid as an owl, and as if he didn't know what's what, and then ask him what does it matter! It does matter to me. I say, Ju, why didn't you tell me she was that sort? I never felt more small in my life.'

'I don't think there is any occasion for it, Dolff,' said Mrs. Harwood. 'Janet's a very sensible girl; she knows exactly what to expect. She is not one of those that are always taking offence. Besides, I don't see that any harm has

been done. You took off your hat at once. You're very careless keeping it on and thinking no manners are necessary for your own people, Dolff, that I must say; but so far as concerns Miss Summerhayes——'

'Oh, of course she thinks me a cad, and that's all about it,' said the young man; 'and you don't care. But, as it happens, I do. What is the good of having people belonging to you, if they can't keep you straight in a business like that? Oh, put the confounded things where you like,' said the young man, waving the books away which Priscilla held in her arms waiting for directions; 'on the floor, or anywhere; I don't mind anything about your tidiness, but I do mind being shown off as a dashed cad.'

He took up his hat, and looked at it, as if that was the cause of offence, then flung it on his head, and stalked out, careless of the calls that followed him.

'Where are you going, Dolff?' his mother said, with a sudden shade of anxiety on her face.

'Mind that you are not late for lunch,' said Gussy.

Julia put her arm through his, and accompanied him to the garden door.

'Don't be long; oh, don't be long,' said Julia. 'Come out for a walk in the afternoon, Dolff, with her and me.'

'I don't suppose she'll ever speak to me,' said Dolff, shaking his sister off: and he paused to take his pipe from his pocket, and light it before he went forth, while all the ladies looked on through the open hall door. That he should go out with a round hat and a pipe in his mouth was a trial of Gussy's patience, such as was very difficult to endure; and the knowledge that Dolff, when he disappeared in this way, might not, perhaps, come back till midnight wrung the heart of his mother. The first day, too! He was not very much to look at, nor remarkable in any way, but he was of great importance to them.

'It is a mere pretext to get away to follow his own devices,' said Gussy, as she rose, red and angry, from her knees.

'Oh, Gussy, the first morning!' said Mrs. Harwood. 'I wish some one had told him; he is so particular about being well-bred, poor boy.'

'Oh, I have no patience with him,' said Gussy; 'it is merely a pretence to get away.'

CHAPTER XVII.

THE fears of the household, however, were not justified. Dolff dutifully came home to lunch.

Janet, who, instead of being offended and dwelling upon his rudeness, had not thought of him at all, save with a certain passing satisfaction such as moves a woman involuntarily when she perceives that her own appearance has had the effect which it ought to produce—continued to be agreeably impressed during luncheon with the evident awe and admiration which she elicited from the son of the house. He was very quiet, not saying much, civil to his sisters, evidently disposed to please. His appearance did not impress Janet. He was colourless, like the rest of his family, with whiskers and a bud-

ding moustache, which, being very light, scarcely showed upon his face: and his form was wanting in those fine proportions which a girl's imagination requires in a hero—the length of limb and commanding height. Dolff was not short, but he was thick, which neutralised his real stature. It is impossible to describe how civil he was—to everybody, to Priscilla when she handed him the potatoes; even to Ju—whom he called Julia. He inquired how she was getting on with her—history. Evidently he did not know what study he ought to inquire into, but selected that as most dignified. This continued during the whole day; for Dolff, to the evident amazement of his family, came in again at five o'clock and drank tea and ate bread-and-butter in large quantities.

'I did not think you ever took tea, Dolff,' said his mother, amazed.

'Oh, I think it's very good for a fellow,' said Dolff; 'better than—other drinks——'

'So do I, my dear,' cried his mother, fervently, and was about to make further remarks, even

perhaps to improve the occasion, had Gussy not interposed with an imploring glance.

In the evening he suggested a game of back-gammon with his mother; the power of virtue could no further go. The ladies kept a close but carefully-concealed watch upon him, expecting the moment when he would break loose, when he would exclaim that he must go out and get a little air, which generally meant that Dolff disappeared for the evening and was seen no more. But he endured like a man these hours of severe domesticity. He looked on while the ladies worked; he stood in front of the fire and told them stories of Oxford, condescending so far to their inferiority as to explain phrases and even to apologise for slang, as well as to throw in several passing biographies of 'men' from other colleges with whom he had formed alliances. I could not assert authoritatively that Mrs. Harwood, or even Julia, enjoyed these stories, but they all expressed the utmost interest, plied him with questions, and did everything that could be done to prolong the auto-

biographical narrative. Occasionally a glance would pass between Mrs. Harwood and her elder daughter—a glance of wonder and satisfaction. Dolff had turned over a new leaf! Dolff had passed without apparent difficulty a long, unbroken evening at home.

The next day Dolff continued in the same good dispositions. He even arranged his books in the little room that was called his study, and retired there for an hour or two to work, as he said. The ladies scarcely ventured to express their delight.

'There is no doubt that Dolff must have turned over a new leaf,' said Mrs. Harwood.

'It looks like it,' said Gussy, 'but we must not build much on the first night.'

The second night, however, was even better than the first. Dolff made an offer to Julia to help her with her—history, which made that young lady open her eyes with consternation.

'I'll come and give you a lecture, if you like—if Miss Summerhayes will let me,' he said. 'I'm an awful dab at history. That's my sub-

ject, don't you know. I've given up classics, and I'm going in for history—does a fellow far more good in the world. I'll give you a course of lectures if Miss Summerhayes has no objection.'

'Oh, no,' cried Janet, demurely, bending her head over her work to hide the laugh which she could scarcely restrain: for it would have been difficult to imagine anything more unlike an academical lecturer than Dolff as he stood, with his legs very wide apart, against the glowing background of the fire. 'It would be to my own advantage as well as Julia's,' she added, 'if Mrs. Harwood would not think it too much——'

'Too much for—me?' asked Dolff. 'Oh! mother would be delighted to think I was doing something. I'll come up to-morrow and see what you're about.'

'Well, Dolff, I am sure it is very good of you,' said Mrs. Harwood; 'but I daresay what you learn at the University, where you have the first men to teach you, would perhaps be rather too much for a little girl.'

'Oh! if that is all! I think you might trust me, mother, to break it down into nice little scraps,' cried Dolff.

'It would only waste Ju's time and keep her back from her—music and other things,' said Gussy, suspicious, though she did not well know why.

'Oh, Gussy!—when you know you have always said I never should do anything in music,' cried Julia, who saw prospects of fun and congenial idleness in Dolff's proposal.

Janet had suppressed her laugh, and was very grave over her needlework. It was not for her to interfere.

'We'll think it over,' said Mrs. Harwood; 'you don't always think the same in the morning as in the evening, my dear boy. No doubt it would be for Julia's advantage, for I don't think, any more than Gussy, that she will ever do much at her music. I should like to see into it myself first, and whether it wouldn't interfere with your time, and if you remain in the same mind, and so forth. We'll think it over, Dolff.'

'I never knew that the mother considered herself clever about history before,' said Dolff, with a laugh. 'And what's all this about music? I've grown a great dab at music, too. You've had the piano open these two nights. Who plays? or sings, is it? Oh! I suppose it's you, Gussy. Come along and let us hear.'

'I seldom sing alone,' said Gussy, with a blush.

'Well, come and sing with me. I'm your man. I've grown quite a dab at it this term. Anything to make the time pass. I thought it was something new when I saw the piano standing open.'

'It is nothing at all new, Dolff. Gussy has always had a very pretty voice. She is shy about it by herself, so she generally sings in duets or concerted pieces. But she has a very pretty voice, hasn't she, Janet?'

'Are you musical, Miss Summerhayes?'

'She has a very sweet voice,' said Janet. 'It came out beautifully the other night.'

'Are you musical, Miss Summerhayes?'

Janet paused, believing that some one would answer for her. Then she said,

'I play a little occasionally.'

'You could rattle over a little accompaniment?' said Dolff. 'Oh, it's not difficult—I could almost do it myself, only one can't play and sing too.'

Again Janet hesitated. She cast a glance round the silent company to know what she was expected to do. But Mrs. Harwood gave no sign, and Gussy was abstracted, listening for the step which did not come—and which was so much more important than all the brothers in the world.

'Oh, yes, I think I could rattle over a little accompaniment,' said Janet.

'Then come along,' cried Dolff, delighted. 'I'll fetch some of my songs in a moment. They are not Gussy's sort, and she would not care to play for me, but the mother will like it, won't you, mother? There's a chorus with most of them,' said Dolff, pausing half-way to the door. 'Perhaps Ju and you could tune

up in the chorus? it's not difficult, and it adds to the effect.'

'I think, perhaps, I might tune up in the chorus, if it's not very difficult.'

'Oh, that's famous,' cried Dolff, rushing out of the room.

Janet turned an ingenuous glance to her patronesses.

'Am I doing what you wish?' she said. 'Perhaps you will tell me, dear Mrs. Harwood, what it is best to do.'

'It will be horrible Christy Minstrels and things,' said Gussy; 'if anyone should come, it would be rather dreadful to have the piano taken up in that way.'

'At the same time,' cried Mrs. Harwood, 'it would be strange if my Dolff could not sing what he pleased in his own mother's house.'

'Oh, if you take it in that way,' said Gussy.

She gave a furtive glance at the clock. It was getting late; the probabilities were that no one would come to-night. And yet sometimes he came quite late, sometimes he was detained

by—business. It was strange that he never should have appeared since that evening of triumph, when they had shared the plaudits of their friends, and had been drawn so close to each other, associated so completely in the common regard. Gussy had felt that something more definite must come into her relations with Charles Meredith after that, and she was restless and *distraite*, unhappy yet subduing her unhappiness, above all things anxious not to betray herself, or to let even her mother suspect what was in her mind. A woman must never betray what she expects, in so far at least as this goes. She went into the other end of the room, voluntarily withdrawing to a distance where she could not hear any step outside, with a fantastic hope that when she was thus out of the way it might come: and moved about, displacing some small pieces of furniture, rustling among the music on the piano, which was chiefly *his* music with his name upon it, in order to give him a chance of arriving unheard. Poor little device of the strained nerves and sick

heart! No one suspected what was in Gussy's mind except the last person whom she could have desired to know it—Janet, who followed her movements with a half-contempt, half-sympathy. Janet herself was fancy free; though she was immensely interested in Charles Meredith and his present movements, it was solely with the interest which is felt in a story, to see what would happen next: and she had all a girl's indignation against the woman who thus let herself go and depended upon a man's decision for her happiness. At Janet's age a girl resents and scorns such a renunciation of the woman's rights: yet follows the sufferer with an inalienable pity and wonder, too.

Dolff came back excited with a sheaf of songs.

'Now, Miss Summerhayes, if you will be so good,' he said. He threw off the pile of music that was on the piano. 'Oh, that's all classic stuff,' he said, 'I can see with half an eye—and as dull as ditch-water—"C. Meredith"—it seems all to belong to C. Meredith. I hope you'll find

mine a little more lively, Miss Summerhayes. It's Meredith and Gussy that carry on all that, ain't it?' he said, with a wink and whisper. 'Oh, you needn't be afraid—I know.'

Janet sat down at the piano without making any reply, and Julia stood by as audience. Dolff placed himself at one side, facing towards the further room in which his mother was sitting. He had turned her chair round a little, that she might see the performance, which, indeed, was supposed to gain in effect from the looks and gestures of the performer. And then there ensued the most curious exhibition of native fatuity, vanity, and simplicity that could be imagined. Janet (perhaps even more important than any other spectator) had the privilege of seeing his face, too, and all the grimaces he made, as he stood facing an imaginary audience. The ladies listened to him in a silence which was almost awful.

Janet, whose hands were busy now, was in no way responsible for Dolff: and the one who could see everything that was ridiculous in the

exhibition without being humiliated by it, was the one who was best off. But for Mrs. Harwood, listening with a gasp to her son's performance, seeing his contortions of face, his gestures, his complacency, the moment was terrible. And even Julia, though she was not much more than a child, and disposed to receive all her brother did as admirable, gazed at him open-mouthed with horror in her face. Gussy had given him but one look, and then had strayed out into the hall. She was not capable of judging. Her mind was too much distracted with other thoughts. She went into the hall with a pretence of something to do there, and even into the dining-room on the other side, where all was dark, yet where she penetrated, to carry back a vase with flowers, groping her way. It was so near the garden, the hall door, the outer road. Nobody could pass or come to the gate without being audible. Poor Gussy pretended even to herself that her sole object was to take back the flowers which had been moved into the drawing-room by mistake

though they belonged to the decoration of the dinner-table. She knocked against the displaced chairs and the corner of the table as she went in in the dark, thus preventing herself from hearing any sound outside: and when those noises were still her heart beat so loudly as to drown all sound—of the less importance, as there was no sound to hear!

'Dolff,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'that is surely a new style for you. I don't remember ever hearing you sing songs like these before.'

'I have been having some lessons,' said Dolff; 'they are all the rage just now. You never learn anything else in Oxford.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Harwood; but she said no more, and Dolff, who did not care very much for her opinion, turned to Janet.

'You don't do yourself justice, Miss Summerhayes,' he said. 'You played that first-rate. You must have heard Arthur Roberts, or some of them, to do it as well as that.'

'No,' said Janet, 'I never heard of Arthur Roberts. Who is he?' a question which made

Dolff laugh—'scream with laughing,' he said to himself.

'Oh, you *are* original! Who is Arthur Roberts?—that is a good one! Who is Shakespeare? You might just as well ask one question as the other. But you play as if—as if you had been all your life at the Vic. I never heard anyone play so well before.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was not till some evenings after this that Mr. Charles Meredith made his appearance again.

To tell the truth, he had been a little alarmed by his position in respect to Miss Harwood. The applause they had received at the concert, which somehow enveloped both of them in a sort of unity—a oneness which was embarrassing, and provoked inquiries and looks of intelligence, glances and hints of all sorts—had given him a little shock. It had not affected Gussy in the same way, for Gussy was far more deeply and truly touched than her partner in that success. She had given up her whole being to him with the unreasonable confidence which is

sometimes to be seen in an otherwise unimagina tive and unemotional woman, never doubting from the first the object of his attentions, feeling that he could have but one reason for his frequent visits, and that the gradual manner in which she herself had been separated and swept up, as it were, into his identity, was the natural result of a strong and certain desire on his part to attract and appropriate her—an unquestionable feeling to which her gradually elicited responses were natural and fitting. It never occurred to Gussy, who was a little narrow, as was natural to her education and circumstances, but very sensible and just, that Meredith's sentiments, which had been so distinctly shown, could be anything but definite and certain. To her there appeared nothing accidental, nothing fortuitous, in the way in which it had all come about. Gradually he had secured the *entrée* and the complete freedom of intercourse which is not very common in English houses. There had been a break during his absence in the country, but this break had been followed by a

return to all the old habits, by the resumption of all his claims upon her attention and sympathy, those claims to which she had already responded in all sincerity and good faith. Gussy had no sensation of having gone a step further than she had been led and persuaded to go. She had no doubt whatever that of this intercourse, which he had so sought, so organised, so firmly established, every step was intended. He had set himself, she believed, to win her love, to gain her heart. What other reason could there be? It was all his doing. He it was who had pressed for each new extension of privilege: for what?—for no conceivable reason save one, that he loved her, and desired to make her love him.

Such was Gussy's theory. She had been first flattered, then touched by these assiduities, and finally, there being no reason whatever against it, she had yielded to the gradually growing response in her own bosom. She was not unaware that this might attain to greater potency than the demand which had evoked it, for he

was a man, about in the world, and having a great many things to distract him, whereas she was a woman with nothing particular in her mind save this new interest which filled her thoughts night and day. There was no doubt that it might grow more engrossing than his love. She was aware of the danger, and quite reasonable about it; but his had been the first —his had been the foundation of all. She was not ashamed of loving him, nor even of the impatience that now devoured her to have him speak and put the whole on the footing of a known and established certainty. It wanted that, at the point to which the matter had now reached. As soon as they had once understood each other, all would be well. Understood each other! Yes, they did so already; but it was necessary that it should be clear—spoken out—settled. Gussy could not tell what it was that restrained her lover. But she was restless and a little impatient, knowing that, by this time, the certainty ought to be fully comprehended of all, and the result known.

It had not been anything in the nature of jealousy which had made her unwilling to take advantage of Janet's services, but only an indisposition to let any third party come in—to have another associated in the already long-lingering duet which she had every reason to believe was to continue all her life. He had chosen that way of drawing her to him which, in the circumstances of the family, was the most effectual way, the easiest—perhaps the only manner in which he could have secured the attention which was due to her mother and sister first, and which it would otherwise have been so difficult to obtain. And it had become a method dear to her—and she did not like to have anyone come in, to disturb the isolation in which their music wrapped them. This was all—no fear of a new face or attraction for him—no feeling of rivalry.

Janet was perhaps incapable of comprehending how very far the young woman, so much less clever, less instructed in the usual course of affairs, perhaps less intelligent

than herself, was from thinking of any such danger.

But all this was quite apart from Mr. Charles Meredith and his sentiments, which had not at any time been those believed in by Gussy. He had found it amusing and piquant to make his way into that secluded, but most respectably secluded, house in St. John's Wood. A little curiosity of his own, the secret of a something to be found out even in the heart of that respectability, had for a moment mingled with his other motives; but that had found little encouragement in anything he saw or heard, and had gradually died out, leaving behind a pleasurable privilege—an amusing variety to his other engagements, an ever-ready way of spending an evening in which he had nothing else to do. He had known the Harwoods almost all his life, and this familiarity, to begin with, had made the domestic circle the more easily comprehensible to him: the unmanageable child, Ju, who lost no opportunity of showing how undesirable she thought his pre-

sence; the mother, mysteriously incapable of leaving her chair, though her children frankly declared their disbelief in her inability; the room so bright and full of comfort with that shadowy background which seemed made for a romance, tickled the fancy of the young man. He had an inclination towards Gussy Harwood —liked her—felt that, if he were ever to come the length of marrying, she would be a very suitable wife for him, and her respectable fortune a very comfortable foundation on which to begin life. And then he was very fond of music—music, that is, represented by new songs and duets in which his own fine tenor might be enhanced by a gentle soprano acknowledged to be very sweet, yet in no way capable of eclipsing the richer tones it accompanied.

All these mingled sentiments had led him to the course of conduct which he had pursued for some time before Janet's appearance, but into which her sudden appearance had imported a little difference. It will be seen that these vague and mingled sentiments were entirely

unlike that for which he had credit in the mind of Augusta Harwood—the steady and serious love by which she supposed him to be moved. The foregone conclusion of a happy marriage, a household equally respectable, and still more bright than that in which the preliminaries took place, had no existence. It was always on the cards, of course, that Gussy Harwood and he might marry and settle down together. It would not be a very romantic conclusion, still Meredith was aware that he himself was not at all a romantic personage, and it would not in any way be a bad arrangement. But where was the need of going so far as that? He liked to know where he could spend an evening pleasantly when he pleased; he liked to hear the sound of his own voice, and even to feel that the voice of the other performer was not likely to beguile the applauses of their audience away from himself—when they had an audience; he liked to have those excellent dinners from time to time, with the other man who could not help perceiving how entirely the entertainment

was for Meredith's gratification. All these things were very pleasant, and Mrs. Harwood was quite able, no doubt, to take care of her own daughter and all the *convenances*, and it was none of his business to watch over Gussy in case his continual visits should be misunderstood.

But the concert had certainly made a little crisis in this easy intercourse—the concert and Janet's appearance on the scene, and the little excitement she had produced, and the additional signs of regard it had been necessary to lavish upon Gussy, to make her feel herself always the first person, notwithstanding any interest that another might call forth. He had felt that a great step had been taken in that concert. To be sure it could not, strictly speaking, be asserted to mean anything at all. A duet between a soprano and a tenor—what more innocent? Their voices suited; what had their persons or their lives to do with it? Charles Meredith knew, however, that though this might be true enough in the case of most tenors and

sopranos, it would not be true as between Gussy Harwood and himself. The audience was not an audience drawn from the larger public, which might have known nothing further, but a St. John's Wood audience, which knew everything about him, and that he visited the Harwoods 'every day of his life.' This was not exactly true, but it was how he heard it stated in the dark, outside the concert-room, by one of the departing hearers. All those present knew them, and knew all about them, and naturally made their remarks: 'Of course it will be a match: he is there every day of his life.'

What a vulgar definiteness there is in these criticisms! People who pretend to be one's friends, yet speak of one without a gleam of understanding, as if all one's intentions were cut and dry. Meredith felt angry, but he dared not show it, for it was clearly his duty to escort Gussy home, and to tell Mrs. Harwood what a success it had been. But after that he was seized with a panic, and did not come back. He

saw that a crisis had come, as well as anyone—a crisis which seemed to him very premature, and for which he was unprepared.

I think there is some allowance to be made for young men who in these days hesitate about taking the last step which makes marriage inevitable. We are not now discussing the so-called 'smart' people, who live after their kind, and afford no rule for the rest of the world, but young men of occupations, who have, as people say, their own way to make. A small income very often represents a great deal more than it is to an unmarried man, with all the luxury of the clubs behind him: and it represents a great deal less than it is to the man who is going to marry—witness all the foolish statistics periodically placed before the world. It is rather surprising how, when the moment and the impulse comes, all these precautions are so easily thrown to the winds: but there is nobody in modern society so well off as the young man with a small competency, a good club, and a tolerable acquaintance. It is heroic of him to

risk all his comforts and immunities, the things he can do, and the things nobody expects him to do, for the sake of a young woman who on her side is much better off at home, if she would only think so. But, fortunately for the race, if not for the individual, nature scorns all such judicious reflections, and follows its own impulse at whatsoever expense.

Meredith, however, who was not in love, but only amiably, pleasurably inclined towards Gussy Harwood, felt their full force when he was thus pulled up and brought face to face with inevitable consequences. In his present circumstances he was very well off indeed: he had all that a young man could desire. He knew a number of people, and was civil to them, and derived from this a little benefit of dinner-parties, dances, and invitations from Saturday till Monday, for which he was not expected to do anything except to continue to be civil in return. And he could also entertain at his club a friend or two when he pleased. I do not know whether the dinners at the more

modest clubs are as good as those of which we read in novels, at which the very fine gentlemen dispense and enjoy hospitality; but they are almost sure to be better than those which a Mrs. Charles Meredith, in a little villa in the suburbs, or in a little flat high up in the district styled W., could produce with great trouble, a complete *bouleversement* of the small household, and a greengrocer from round the corner to wait. The servants at the club are real servants, the dinners quite genuine, and giving no extra trouble. If Charles Meredith had been in love, it would have been unpardonable in him to have made any such reflection. But then he was not in love. And he was startled, and paused in the face of fate.

He might not perhaps have done so with quite so much perturbation if there had not been at the same time a little point of interest in his mind about the other little girl who had appeared so inopportunely in St. John's Wood. He was not in the least in love with Janet. But she was amusing—a great deal more amusing

than Gussy, with all whose opinions and inclinations he was acquainted, and who changed little from any standing-point she had once taken. It amused him to get possession of the governess, to make her play, to watch her looks, and communicate with her telegraphically, nobody being aware of that intercourse. That Janet did not respond, or, at least, did not willingly respond, made it all the more piquant, for even a glance of indignation now and then, a flash of anger, was a reply, and he could read in the involuntary movement of her little shoulders, as she played, a hundred little criticisms and signs of what she was thinking; the thrill of displeasure at a false note made him laugh, and the clang of accompaniment with which she would suddenly drown a failure—all this imported a new element into the evening with which he was delighted. But all these amusements would have to be put a stop to if he married and settled down to domestic felicity and the enjoyment of a sensible companion and a comfortable life at home.

All of which things made Charles Meredith pause; but after a week or so he began to feel that his hesitation, if too prolonged, would in its way produce a decision which he desired as little as the other. And then he remembered that Dolff was at home, which would always make a diversion and stave off explanations. These deliberations have seemed to occupy a long period; yet it was not, after all, a very long period. About ten days after the concert, the door being open to admit of the exit of Dolff, who, in all the glories of evening costume, was stepping forth towards a waiting hansom, ready to convey him to some evening festivity, Charles Meredith slipped in unheard, with his usual little roll of music, but less than his usual confidence and calm. He was met in the hall by Julia, who had come out to superintend her brother's departure, and whose pleasure in Dolff's entertainment and finery was brought to a sudden pause by the apparition of a figure less beloved. She gave vent, having no watch upon her, to that sound which had

died from her lips, or rather from her teeth, for so long, but with which she had been wont to welcome Meredith.

'Oh!' or rather 'S—s!' said Julia, 'so this is you—again——'

'Yes, my dear child, it is I—again,' he replied, with a mocking bow and smile.

CHAPTER XIX.

MEREDITH paused at the door inspecting the quiet interior thus thrown open to him—in which he was not looked for, and where, accordingly, his arrival remained unobserved—the doors being all open still for the exit of Dolff. It startled him a little to find in how like its ordinary condition everything was, and how little sign of the absence of a habitual visitor was about the place. There were a hundred signs of Dolff, but even the place near Gussy usually though tacitly reserved for himself was filled up, and Gussy sat at the eternal woman's work, which, in some circumstances, is so exasperating to a man, as composed as if he had never crossed her horizon. They were all at

it, Mrs. Harwood with her crewels, Janet with something else. He wondered, half-angrily, if they would go on for ever with their heads bowed over that infernal sewing whatever might happen, even that quick little thing, that creature born under more variable skies, the governess. She, however, was the first to find him out. A consciousness of some new element in the warm atmosphere, something that had not been there a minute before, moved Janet. She looked up and uttered a faint exclamation.

Ah! he had thought there was no difference, but there had been a difference. Gussy had been sitting like a statue, quite still, but not the faintest thrill of movement in her. She did not expect him, or anyone, she was not thinking of him, or anyone, quite self-contained, self-absorbed. He was almost ashamed to think how he had been thinking of her, complacently realising her suspense, and disappointment, and wonder at his non-appearance. The extreme composure of her aspect gave Meredith a shock which would have done much to redress the

balance between them. She did not even raise her head at Janet's exclamation. It was Mrs. Harwood who did that, crying out, 'God bless me! Charley!' with a pleasure of which there could be no doubt. And a sort of shock passed over Gussy, electric, spasmodic, he could not tell what it was, something that moved her from the crown of light hair on her head to the tip of the shoe which was visible under her gown. It all passed in a minute, nay, in a second, as so many a crisis does. He could see it go over her; had not his eyes been opened by a sense of guilt, and by various other convictions, he might have known nothing of it; but he did, and suddenly became aware that he had something more to deal with than a girl's momentary annoyance at the absence of the man whom she was beginning to care for. At the end of that moment, when he had come forward to shake hands with Mrs. Harwood, Gussy rose, and gave him her hand with perfect composure. On her side she was quite sure that she had betrayed nothing, not even the

mere surprise which would have been so natural.

'You have been a great stranger, Charley,' said Mrs. Harwood.

'Yes, indeed,' he said, 'no one can know that so well as I. I have been driven to the end of my patience. I kept hoping that one of you would take a little interest, and ask what I was about.'

He kept his eyes on Gussy, but Gussy never moved or gave sign of consciousness.

'My dear boy,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'women never like to interfere—to ask what a young man is about. You are so much more your own masters than we are. We know very well that if you want to come you will come, and if you don't——'

'How unjust you are with your general principles! Here is one poor miserable exception, then, to the rule—who has tried to come, and thought he could manage it evening after evening. Well, it is all in the way of business. You have always been afraid I was idle. What will you say when I tell you that I have been

in chambers—sometimes till eight and nine o'clock every night?'

'I shall hope it means a lot of new clients, Charley,' the old lady said.

'Well, I think it does.'

He did not wink at Janet—oh, no! that would have been vulgarity itself—the sort of communication which takes place between the footman in a play and the chamber-maid who is in his confidence. Mr. Charles Meredith's manners were irreproachable, and vulgarity in that kind of way impossible to him. But he did catch Janet's attention with a corner of his eye, as it were, which expressed something a little different from the open look which was bent on Mrs. Harwood—or, rather, on Gussy, at whom he glanced as he spoke. And then he entered into certain details. Mrs. Harwood, though she was disabled and incapable of getting out of her chair, was an excellent woman of business, and she entered into the particulars of his narrative with great interest. She said at the end, with a satisfied nod of her head,

'Well, Charley, I hope we may now feel that you are beginning to catch the rising tide.'

'I hope so, too,' said the young man. And then it seemed to dawn upon him that these agreeable auguries might lead him too far. 'A little time will tell,' he said, 'whether it's a real beginning or only a flash in the pan. I am afraid to calculate upon anything too soon. In three months or so, if all goes on well——'

Janet asked herself, with a keenness of inquiry which took her by surprise, what, oh, what did he mean by three months? Was that said for Gussy? Was it said for anyone else? Did he, by any possibility, think that *she* cared—that it pleased her to know that he was deceiving Mrs. Harwood and her daughter? She felt very angry at the whole matter, which she thought she saw through so completely, but which, after all, she did not in the least see through. Janet thought that for some reason or other this young man was 'amusing himself,' according to the ordinary jargon, with Miss Harwood's too-little concealed devotion, that he

secretly made fun of the woman who loved him, and was preparing, when the time came, a disenchantment for her and revelation of his own sentiments, which would probably break Gussy's heart. It can scarcely be said that Janet felt those sentiments of moral indignation which such a deliberate treachery ought to have called forth. She was still so far in the kitten stage that it half amused her to see Mr. Meredith 'taking in' Miss Harwood. It amused her to think that probably he had been having some wild party of his young men friends (a party of young men always seems wild, riotous, full of inconceivable frolic and enjoyment to a girl's fancy) in his chambers, on some of those evenings which he so demurely represented to the old lady as full of business. She could not help an inclination to laugh at that. It is the kind of deceit which has always been laughed at from the beginning of time. But she felt angry about the three months. What did he mean by three months? Was it for Gussy to lull her suspicions? Was it for—anyone else?

Janet felt as if she were being made a party to some unkind scheme which had not merely fun for its purpose. Why should he look at her in that comic way when he said anything particularly grave? Janet turned round her little shoulder to Mr. Meredith, and became more and more engrossed in her needlework. But yet it was strange that whatever she did he succeeded in catching her eye.

'Some one has been singing,' he said, presently, with a little start of surprise. 'I brought something with me I thought Gussy would like —but you have been singing without me?'

He turned round upon her suddenly at this point. Gussy had been very quiet; she had said scarcely anything. She had allowed him to go through all those explanations with her mother. At first she had closed her heart, as she thought, against them; but it is not so easy to close a heart when it is suddenly melted by a touch of thaw after a frost. Gussy had been frozen up hard as December—or even February —could do it. But what is frost when there

comes that indescribable, that subtle, invisible breath which in a moment undoes what it has taken nights and days of black frost to do? What a good thing it is to think that the frost which works underhand and throws its ribs across the streams, and its icicles from the roofs by degrees, takes days to make ice that will 'bear,' and that the sweeter influence can bring all that bondage to ruin in an hour or two! Gussy's heart had frozen up, putting on an additional layer of ice every day; but in a moment it was all gone, sliding away in blocks, in shapeless masses, upon the irresistible flood. The flood, of course, is all the stronger from that mass of melted stuff that sweeps into it, giving an impetus to every swollen current. Gussy made an effort to feel as if this melting and softening had not been, as if she were as she had been an hour before; but what attempt could be more ineffectual? Frost may counterfeit a thaw on the surface when the sun shines; but what thaw can counterfeit frost. It was not among the things that are possible.

'I have not been singing,' she said, softly, her eyes wandering, in spite of her, to the little roll in his hand. 'You forget we have had something else to amuse us all these evenings. It is Dolff who has been singing.'

'And a very nice voice he has got, now that it has been trained a little, poor boy,' said his mother, 'though I am not very sure that I like his taste in songs.'

'And Miss Summerhayes plays for him,' said Meredith, turning round upon Janet with a laugh. He faced her this time, looking at her frankly, not trying to catch any corner of her eye. His look had a gleam of merriment and saucy satisfaction which made Janet glow with anger. 'Didn't I tell you so?' he seemed to say with his raised eyebrows. He laughed out with a genial roar of amusement. 'I knew Miss Summerhayes would play for him,' he cried.

How did he know anything of the kind? How dared he laugh in that meaning way? How dared he look at Janet as if he had found her

out; as if she, too, had a scheme like himself? Janet gave him a look in return which might have turned a more sensitive man to stone, and she said, with great dignity, wrapping herself up in the humility of her governess-state as in a mantle:

'I am here to play for anyone who wishes for my services, Mr. Meredith, as I think you ought to know.'

'Good heavens,' cried Mrs. Harwood, 'my dear child! I hope you don't take it in that serious way. If it is so disagreeable to you, my dear, you shall never be asked to humour poor Dolff again.'

'Oh, Mrs. Harwood, that is not what I meant! I am very glad to do it for anyone, but I don't like to hear people talk—to hear people laugh—'

'The little thing is in a temper,' said Meredith, aside to Gussy, 'have I said anything so very dreadful? Come and try whether they have thumped the piano all to pieces, and then we can talk.'

'I don't know that you have said anything

dreadful. And we can talk very well here,' said Gussy, in the same undertone.

'She is like a little turkey-cock,' said Meredith. 'What has been going on? To think that something should always turn up, a farce or a tragedy, when one is out of the way for a few days.'

Gussy asked herself, with a catching of the breath, if it were a farce or a tragedy? How true that was! No, it would not be a tragedy now—now that he had come back.

'Nothing has been going on—except some silly songs,' she said.

It did not occur to her that her own songs were silly, or that there might be two meanings to the word, but Meredith was more ready in his comprehension.

'Ah, some silly songs!' he said.

Upon which Gussy, feeling more and more the soft welling-up from under the crackling frost, of the warmer waters, felt a compunction.

'Poor Dolff,' she said, 'is not altogether exalted in his tastes, you know. And he has taken

a music-hall craze. I suppose it is from the music-hall they come, all those wonderful performances. But he likes them, it appears, as well—as well——'

'As we like ours,' said Meredith.

'Well, ours——' she coloured a little as she said the word; but why should she not say it, seeing he had thus given her the cue? 'Ours are better worth liking. At the same time,' said Gussy, returning to her old self, 'we are all so silly in this family that we can't do anything without doing a great deal too much of it. We can't, I fear, take anything moderately. We do it with all our heart.'

'That is why you do it so well,' said Meredith.

His voice had a slight quaver in it, which might have been taken in more senses than one. It might have meant emotion, and again it might have meant a suppressed laugh, for to imagine that Dolff sang his music-hall songs exceptionally well because he sang them with all his heart was a little trying to the gravity. But now that he had set up a conversation *sotto voce*,

and now that Gussy had been brought back to talking of what was habitually done 'in the family,' Mr. Meredith felt that he had got back upon the old ground.

As for Janet, she packed up her sewing things in her little basket, and begged Mrs. Harwood's permission to retire.

'I have a little headache,' she said.

Good Mrs. Harwood was much concerned and very sorry, but agreed that quiet and going to bed early was the best thing for a headache. And when the lovers—were they the lovers?—went to the other room, Janet rose and stole away. She was not gone so soon but that she heard Meredith burst into a laugh over Dolff's songs, which were all scattered about. He sang a snatch of one of them mockingly as she was going out, and caught her with a wave of his hand, an elevation of his eyebrows, and a slight nod of his head. He would not let her escape, he who had so easily made up his own difficulties, but must discharge that arrow at her, hold that whip of mockery over her. Janet closed

the door upon herself with a studied quiet, which was even more demonstrative of her state of mind than had she shut it with a violent slam, as Julia would have done; but it was more hard to suppress the pants of her labouring, angry breath.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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