JANET

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JANET.

CHAPTER I.

JANET sent out before her into the hall a bursting sigh, a hot wave of impatient fiery breath, which seemed to raise a little mist before her eyes as she emerged into the silence and found herself alone, leaving mockery and music, and sentiment true or false, behind. What did he mean, what did he want, that visitor whose non-appearance had held the household in suspense, whose coming had introduced so many elements of disturbance? It cannot be said that Janet herself had been uninfluenced by his absence. It had been a fact of which she could not get

rid, always present with her as with Gussy, though in a different way. Certainly he had taken away much of the salt of life with him—the interest, the drama. And now that he had come back the salt had not lost its savour; it was almost too keen: it affected sharply not only the chief personage in the piece, but the audience. He was now more than actor—he was audience also; and that look of intelligence which had conveyed so many confidences on his own part now expressed the most daring suggestions as to hers. Janet burst out of the room with a sense that her period of peace was over. His looks would put motives to the most trifling actions. What had he to do with her? How dared he to suggest that this booby, this music-hall hero, this cherished only son, could in any way affect the life of Janet? 'Miss Summerhayes plays his accompaniments.' The tone was light enough, the laugh as light; but it stung Janet to the very depths of her heart.

Something cold and fresh blowing in her face made her turn to the door, which had

been left inadvertently open, filling the house with the chill of December. Outside it was a beautiful night—the moon shining full, the stars sparkling with that keen glitter which is given by frost, the shadows of the leafless trees standing as if engraved upon the whiteness, not a breath stirring. Moonlight is always an attraction to a girl, and the outer air the best calmer of feverish thoughts. She caught a shawl from the stand, and, wrapping it round her, went softly out. Everything was very still. Talk of the silence of the hills! The hills have sounds innumerable that can never be silenced—movements of birds, of insects, of living creatures of all kinds; rustlings among the heather; tinklings of water; the air itself, occupying vast fields of space, has a breath—which means silence, but is not. But, if you like, the silence in St. John's Wood! That is something worth speaking of. There was not a sound. At long intervals, when anybody moved in the world outside, you could hear the distant footstep walk out of the unknown,

advance step by step as if it had been that of a messenger of doom, diverge, pass away again, grow fainter and fainter till it went out in the stillness like the withdrawal of a light. That mystic, unseen passage occurred from time to time, but faintly at a distance. Sometimes there came into the absolute stillness a distant jar of wheels, increasing and diminishing in the same manner, going out in space.

When Janet stole out, in her little thin evening shoes that made no sound, the house stood surrounded by that intense quiet and moonlight like a house in a dream. Like its own enclosure of humble human garden soil, that mystic atmosphere isolated and surrounded it from everything else in the world. It was almost an awe to steal round the white path, and cross the branching shadows that lay over it in all the complication of their elaborate anatomy, and watch the dark and solid dwelling standing in the midst, surrounded by all that reverence of nature, with a touch of yellow light here and there in its windows, and such foolish evan-

escent fret and jar of feelings and thoughts within! Janet's own little step, which was scarcely so much as the stir of a bird, struck, she felt, a half-guilty little broken note into the profound calm. The chill of the air cooled her little head. She was so small, so insignificant an atom in that silent world, troubled about matters so infinitesimally little, so unworthy to be breathed in the all-listening ear of night.

She had made the round of the garden, which was a long piece of ground, more than half of it grass, and of a very woodland aspect for anything so near London, and was about passing the side of the house on her way back, when Janet's attention was suddenly roused in a very extraordinary way. The house was square, of the commonest comfortable form, but on the western side there had been built on to it, at some previous period, a wing, which projected in front, making a gable, and slightly outpassing the *corps du logis*. This wing, however, was not, so far as Janet knew, ever used at all. If used, it was as a lodging or workshop, whatever

his employment might be, for the mysterious Vicars, who yet was not mysterious at all—the man-servant of whom more had been seen since Dolff's return home, and who, Janet had vaguely understood, lived in some corner of the house, carrying on his own avocations, whatever they were, but at hand when he was wanted for any special service—a privilege given by the kindness of Mrs. Harwood to an old servant, but also a convenience to herself. It was after Janet had seen this personage carrying through an open door, which had all the appearance at other times of being hermetically closed, a tray covered with dainties, that Mrs. Harwood herself had explained the position of Vicars to the governess, thus settling the question.

Nothing could possibly be more uninhabited, more shut-up and empty, than the wing. It had two long windows on the upper floor, facing the garden, which were so grown over with ivy that it was clearly apparent no light could enter, or human uses be served by them. The ivy was carefully trained, and perhaps a little thin-

ner than usual at this time of the year. As Janet came opposite the windows, something —she could not tell what—made her look up. The moonlight was streaming full upon them, showing white crevices and reflections in the half-covered window-panes which never showed by day. She stopped short, struck by an alarm and horror which seemed to freeze the blood in her veins. At the nearest window, in an opening made by the curvature of a great ivy branch half denuded of leaves, there appeared to her the face of an old man with white hair and a long, white beard—a white image so like the moonlight that, after the first dreadful realisation of what she saw as a face, Janet, in her terror, tried to persuade herself that it was only some effect of the white light shining upon the panes, which were covered by dust and the droppings of the heavy foliage. If she had hurried away then, flying indoors, as was her first impulse, no doubt she would have been able to persuade herself that this was the case. But she was, on the other hand, too much fright-

ened, too much excited, to fly. She stood still, scarcely able to draw her breath.

A pale, very pale face, with a long, white beard—patriarchal, like the beard of a prophet—white hair, deep-sunken, aged eyes, looking up towards the moon. A sort of frenzy of terror caught hold upon Janet, so that she could not move. Who was it? Who was it? Vague recollections flew across her mind of things she had read—of an old, blind, mad king whom she remembered in her history—of—she knew not what. The thoughts thronged over her mind like clouds o'er the sky, and she could take no count of them. For there could be no king, no martyr, no prison, no madhouse here. Who was it? Who was it? In a house in St. John's Wood, the most respectable, the most perfectly well-known and well-established, in the midst of the quiet, within the tranquil garden, surrounded by all the decorums of society. Who—oh, who could it be?

She stood transfixed, not thinking that she herself in the midst of that white light, a little

dark figure, all surrounded and isolated by the brightness, was more clearly distinguishable than anything about her, and, indeed, could scarcely fail to catch the eye of anyone that might be looking. Janet did not think of this, her whole mind being occupied with her extraordinary discovery. She was afraid of being seen. She never realised the possibility—until suddenly, all in a moment as she stood and gazed, her whole bewildered being lost in wonder and amaze, she discovered, with a second shock even more potent than the first, that the face in the window had changed its direction and turned towards herself. Whether it was that Janet was too terrified to have the strength to fly, or whether that she was not so terrified as she thought, and more eager, more curious than she was frightened, it is certain that, though she shrank back a step upon herself, she did not run away, but stood there gazing with her heart in her mouth, and the sensation tingling through and through her that not only did she see this extraordinary being, a real per-

son, whoever he was, but that he saw her. The head, with its white hair, turned slowly from contemplating the sky to contemplating her. He began to make signs to her, beckoning, bending forward, till the crown of white hair was pressed against the pane, and seemed to sparkle and reflect, as if those patriarchal locks had been spun glass, the hard white blaze of the moon. Janet felt as if she could neither move nor breathe. It was real—it was not a dream—it was a man shut up there, who saw her, made signs, called for her help—an old man—a man in trouble. Her head seemed to go round, though her feet were planted on the path as if they had grown to it, or frozen there. What was she to do? What could she do?

At this moment there came from within, from the room whence there stole a ray or two of yellow lamp-light out into the whiteness of the moon, the sound of music—a few notes—tremulous notes—with which she was very familiar; and then rising together the two voices, also so familiar, every tone of which she could have

anticipated. The sound made a diversion in her thoughts. She turned her head for a minute that way with a thrill of sensation, wondering if they could but see what she saw—if they only knew! It was so strange to realise, as she did, with a sudden flash of consciousness, the tranquil room, the mother in her chair with her mild face full of gratification and reflected pleasure turned towards the pair at the piano in perfect composure and ease—the two singers busy with their music, with themselves, thinking of nothing else. She took her eyes from the window in her startled realisation of all this, and turned her head for a moment in the direction of those unconscious people, who did not know—— In that moment, while her eyes were averted, the air was suddenly rent, torn asunder, cleft by the same wild, unnatural, and awful cry which Janet had twice heard before. Her feet, which had seemed growing to the path, were loosened with a spring, and Janet too uttered a scream which she could not restrain. Where was it? Though she was wild with terror,

she had yet sense enough left to see that the figure at the window had altered its position, and that it was from thence that the sound came. But her strength was equal to no more. She fled, forgetting all precautions, her feet flying over the hard path to the open door. She was dimly aware that the music had wavered, half stopped, and then gone on again. Gussy's voice coming out loudly upon the night. After that Janet knew no more. She burst into the house, and stood panting in the hall, recovering her breath, not knowing what to do.

What was she to do? She stood leaning against the wall inside, safe from pursuit. And it was not till some time later that it occurred to her that, instead of being safe from pursuit, she was within the very walls of the house which enclosed the mystery, and that the prisoner, the maniac, whoever he was, the pale old man with the white hair, was an inmate of the same dwelling, and therefore she was within his reach far more easily than she had been

outside. But this in her panic she did not think of. For the moment she felt securely sheltered, and stood gasping, recovering her breath, asking herself what she should do. They were singing in the drawing-room, singing as if all was right, as if nothing could ever be wrong. Had they not heard it? Did they not care? They had not seen as she had, but how could they remain unconscious after that cry? Should she walk in and tell them—tell them? What should she tell them? That there was some one shut up in the wing—an old man with white hair, with his pallid face pressed against the window between the branches of the ivy? How could she go and tell them this? 'Mrs. Harwood, there is a man—an old man—at the window—in the wing——' Was that what she should say? Some door might have been open and some madman got in. But then it was not the first time she had heard that cry. He must have been there for some time—he must have been there before she herself came. Perhaps—perhaps—how could she tell?—per-

haps Mrs. Harwood already knew—perhaps—— Janet panted and gasped, but after a time got back her breath. But still she stood there thinking, wondering over her problem. What was she to do? Was it, perhaps, her part to do nothing—to ignore this sight she had seen—to try to forget it? Was it none of her business to interfere? Was it her duty to tell at once her appalling discovery? What was she to do?

In the meantime she had not closed the door, which still stood open, letting in the cold air of the night; and presently, while she still stood trembling, steps approached from the servants' quarters. It was Vicars who made his appearance, and Janet almost had a new shock of terror as the man to whom she had never spoken before came up and looked at her severely with suspicious eyes. He asked, in a tone as severe as his look,

'Was it you, miss, as left the hall door open, to give everybody their death?'

'I—I found it open,' Janet said, faltering.

'If a person finds a door open of a cold night

it's their part, if they've any sense, to shut it,' said Vicars. He never removed his look from her, fixing her with the eyes of a judge. 'May I ask, miss, if it's your custom to go ranging about the grounds at this hour of the night?'

'Oh, no,' said Janet, 'it was only an accident. I never did it before.'

'I'm only a servant,' said Vicars, 'but if I was the master I wouldn't hold with folks going round and round of my house in the middle of the night looking things up.'

'I have not been looking anything up,' said Janet, indignantly. She stood by while he closed the door; but, when he turned to go away, made a step after him timidly. 'Oh!' she said, 'if you would only let me speak to you for a moment. Mr. Vicars, you said you were a servant——'

'Did you take me for the master, miss?' he said, with a low laugh.

'Oh!' said Janet, 'if you would but tell me. Who is the old gentleman at the window with the white hair? And why does he cry so? I

will never, never say a word if you will but tell me. I am so frightened, I don't know what to do.'

'There is no gentleman at the window—and he don't cry,' said Vicars, fixing her once more with keen eyes.

'But I saw him—and I've heard him, oh! three times. Mr. Vicars, tell me, for goodness' sake, does Mrs. Harwood know?'

'You'd best go and tell her, and see what she'll say. You'll not stop another night in this house if you bother the missus with what you hear and see. You may take my word for it, Miss Peep and Pry.'

'You are very impertinent,' said Janet, indignantly, 'and I do not care in the least whether I stop here another night or not. Does Mrs. Harwood know?'

'I'd advise you, miss, not to offer her no information,' said Vicars, 'about things as happen in her own house;' and with this he turned his back on Janet, and went deliberately away.

Should she go and tell Mrs. Harwood what she had seen? She turned towards the drawing-room door, which was so close at hand; but she paused again before she had opened it. Had Vicars remained there she would certainly have done it; but as he was gone, and as there was nobody to see, Janet hesitated, pondered—and, finally, though with a beating heart, and every nerve in her body thrilling, went away in the other direction, and very softly and slowly, hesitating at every second step, retired upstairs.

CHAPTER II.

EVERY family has a skeleton in some closet. So says the proverb; but is it true? We are all of us aware of many cases in which it is not true. To half of the world perhaps it is a foolish fiction. They have troubles, but they are above-board, straightforward troubles upon which their neighbours can offer sympathy. Thackeray speaks of the wife or the husband in their intimate domesticity going back secretly, each unknown to the other, perhaps upon a youthful past which contained another image than that of the legitimate partner of their days; but that is a gentle sort of a skeleton, its bones all covered in soft rounded outlines of

imagination. The real skeleton is very different: it haunts the house in the form perhaps of a ruined son, a debased and degraded brother, still more dreadful a woman disgraced. Or it is an incipient madness—a dreadful disease of which the miserable people never know at what moment it may blaze forth? It is always in the minds of those to whom it belongs. In the midst of laughter, in the happiest moment, it gives a tug at their hearts, as if it held them in a chain, and the smile fades, and the sweetest tints grow grey.

But how could there be anything like this in the house in St. John's Wood? The Harwoods were people not given to excitement of any kind. They were too orderly in mind, too calm and well-balanced, for any emotion. Their daily round of life was comfort itself, unbroken by any pangs of anxiety. No. Mrs. Harwood was a little anxious lest Dolff should stay out too late, and showed it in a natural, motherly way. Her brow got a little pucker in it when he did not return at the time he was expected;

and Gussy had a way of going upstairs to the staircase window, from which she could see, over the garden wall, the road outside, to look out for him. This was visible enough to those who had eyes to see. But a mystery in the house, a secret inhabitant, a prisoner—It was incredible; it was a thing that could not be.

Janet lay awake for a great part of the night tossing and trembling in her bed. She had locked her door, and she kept her light burning, frightened, she knew not for what, for the old man with the pale face, who might appear at any moment, and congeal the blood in her veins. Janet, of course, argued with herself in every way, that if there was any old man in the wing he was evidently shut up there and guarded and very unlikely to be seen outside; that there was no reason to suppose that he would know where her room was and come to her; that perhaps it was no old man at all, or a mere visitor to Vicars, or a hallucination, or—she knew not what. But all these reflections were not enough to calm the beating of her heart.

She heard Dolff come in from his ball and was comforted by the sound of voices, which gave a feeling of security: but these sounds died away again after a few minutes, and the silence and the darkness settled down. It seemed to Janet that the night had endured for ages before she got to sleep. Perhaps, however, it was not so very late, after all, for she was quite unused to watching.

It was, however, late when she sprang up in the morning, finding that she had overslept herself and too busy in her hurry to think of anything for the first half-hour. Then all that she had seen suddenly flashed over her mind again, and she uttered an involuntary cry. She leaned back in the chair and closed her eyes, and saw again in her mind's eye the apparition of the previous night. Janet started up again and gave a wild look round her, wondering whether she should not pack up at once and go away. If she had been one of the happy girls who have a mother to go to!—but all the possibilities rushed through her mind in a moment. The

explanations she would have to give, the mild suspicion at the vicarage, the milder remonstrances, 'But, my dear!—when you were so happy; a face at the window! There might be a dozen ways of explaining it;' and what had she to do with it, when all was said?

'Janet, what's the matter? Janet, let me in. Why, you have your door locked! Janet, Janet, are you ill? You're late for breakfast and everybody's down. Ja—anet!'

This was Julia beating a tattoo upon the door.

'There is nothing the matter,' said Janet, faltering; 'I have overslept myself. I shall be down directly. Go away, Julia, please.'

'I sha'n't go away. I'll wait here for you. I suppose Dolff woke you up coming home in the middle of the night. Make haste, make haste, Janet, or Gussy will say something nasty about people who are so easily put out.'

'Julia, please go away. I am coming; I—have got a headache.'

It was not often that Janet had recourse to a headache, which is always the most ready of excuses. But Julia, though she had been subdued by her governess, was not yet a model of subordination. Janet could hear her seat herself noisily on the other side of the door to wait. She could hear her foot drumming impatiently upon the floor, and then Ju, by way of amusing herself, began to give forth discordantly one of Dolff's not very lovely songs. It was quite true that Julia was never likely to do much in music. Her voice was something like that of a crow. She chanted Dolff's song with a very perverted reminiscence of the air, but a perfect memory for the words, which were not admirable. Janet was called back by this performance to the recollection of her duties. It was not possible now to pack up and hurry off. And then she became conscious of a great many threads that held her, as well as this sentinel with her song keeping watch over her door.

They went down together, though Julia did not fail to impress upon the governess a due

sense of the fact that she herself had been ready nearly an hour ago.

'You should always get up the moment you're called, or you are done for,' said Julia; 'one says just five minutes more, and when one wakes one finds it's an hour. I've learned all that about the kings, which is rubbish. What do I want with all those old kings? I shall just forget them the moment I've said them. I learned it not because I approved of it, but merely to please you.'

'Thank you, my dear, that was a very kind motive,' said Janet, recalling herself to her duties, 'but if there is one thing that you ought to know it is the history of your own country. Everybody will tell you that.'

'Well!' said Julia, 'if it's all about one putting out another, till you don't know which is which, or who's king and who's not, I don't call that the history of anybody's country. So long as it's just to say off the Henrys and the Edwards I don't mind; but to learn whose sons they all were, and what right they had, and why they

fought each other about it, I do it to please you, Janet, but I don't care tuppence.'

Janet also did not care tuppence either, nor a fraction of tuppence; but she knew, and feebly tried to do her duty.

'You can't understand how they succeed, or which is right and which is wrong, unless you know about their families,' she said. 'It is all very complicated in the Wars of the Roses, but it is plain sailing for a long time after that.'

'It ought always to be plain sailing,' said Julia. 'The Prince of Wales comes after the Queen, and Prince Albert Victor after him—anyone can understand that. If it went quite straight—father and son, or mother and son when there's a queen—I shouldn't mind; but they just inverted things to make history difficult, with no other reason. If they had only let Richard the Second alone, he would have had a son after a while—Richard the Third, perhaps—and we could have skipped all that nasty bit. But those old people had no consideration. Of

course, it stands to nature that the son should always come after the father.'

'This is most edifying,' said Gussy, for by this time they had arrived at the breakfast-table. 'You are late, young ladies, but if you come in discussing historical questions it is clear you must have been making a good use of your time. Good-morning, Janet, I hear you were disturbed—by Dolff or something last night.'

'No!' said Janet, faltering a little, 'I heard Mr. Harwood come in, but I was not disturbed. It is pleasant to hear voices and people stirring when one can't sleep.'

'You left us in a great hurry last night,' said Gussy. 'I am afraid something put you out. You must not think you are neglected if, when a visitor happens to come—— I am sure there was no such intention. We always like, in this family, to see everybody comfortable; but sometimes, you know, there are circumstances——'

'Indeed, indeed, I was not put out by anything,' said Janet. She had really forgotten all about Meredith and the small commotions of the

drawing-room. 'I had—a headache,' she added, by an afterthought.

'I don't wonder, after thumping out all those accompaniments for Dolff. We must not let you be victimised so much. And you ran out to have a turn in the garden? It is very tempting on a moonlight night, but there is nothing that gives cold so easily. You must really take care. You look,' said Gussy, raising her eyes full upon Janet, 'rather pale, and shivering as if you had caught cold.'

What was this in Gussy's eyes? something more than their usual placidity—an inquiry, an examination, almost a menace—they seemed to ask where the other had been, what she had been doing, what she had seen. Janet felt herself shiver under the look.

'I am sure you have caught cold; you ought to stay in and take care of yourself to-day. I am sure my mother would wish you to nurse yourself up. Ju, you must see there is a good fire in the school-room, and if Janet would keep to one room, without exposing herself to any

draughts to-day, she will probably be quite well to-morrow. That's what I always do when I feel a cold coming on.'

'But I don't think I have any cold——'

'Oh, yes, I can see it in your eyes; they are beginning to run. You must take care of yourself, my dear. And you really must promise to give up this habit of running out into the garden on a cold night.'

'Indeed,' said Janet, 'I never did it before. The door was open, and the moon was shining so brightly——'

'Oh, the door was open! I wonder, now, who could be so silly as to leave the door open in December? I must ask about that.'

'It was me, I suppose,' said Julia. 'I was standing there when Charley Meredith came. And I wasn't at all glad to see him. So I turned round in disgust, and forgot all about the door.'

'You are very impertinent to say so!'

'Oh, I've just as good a right to my own opinion as you have, Gussy; as much as you

like him, so much I don't; and I should never open the door at all to him if I had my will. He's not nice at all, or true. He has always mocked at me and made eyes, and I can't bear him,' said Julia, through her teeth.

'Ju! I thought you had learned a little sense. I thought Miss Summerhayes had taught you how to behave, though your own family never could.'

'Oh, I am quite sick and tired of my own family,' cried Julia. 'Mamma does whatever you please, Gussy. And you're so silly, I could shake you sometimes. And Dolff—Dolff——'

'What of Dolff? It must be delightful for a stranger to hear what we think of each other.'

'What do you mean by calling her Miss Summerhayes and a stranger, when you know it was settled she was to be like one of ourselves—and by far the best of us?' cried Julia, with flushed cheeks and blazing eyes.

'Miss Summerhayes,' said Gussy, turning again upon Janet, with a wave of her hand

towards the indignant Julia, 'I think your pupil is not doing you much credit to-day.'

Janet had more command of herself in the family squabble than she had in the previous question.

'Julia has forgotten herself,' she said. 'She will be very sorry for it by-and-by. I hope you will forgive her. She cannot quite get over her quick temper all at once.'

'I hope she won't wear out our patience altogether before she does so,' Gussy said, with significant calm.

'Janet! she means she'll persuade my mother to send me to school. Mamma would never do it of her own will. But if Gussy goes on nagging and nagging—— But I'll not go. I'll run away. I am too old to be packed off like a child. I'll——'

'It would do you a great deal of good, Julia, to go to school,' said Janet, sedately.

'I have always said so,' said Gussy, 'and it's very good of you, Janet, to back me up. I have a temper, perhaps, too, and I say what I

don't mean when I'm angry. But please don't think that I have ever changed about you. I liked you from the first, and I shall always like you. That little vixen makes one say things—But I know that we owe a great deal to you.'

'Oh, no,' cried Janet, with a compunction in her heart.

She was not sure that she could return the kind words and declare that she would never change. She felt as if involuntarily she was a traitor to Gussy—in a complot against her—or at least in the confidence of the plotter. And she was glad to retire into the shelter of her supposed cold and withdraw for the day to the school-room, carrying the excited Julia with her, to whom Miss Summerhayes set forth her offences against good taste and decorum with an incisiveness and distinctness which soon reduced that young lady to the depths of self-contempt.

CHAPTER III.

THE day had been rainy, some time after these occurrences, and the governess and her pupil were taking their needful exercise in the garden —up one side and down the other under the bare trees. They trudged along, making a sharp noise upon the wet gravel with their heels, occasionally very fast when they thought of it in the true spirit of a constitutional, occasionally lingering when they got into a discussion, and their tongues went faster than their feet.

Things had fallen into comparative tranquillity, and Janet, though far from at ease in more respects than one, was drawn on from day to

day with the force of the current, and had no idea, whatever mysteries there might lie under the surface or troubles might be to come, of packing up in a hurry and rushing away. She wanted to see what was going to happen—very curious, a little disturbed, with more things going on in her little mind than were known to any philosophy. Julia was the greatest talker when the two were alone, and Janet carried on her thoughts and the thread of many a reflection through the girl's chatter at her ease—for Julia answered her own questions in a great many cases, or forgot that she asked any, and a very small response on the part of Janet sufficed to keep her satisfied.

What had happened, however, on this particular afternoon was that Dolff had seen them from a window, and had sallied forth to join them. Dolff had a very comfortable little study to which he retired for certain hours in the day 'to work'—as everybody said. Perhaps in her heart Mrs. Harwood had not very much more confidence than other people in Dolff's work.

But she liked to say she had—to deceive, perhaps, a family friend now and then, or, what was more likely, herself.

Dolff, however, smoking a cigarette over his work—which in this case was an old French novel—saw the two figures in the garden, and threw aside his book with as much alacrity as if it had been Aristotle. He did not much care even for a French novel: literature of any kind was not his forte. And it was the afternoon, in which man, nor woman either, has any call to work. It is going against the very rules of Providence to work between four and five o'clock, and you cannot disregard these laws with impunity. Nothing that is done between these hours is ever good. If it is reading, it runs out of your memory as fast as you put it in; if it is writing, it is so bad that next morning you tear the paper across and throw it into the fire. Dolff was deeply sensible of this penalty of untimely labour. He threw his book aside, picked up his cap, and went downstairs. A walk in the garden before tea, which was a

refreshment his mother liked him to share, was exactly what was needed to keep him up to the mark.

It is difficult to say how these things happen; but after Dolff joined the pair, Julia separated herself with an instinct which need not be defined. She found that two was company and three was none. She was a little impatient at the sight of her brother when he first appeared, but afterwards accepted the situation, and began to find that she had a great many things to distract her attention. She wanted to speak to the gardener. She wanted to see whether the snowdrops were appearing which grew in the grass under the trees. She wished to look how the primulas were coming on in the little conservatory. It was well, on the whole, that Dolff had appeared to leave her free, for she could not have allowed Janet to walk alone, and yet she had all these things to do.

Dolff was not very great at conversation, as the reader may imagine; and it was very seldom

that he had found a chance of talking to Janet alone, or so nearly alone as they were now. He began with the weather, as was natural. It had been very cold. That night he went to the ball he thought he should have been frozen walking home, coming out of the hot rooms after dancing all night. It was a beautiful moonlight night, indeed, as Miss Summerhayes remarked—but dreadfully cold.

'I hope it was a nice ball?' said Janet.

'Oh, yes; it was a nice enough ball, but I did not know very many people. I wish you had been there, Miss Summerhayes; but perhaps you don't care for that sort of thing?'

'Indeed I do,' said Janet. 'I am very fond of dancing. At least, I used to be when I was in the way of it.'

'I hope you are not out of the way of it now. We must have a dance at Christmas. I am sure you dance to perfection, Miss Summerhayes.'

'Oh, no,' said Janet, with a laugh. 'I don't do anything to perfection, but I confess I am fond of dancing.'

'And of music, too,' said the grateful Dolff. 'I know you are—good music, not my sort. And yet you are so very kind as to play for me.'

'Oh, please don't speak so. I am very glad to play—for anyone. Everybody is very kind to me. I am here to be of any use I can.'

'I hope, Miss Summerhayes,' said Dolff, growing very red, 'that you don't think I would presume to ask you—on that ground.'

'I don't mean anything disagreeable,' said Janet. 'I am sure you don't ask me because I am the governess. But if your mother makes me like one of the family in other things, I must be so in this too.'

'How strange it is!' cried Dolff; and then he added, growing redder, 'Don't be angry with me, Miss Summerhayes. To think that being one of our family should be anything to you!'

'Why not?' said Janet. 'It is always a great thing for a governess to have such a kind home.'

'A governess!' he said. 'It hurts me to hear you call yourself a governess. Don't, oh, don't, please!'

'Why not?' she said again, and laughed. 'It does not hurt me at all. I have no objection to being a governess. You need not be so careful of my feelings. I am quite contented to be what I am.'

'That is because you are——' Dolff murmured something in his young moustache, and grew redder than ever.

Janet was not sure that it was not 'an angel'; and she was very much amused—not displeased either. There is no harm in being well thought of. She liked it on the whole.

'It is because I had—nothing else to look for,' she said; 'and I am not a discontented person. One can always get a little fun out of everything. It was rather fun coming out like this upon the world, not knowing what sort of place one might find oneself in. It is the nearest to beginning a brand-new life of anything I know.'

'Well, about fun I can't tell,' said Dolff, a little abashed. 'I—I hope you think there is a little more in us than that.'

'There is a great deal more,' said Janet, 'oh, a great deal more. You have all been so good. I mean before I came that it was fun imagining what my new family would be like, and how I should get on, and what sort of a pupil I should have, and all that.'

'I daresay,' said Dolff, 'you never thought there would be a cub of a brother to bother you with his vulgar songs—oh, I know they're vulgar—at least, I know now. A set of men, you know, is different. We bellow them out at each other's rooms, and make an awful row in the chorus, and think them jolly.'

'And so they are, I suppose,' said Janet, with a smile.

'I assure you,' said Dolff, 'I don't think so now. I have been getting more and more ashamed of them, Miss Summerhayes. I've gone on singing them just for the pleasure of your playing. But I'll not do it any more.'

'I cannot see why you should give up what is a pleasure to you,' said Janet. 'If you think I dislike playing for you, it is not so at all.'

'That's because you're so good and charitable; they're not fit for you to touch. I can see that now. In a roomful of men that are thinking of nothing but noise and diversion, such things are all very well; but for your hands to touch, no, no—I see it all now.'

There was in Dolff's voice a tone of touching regret. He felt the sacrifice he was making, yet he was ready to lay it at the feet of his lady. Between amusement and a certain pleasure in his devotion Janet's countenance shone.

'I can't allow you,' she said, 'to make such a sacrifice. You must have something to amuse you in the evenings; and your mother likes to hear you sing. Never mind if they are a little—well! some of them are quite nice—they are not all vulgar. I will show you the ones I like best.'

'Will you be so very, very kind to me, Miss Summerhayes? It is out of the goodness of your heart, I know. Yes, my mother likes it, and she has good reason. I used always to be going out of nights getting into bad company.

I can tell *you*, Miss Janet, though I could not tell anyone else. Poor mother was anxious about me, of course. But now I have no wish to go out at night. The Strand may be in Timbuctoo for anything I care. I never want to spend an evening away from home. So long as you will go on playing them—the best of them, don't you know—you will make both mother and me happy.'

'Well,' said Janet, 'it is very easily done: and there are some others that I think would suit your voice. We might go over them together.'

Dolff turned quickly round as if he would have seized her hand, but overawed by the imposing vision of Janet, who met his eager look with a slight elevation of her head and withdrawal from his side, drew back again a little shyly. But he was beaming with happiness and gratitude.

'If you will do that for me, Miss Summerhayes,' he said, 'I can't tell you how happy you will make me.' He paused a moment, and then gave vent to a laugh. 'Gussy and Meredith

may think they're very grand,' he said; 'they look down upon me as if I was a clown at the circus; but just you stand by me, Miss Summerhayes,' he said, with a little break in his voice; 'by Jove, we'll put them on their mettle!'

Dolff was so delighted with the future joys which he saw before him that he smote his manly thigh in exultation. His face was crimsoned with pleasure and satisfaction, shining behind the faint shadows thrown upon it by his colourless hair and light moustache. He was happy and he was proud, doubly repaid for the genuine humility which had prompted his sacrifice. Janet had made him feel his coarseness and imperfection. It was with all the greater exultation that he felt himself mounting up with her into a higher place.

'You must remember, Mr. Harwood,' said Janet, 'that Mr. Meredith has a beautiful voice. There are not many people that have a voice like that.'

'Do you really think so?' said Dolff, some-

what crestfallen. 'He thinks a deal of it himself, I know.'

'A man cannot have a voice like that,' said Janet, 'without knowing it. I will do my very best for you, but no one can give you a voice like that. And your sister sings very well, too. I think I could help her a little—but she doesn't think so, which is a pity. But you cannot do as well as that, Mr. Harwood—oh, no, whatever we may do.'

'I don't mind,' said Dolff, magnanimously, 'so long as you back me up, Miss Summerhayes. If you're pleased, that's all I care for. I know you don't like Meredith, I've seen it in your eyes. We'll have concerts of our own, and my mother will like it, for one, better than twenty Merediths. And Gussy can't hold a candle to you—not in any way. Do you think I am so stupid that I can't be trusted to see that?'

Janet's mind was a little excited by this conversation. An uninterrupted course of adulation is not a disagreeable thing altogether: even if we do not have a very high opinion to begin

with of the genius of the person who expresses it, our idea of his judgment will probably improve when we see how he appreciates our merits. Janet was no doubt more or less influenced by this natural sentiment; but she was also a little shaken by his confidence in respect to Meredith.

I know you don't like him—was it true? She felt herself pulled up short by that unhesitating expression. I know you don't like Meredith. It gave her heart a quicker beat: it was like the drawing up of a curtain upon a scene—a scene very much confused and covered with clouds, but not what her companion in ignorance of her and of all things had made sure it was. The curtain divided, opened for a moment, and then the folds fell back again, leaving her not much the wiser. No, not much the wiser; but not at least as Dolff supposed. After all he was a lout, though he admired her so much, which was a sign of good taste; but to take it for granted that he understood her was a little too much. Also, it was quite time to change

the subject. He might rush upon her at any moment with other words that it might not be easy to answer. Decidedly the subject must be changed. She turned round upon him quite suddenly, though not without a little conscious artifice.

'Mr. Harwood,' she said, 'I want you to tell me one thing.'

'A hundred things, Miss Summerhayes; as many as you like.'

'Well, it is just this. Do you put full confidence in Mr. Vicars?' she said, looking him full in the face.

'Mr. Vicars,' cried Dolff, with the most comical expression of astonishment and dismay. He had thought, poor fellow, that he was 'getting on very well' with Miss Summerhayes; he had felt himself able to speak to her as he never had been able to speak before. Yes, and she had understood him, agreed to what he had scarcely ventured to ask, and, though she had not flattered him (which was so much greater a compliment he had said to himself somewhat

ruefully), had at least seemed willing to help him—to stand by him. Decidedly he had been getting on; but what in the world could she mean by this sudden *volte-face*. 'Mr. Vicars!' he repeated, with amaze; then slowly dawning into understanding. 'Old Vicars?' he said; 'the old butler?' then Dolff paused to laugh. 'You startled me so, I could not think what you meant. Do I put confidence in him? Well, I suppose so—that is—I can't tell. I know very little about him; but my mother does, I have always heard. Do you—take any interest in Vicars, Miss Summerhayes?'

'Oh, no,' said Janet. 'I thought as he was such an old servant you must know him very well.'

'So I do,' said Dolff, 'and yet I don't. I have not been much at home—only for the holidays when I was at school, and now only for vacations. And half the time we were always away at the sea-side or somewhere. It is strange how little a fellow is at home when he is young, though of course when one is the

only man of the family, and all that, I suppose you think I ought to pay some attention to things at my age.'

'Oh, it was only an idle question,' Janet said.

'But I should like you to know: everything is in my mother's hands for her life. That is—not everything. I have the most of the money, but not till I'm twenty-five: and she has the house and all the management. Of course I ought to pay more attention; and if I was to marry, or that sort of thing, I should have to settle up, and I don't know that she would have enough left to keep up this house. I have never thought of marrying till—quite lately; and I've always left everything in her hands and never interfered. Do you think I ought to pay more attention, Miss Summerhayes?'

'Oh,' cried Janet, after two or three attempts to stop him, 'I did not indeed want you to tell me about your family matters. It was only an idle question. I—I don't like the look of the man, and I only asked for curiosity. I

never wanted to pry into your family affairs.'

Dolff gave her a look which was full of meaning. He drew himself up to his full length, and instinctively pulled at his shirt-collar, and smoothed his moustache.

'Miss Summerhayes,' he said, with dignity, 'never speak of prying, for that is what you could not do. It is I who wanted you to know.'

CHAPTER IV.

'WELL,' said Gussy, 'I cannot say that I see any harm in that. We have not had anything of the kind for a long time. We must see what mamma says. It does turn the house upside down, and give a great deal of trouble. But—you know mamma always likes to do anything to please you, and make you fond of your home, Dolff——'

'I should like to see any fellow that is more fond of his home, or sticks to it more,' cried Dolff.

'You have been very good lately,' said Gussy, in a hesitating tone, 'if only one could be quite sure.'

Gussy did not know what to think. Mr. Meredith's laughter and innuendoes had opened her eyes as to the cause of the virtue of Dolff; and she did not like the persistence with which Charley came back to the subject. She had no desire to be talked to about Miss Summerhayes and her influence for a whole evening, even if it was by way of jest. And as regarded the matter itself, though Gussy was quite willing to accept Janet's aid in keeping Dolff from nightly wanderings which were not for his advantage, she did not like to be called upon to acknowledge that aid; still less to consider that it might lead to what she called further complications: the idea of 'further complications' was highly disagreeable to her. Janet was very well in her way. She was good for Julia, and fortunately for Dolff too. It was a great advantage to have anyone who would keep those troublesome members of the family in order. But—the idea of further complications alarmed her very much. It was the last thing in the world that was desirable for anyone concerned.

'I shall tell my mother I have set my heart on having a dance. How can you expect a man to stick to his home as you wish if he has nothing to amuse him? I will settle all that with my mother myself,' said Dolff, somewhat magisterially. He turned round upon her, however, after a moment: 'If you don't interfere.'

'Why should I interfere, if it makes you happy? To be sure it is a great trouble turning everything upside down.'

'One would think you were forty, Gussy!'

'I am not so young as you, at all events,' she said.

Gussy was as good as her word, and did not interfere. Even when she was privately consulted by her mother she said nothing against Dolff's wish.

'If it keeps him up to the mark,' said Mrs. Harwood. 'It is such a pleasure to see him so nice, to see him so improved—none of those wanderings out at night.'

'Yes, it is a great improvement,' said Gussy.

She shook her head, with a sigh, and hoped that it would last.

'It has lasted a month,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'I see no reason why it should not last for ever. How can I refuse him anything when he is so good? Vicars will not like it. It distracts his mind, and he says he never knows what may happen: but I think I can smooth down Vicars, Gussy, if you are sure that you approve.'

'Oh, yes, I approve,' said Gussy, 'anything to keep him steady.'

But Gussy herself was still young enough, and she thought of all the opportunities of the dance and the talks aside, the conversations in quiet corners, which were legitimate on such an occasion, with a little stir in her heart. At the piano, even though it was at the other end of the room, it was still under her mother's eyes. She never saw her lover, never talked with him except under her mother's eyes. How could he say anything under such circumstances? Her heart was a little sick that it should all go on for ever in the same way, without the least pro-

gress. He talked about the songs, or about Janet and her influence on Dolff, laughing at what he said he had foreseen from the first. Gussy did not quite like the discussion of her brother, who, after all, *was* her brother, and not to be dissected as Charley loved to do, and she was not fond of hearing so much about Miss Summerhayes. There was no special interest in Miss Summerhayes that she should be the object of so much conversation between the two. And Gussy could not help thinking with a little pleasure of all the possibilities of the ball, where it was not only possible that two could talk together quite untrammelled, but where it was even a necessity that they should do so. To sit apart in a room unobserved with Charley once at least in the evening would be almost her duty: and then—with nothing to disturb them, no occasion for self-restraint—Gussy thought of this with a thrill through her veins yet with a sigh. She was becoming weary. All this had gone on for so long, and it looked as if it might go on for ever without change.

Curiously enough it was the governess alone —as if she had any say in the matter!—who objected to the idea. Of course she did not object in words—but she nearly wrecked the project notwithstanding. She said, very innocently, that she did not think—even though Mrs. Harwood was so good as to ask her—that she could be present. There was a great outcry over this, for it was at luncheon, and the whole family was at table.

'Not come to the dance?' said Dolff. 'Oh, but, Miss Summerhayes, that will spoil everything. I have—we've all calculated upon you, haven't we, mother. Tell her she must come.'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'this is quite a new idea. I couldn't have a dance in the house, knowing there was a young person upstairs alone. Oh, no, I couldn't do it. Dolff is quite right—you must come.'

Gussy had only said 'Oh!' raising her eyelids —but Janet read in that exclamation a suspicion and question. Gussy did not believe that she was sincere, and was curious to know what

her motive was. The two had drifted apart strangely, but this suspicion was not native to Miss Harwood's mind. It came from all those talks about Janet, and Dolff's subjection to her, which had afforded an opportunity for so much amusement over the piano. Meredith would say 'Ah! I wonder what she means by that?' till Gussy put the question to herself involuntarily as he would have put it, feeling all the same that sick weariness with the subject which translated itself unjustly, but not unnaturally, into an impatience with Janet which sometimes she could hardly restrain.

'I should like to come,' said Janet, 'but you forget I am in mourning. It is not six months yet——'

'That is true,' said the old lady; but she added: 'My dear, I like you the better for thinking of it. But, after all, she was not a near relation—not like your mother. For an aunt, six months' mourning is all that anyone thinks of nowadays. And I believe the late poor lady was not even an aunt.'

'She was all I ever had, for mother or aunt or guardian.'

'Yes, I know—but left you to struggle for yourself, which makes a little difference. And what harm can it do her, poor thing, that you should enjoy yourself a little? You don't get so many opportunities in this quiet house. When Dolff goes away we shall all relapse into our needlework again.'

'And Charley Meredith,' said Julia.

Thought is quicker than the most rapid utterance. Julia's words came instantaneously, almost before her mother had done speaking, but it had flashed into two different minds before she spoke. And Charley Meredith! Gussy added that reflection to the picture of the future with an increasing sickness and impatience of her heart, seeing the same thing over again stretch before her, not without happiness in it, but with a weariness and incompleteness which would grow day by day. And it gleamed into Janet's thoughts with a certain excitement and suspense, as of a thing of which nobody could

prophesy how it would end. The sudden movement in both minds was curiously struck as by a false note by Mrs. Harwood's calm reply:

'And Charley Meredith, perhaps. But that can't affect Janet, except the wrong way: for I confess, myself, I get sick of these two always philandering—I beg your pardon, Gussy, my dear, but I've been young in my day—and other young people looking on, you know: why they must either make fun of you or the water must come into their mouths.'

The old lady laughed in the heartless way in which old ladies will laugh. She was only the more tickled when Gussy drew herself up, and, looking straight before her with a blank countenance and the sternest gravity, replied,

'I cannot form the slightest idea what you mean, mamma, or what there is in anything that has been said to call forth such a digression. We were speaking of the dance, I think, and of Janet's mourning, which I agree with you is no reason why she should shut herself up.'

'I'm sure I beg your pardon, Gussy,' said Mrs.

Harwood, wiping her eyes, for she had not been able to stop her laugh, 'but I'm glad of your support. No, no, my dear, the mourning has nothing to say to it. You have worn it very faithfully, and you have done your poor aunt full justice. I'm sure, poor lady, she would be the first to say, could she know, that you must now begin to enjoy yourself a little. At least, take what enjoyment you can: for you know the men are generally in the minority, and nobody can ever tell till the last moment whether there will be enough partners or not.'

'There shall be enough,' said Dolff, with a grand air. 'I should be ashamed of myself if I couldn't produce a lot of fellows—only you'll have to put some of them up for the night. Couldn't you clear out that old wing? There must be some rooms that could be used if they were tidied up.'

'No,' said Mrs. Harwood, with a change of countenance. She, too, became perfectly blank, as Gussy had done, dismissing all expression

from her face. 'It is quite out of the question to open the wing.'

'Why?' said Dolff. 'I don't see the difficulty. A couple of housemaids and a few brooms——'

'My boy, I must be the judge on this point,' said Mrs. Harwood. 'There is nothing to be done with the wing.'

'But, mother——'

'I will have no more said on the subject,' she answered, peremptorily. 'You had better come and wheel me into my room, I have some business to do this morning. And, Janet, I hope it's settled, and that I shall hear no more about your mourning.'

'You are very kind, Mrs. Harwood. I am afraid I have no dress——'

'You have a very pretty dress; and let me tell you, my dear—though I daresay you know it—that black is always becoming, and that you look very well in that dress. Now, Dolff——'

'I hope we shan't hear any more on that subject,' said Gussy, with an air of decision, as her

mother's chair was wheeled away. 'I'm very glad to humour Dolff, but I shall soon be very tired of it if there are many more difficulties. Dress is always a nuisance on such occasions. One wears a ball dress once—it is as good as new, but when one takes it out it is old-fashioned, or faded, or something, and it is such a waste of good money to get another to be worn again only on one occasion. You may be very glad you are in black, Janet—and there is Ju, she is not out, and won't be for a couple of years. And yet she can't be sent to bed. How is she to be dressed for this one night? I know mamma will overdo it if she is left to herself. All that and the supper, and the musicians, and everything of that kind is left on my hands. A ball may be very nice at the moment—for those who like it—but the trouble it gives, both before and after! Every spare inch of room must, of course, be got ready for Dolff's friends.'

'Do you think, then, that Mrs. Harwood will yield about the wing?' said Janet, very curious.

'As if Vicars would!' cried Julia. 'Mamma

doesn't matter—it's Vicars that won't have it. I've always wanted to get into the wing, but Vicars stands sentinel as if he were a gaoler. I've told him a dozen times I was sure he had got something wrong in there. I can't bear Vicars!' said Julia, hurrying out the words to get as much said as possible before Gussy's imperative tones broke in.

'Ju! you are unbearable. I thought at one time there was an improvement, but there's none. Vicars is a most valuable servant. We have the highest respect for him and his opinion, both mamma and I. At such a time as this he is more good than words can say—and always so careful for the credit of the house. Isn't it time you had begun lessons? I must go and see after the house.'

As Janet followed her pupil out of the room she was met in the hall by Dolff, very eager and breathless.

'You're coming, Miss Summerhayes? I must stop you just for a moment to make sure. Don't spoil it altogether by saying you'll not

come. I shan't care a brass farthing for it if you're not there. But you *will* come—say you will? You won't disappoint us all and ruin it for me——'

'I can't see what difference it would make,' said Janet, 'especially if there are too many ladies already.'

'But that wouldn't affect *you*. You will always—— Miss Summerhayes, I'll throw it all up if you don't come.'

'Don't threaten me, Mr. Harwood; besides, after what your mother so kindly said, I am coming—to look on at least.'

'Oh, I like that!' cried Dolff. He seized her hand and squeezed it as she passed him. 'But you may say anything you like,' he said, rejoicing, 'so long as you come.'

'Janet,' said Julia, when they had reached the school-room, 'I think this is getting a very queer house. Gussy cares for nothing but Charley Meredith, and Dolff cares for nothing but you. It is—odd—don't you think?'

'It would be if it were true,' said Janet; 'but

as it is a mere fancy, it is not worth discussing. I hope you are quite ready with your preparation to-day.'

'I can't see,' said Julia, 'any signs in you like the other two: but perhaps it's just your artfulness. One thing, Dolff is much nicer than he was before. As for Gussy——'

'We are not here to discuss either your brother or your sister, Julia, and I will not have it. Where are your books?'

'Janet, you have a dreadfully strong will. Mamma says so. I suppose you never would give in to another person; to do what they wanted, and not what you wanted yourself?'

'It does not look as if I had a very strong will,' said Janet, with a laugh, 'when you run on defying me, instead of getting out your books.'

'That's no answer,' said Julia. 'If Dolff asked you——'

'Come,' said Janet, 'this is going too far. I think the Wars of the Roses are much more interesting. You have never yet made out that

table showing how Henry the Seventh succeeded; and how it was so wise of him to marry Elizabeth of York. Come, you'll understand it all so much the better when you see how it comes——'

'As if I cared!' said Julia, opening her books with a sigh; 'they were all cousins, and the one that was strongest took everything, and when the other one got stronger he took it all back. I know exactly how it was; all cousins are like that. The very same thing happened with Mary Morgan, who is my cousin. All the toys used to be mine while I had Dolff, and Fred was away; but as soon as Fred came home, who was the biggest, he seized them all. I know it far better than any book could say.'

CHAPTER V.

PERHAPS it was Julia's question; perhaps it was the rapid seizure of her hand which she had not been able to prevent, which opened that self-discussion in Janet's mind. 'If Dolff asked you——' 'What?' she said to herself, 'what would Dolff ask?' She had been half pleased with his homage and her evident power over him in the dearth of other excitements—more than half pleased, pleasantly carried on by it with a laugh at him and his clumsy devotion, which was not unpleasant. She thought better of Dolff, on the whole, that he thought so well of her. It was the best trait she knew of him. Her first idea had been that he was a dolt, that

he was a vulgar, music-hall frequenting, loud, and foolish young man. But when she had become aware of his admiration, his subjugation, the reference to herself that was in everything he did, Janet could not help entertaining an improved opinion of Dolff. She laughed at him secretly with an amiable and complacent laugh, conscious that there was a great deal to be said for him. He was appreciative—his doltishness had disappeared—his manners had improved. Janet was quite conscious of liking him a great deal better than she had done at first, and she had no objection to allow him to continue on the same footing as long as he should be at home. She had found the quiet evenings, the warmth and friendliness, and the needlework, pleasant enough when she first came to St. John's Wood, having still all the novelty to amuse and carry her on, and the story of this new family to pick up and understand. But no doubt it soon would have ceased to be exciting had it not been for the entrance of Meredith upon the scene, with all the per-

adventures to which his appearance gave rise and the manner in which he had drawn her into the romance by those asides and confidences, which never were expressed in words, but which she could not help understanding.

And then Dolff. Janet did not feel, as Mrs. Harwood had indiscreetly said, that the sight of the pair 'philandering' had brought the water into her mouth. Meredith, with his confidences and the curious doubt she had of him, was too interesting for that. She did not envy Gussy, nor feel the least desire to be in the same situation. What sentiment she had on the subject was a troubled pity for Gussy; but even that only in the background; her curiosity and interest and doubt in respect to Meredith himself being her chief feelings. And Dolff, for a time, had only been an interruption to the other study. But now it was evident that matters were getting serious, and that it was necessary for Janet to take into consideration whither she was going. The ball was a great event in front of her, which might bring with it serious consequences. Balls

are but frivolous things, but yet they are sometimes fraught with events of the deepest importance. Miss Harwood, as we know, with ideas far from frivolous, looked forward to this merry-making as perhaps the most serious moment of her life. Janet had not the same feeling, but she was excited and a little disturbed. If Dolff should ask her—whatever he might have to ask: what would happen?

The reader is aware that Janet at the very outset of her career had been brought face to face with a similar problem, which she had solved very summarily without taking much time for thought. But the circumstances now were a little different. Dolff was young (too young, for he was only twenty-two): there was no disparity in that point of view: and whereas, in the first instance, the only drawback in refusing was the breaking of poor Dr. Harding's heart—a contingency at which Janet was disposed to laugh in the cruelty of her youth—the matter was complicated now by the possibility that she would herself suffer by the

necessity of giving up a situation that suited her, where she was comfortable and interested. This probability did not please her at all. To leave St. John's Wood, not to be able to follow the curious romance to its end, not to know how things arranged themselves between Gussy and Meredith, to be cut sheer off from that thread of story which it was so exciting to watch as it twisted itself out day by day—Janet was very unwilling to contemplate such a possibility.

And then there came upon her, as if blown upon the fresh winterly breeze which puffed in at her open window, the half-forgotten talk of Clover—the conversations that used to go on by the fire at Rose Cottage in the afternoon, when half-a-dozen ladies would drop in to tea. How severe they were upon a girl who was so fantastic as not to accept a good offer! How they would prophesy that she would never have such another—how they would ask indignantly what she expected! Janet seemed to hear them all talking together, hoping sarcastically

that Mary Brown would never repent her folly.

Dolff would have seemed to these ladies a good match. A young man who was at Cambridge, who was going in for the Bar, whose mother was so well off, and all the money his, though not to be inherited till he was twenty-five. What was Janet thinking of? they would say. What did she expect? Had she another string to her bow that she was so careless of this? And how could she tell that she would ever have another offer? She, a governess, with nothing to fall back upon, and no resource but to go from one place to another, so long as she pleased her employers or was wanted. Even Mrs. Bland, though she was so kind, would say the same thing. What did Janet expect?

She did not, as will be seen, fling off this new opening of fortune as she flung off Dr. Harding. To get herself provided for, established in life all at once, she knew now that this was something. And she reflected with a kind of pride on the triumph of concluding such a matter at once while the story of Gussy and Meredith

still dragged along, and in showing *him* that while he lingered and amused himself another made up his mind.

These ideas fluttered about, now one of them, now another, alighting upon the surface of her thoughts like snowflakes. The opposite arguments did not come in the same manner, probably because it was the opposite she held by, and they stood around her like fortifications round a citadel. It was the others, the temptations, which fluttered about her, and went and came.

'If Dolff should ask you——' To marry Dolff! 'Oh, never,' cried Janet to herself; 'oh, no, no,' with a keen conviction that it was impossible.

And then the temptations began to flutter about like snow. It was a serious thing to throw away for no reason—for no particular reason—a good offer, a good house like this, a good income, and all that is certain in life. And then, again, on the other hand—Janet lingered in the garden when Julia ran indoors, saying

she would follow instantly. She knew that Dolff was safely disposed of—that he could not come to trouble her, and a moment of solitude was delightful. She walked very quickly under the trees making the round. To be, or not to be? Oh, no; it was not so deep a question as that. To marry, or not to marry. Janet was well aware throughout that it was a foregone conclusion, and that nothing would really tempt her to marry Dolff: but she let her thoughts flutter about her, and pretended to discuss the question—not, however, with much faith in her own thoughts.

In the second round she extended her promenade a little without thinking, and came accordingly along the side of the wing. She looked up at the window, as was natural, and for the hundredth time asked herself how she could have ever fancied that she saw a face between the arching branches of the ivy. The boughs were so strong, the clusters of glossy leaves so thick, how would anyone be seen through? I need scarcely say that these arguments did not

shake her conviction in the least; and that she was as sure of having seen that face as of anything in her experience, notwithstanding that she argued so strongly that it was impossible. The ivy was like an old tree in thickness, great twisted hairy branches barring the window, the glistening dark leaves concealing everything, stopping the light. How could a man show through that?—particularly in moonlight, under a glare so dazzling and confusing? The whole side of the house looked completely shut up. The windows behind the ivy branches were encrusted with the dirt of years. There was no trace of habitation, no possibility of anyone being there. And as for the face at the window, what tricks fancy will play! It was very evident it could be nothing but that.

Under the wall was a flower border, in which there were some bare rose-bushes, some bulbs showing green points above the ground for spring flowering, some bushes of wallflowers for the same season, but looking very shabby after repeated frost. There was nothing in this to

attract anyone's attention: but scattered over them, lying on the drooping leaves of the plants and the damp brown soil, were a quantity of small specks of white which caught Janet's eye. She thought at first it might be the beginning flakes of a snowstorm—for the sky was very grey and lowering. On looking up, however, she saw that the atmosphere was still quite clear, though dull. Looking again, she saw that several of those white specks had lodged on the ivy upon the wall, and went forward to the flower border with some curiosity to examine what they were. There was no air, the afternoon was perfectly still, so it could scarcely be a windfall.

To her great astonishment, Janet found that these were little pieces of paper, covered with a large indistinct writing, but torn into such small pieces that it was scarcely possible to trace a single word. She gathered up a handful of them hastily, looking round to see if anyone was about, with a sense of doing something clandestine, though she could not tell why.

And, indeed, she had scarcely taken a dozen steps in the opposite direction when she heard other steps coming round the front of the house, and, looking back, saw Vicars, who seemed to be continually prowling about, and who, after a glance at the papers on the border, looked after her with a suspicious start, and finally followed her into the long walk which ran along one side of the garden. Janet instinctively concealed the bits of paper in her hands, and turned upon him before he overtook her.

'Do you want me? Has Mrs. Harwood sent for me?' she said.

'I can't say as she has, miss. Seeing you about, I would just like, if you please, to ask you a question. Have you seen anyone a-picking up pieces of paper about these walks?'

'Seen anyone—picking up pieces of papers? No. I have not seen anyone—there has been no one here but myself.'

'Ah!' said Vicars, drawing a long breath, and then again he looked at her keenly. 'As for yourself, miss—you've got sharp eyes—

maybe you've seen some of them papers blown about the walks.'

Janet persuaded herself afterwards that she did not tell a fib by premeditation. She answered, hastily,

'I have seen nothing about the walks but fallen leaves—there is no wind to blow anything about.'

'That's true enough,' said Vicars; then he added, 'It's a bit of an old copybook as someone has been tearing up. Missus can't bear a litter —that's why I asked you. Beg your pardon, miss; I hope it's no offence.'

'If you mean to me, I am not in the least offended,' said Janet, with her most dignified air, and Vicars, though with another searching look at her, turned away.

She watched him go back and collect carefully all the scraps in the border. Those she had seemed to burn her fingers with the impatience she felt to examine them: but in face of Vicars' suspicious looks she would not turn back and run in as she wished to do. She had to

make the whole long round sedately before she could take refuge indoors and in her own room. And by that time the afternoon had begun to grow dusk towards evening. She locked her door, and lighted her candle, with an excitement which made her temples throb, and then sat down at the table and began her task to piece the scraps together. It was by no means an easy task—no child's puzzle was ever so difficult—the bits of paper were very small, and of the most obstinately disjointed character. A few of them, a very few, fitted into each other, and the handwriting was large and sprawling, one word going over several lines: for the paper was ruled in lines, as if it had been, as Vicars said, a copy-book. To support this idea further, Janet found, after going over the scraps which she had been able to piece together, that the same words were repeated over and over, and that on several pieces which seemed to have formed the bottom of the page there were some scrawls that looked like a name. She deciphered, by degrees, 'I can't,' and 'I want,' and the

word 'out,' written in all kinds of letters, sometimes small and sometimes large.

The name at the end gave her still more trouble. She made out at last an Adol, Char—and then there came a piece of paper more triangular than ever, containing the following curious hieroglyphic—'esHar—w—' She pondered over this till the candle burned down and the dressing-bell rang. 'esHar.' What did it mean? She dressed hurriedly, with her mind still full of this problem. It only gleamed upon her what it was as she stood, looking in the glass, putting the last touches to her dress. Sometimes, to look at your own face in the glass is like looking into the face of an intelligent friend, and it sharpens your wits. 'esHar—w.' She spelt it over and over to herself—'e-s-h-a-r—w.' What did it mean?

At last Janet threw up her arms over her head and burst into a laugh, though she was alone—a laugh full of confusion and self-ridicule. Mean! Of course what it meant was as clear as daylight. Adol for Adolphus, or

Dolff; Char for Charles, with the two last letters joined on to the Harwood—Adolphus Charles Harwood. What could be more clear? She might have known that it must be Dolff's big, straggling hand. Janet laughed at herself till she cried, but subdued the sound, lest anyone should hear, and flung her scraps of paper into a box as if she had been playing at a letter game. Of course, that was what it was—an old copy-book of Dolff's inscribed with his name—Adolphus Charles Harwood—after the usage of the school-room. How could she have been such a fool? She thought of Catherine Morland in 'Northanger Abbey,' and blushed crimson and hid her face in her hands, though she was alone. How ridiculous she had made herself!—only, fortunately, nobody knew—not even Vicars knew.

There was not much music downstairs that night, for the time of the ball was now very near, and everybody was interested in talking it over—the people who were coming, and where 'Dolff's men' were to be put up, and all

the details. It had given the family a great deal of trouble, as Gussy had prophesied it would, and they liked to find a recompense for these fatigues and anxieties in endless discussions. Janet found an opportunity, while they were all busy with the box of programmes which had just arrived, of looking at the autograph upon Dolff's music. It was, to her surprise, not at all like the sprawling hieroglyphics of the copy-book; but then, to be sure, he must have been a child when he had written the others. The music was all inscribed 'A. Harwood' in a neat little, concise hand. He saw her looking at it, and came up to her.

'You are looking at those wretched old things of mine, Miss Summerhayes?'

'No; I was only looking at your name on it. You don't use your second name?'

'For a very good reason—I haven't got one. It's a ridiculous name, isn't it? I sign "D." always to my friends. But "A." is a good enough disguise. A great many fellows are Arthur, or Andrew, or Alfred, or something like

a man, so I creep among them. You never would suspect a man of being Adolphus, eh!' cried the young man, 'if you saw only A. standing for his name?'

'I don't think I should,' said Janet; 'but I thought you were Adolphus Charles.'

She had a little tremor in her voice as she spoke, which was half alarm at this betrayal of herself, and half-suppressed laughter, though she dared not laugh.

'Oh! no; I have no Charles in my name. I wish I had. Shouldn't I use it if I had the chance! You may laugh, Miss Summerhayes, but if you would only think how much nicer for a man it would be if his friends called him Charley instead of calling him Dolff!'

'What are you talking of, Dolff?'

Both Mrs. Harwood and Gussy had turned round at the sound of the name.

'Not much, mother. Miss Summerhayes thought I had Charles in my name, and I tell her I only wish I had.'

'How did Miss Summerhayes know?' said

Mrs. Harwood, with a faint, scarcely perceptible change of tone. 'I beg your pardon, Janet; but how did you know—about that name?'

'How could she know, mother, when it doesn't exist? It was only a mistake she made.'

'How did you know, Janet, we had that name—in the family?'

Mrs. Harwood repeated the question with an insistance which was not like her usual easy-going way.

'I suppose I must have—seen it somewhere,' Janet said, her colour rising.

She felt guilty; she did not know why. There was no harm in it. She might have said it was out of an old copy-book; but somehow she did not—scared by she knew not what.

Mrs. Harwood had been wheeled to that end of the room to see the programmes, and to examine some new arrangements Gussy had been making for the ball. She dropped out of her hand the pretty pink programme which she had

been holding, and called to her son to take her back to her place, with a change of mien which brought a chill over the party. Janet felt more and more guilty, though she did not know what she had done, nor why she could not confess frankly where she had got her information. The others soon recovered the momentary depression, and resumed their talk over the approaching event, but Janet stood at the piano, running over the notes of a waltz softly with one hand, and wondering why she should have produced, without intending it, so great an effect. Presently Mrs. Harwood called her, clapping her hands as she had a way of doing to secure attention. Janet hurried to her side. The old lady had recovered her composure, but she still looked grave.

'My dear,' she said, 'you will wonder that I was so startled. There was no reason. Of course you could know nothing. That was my husband's name.'

'Oh, Mrs. Harwood, I am so sorry. I can't think what made me ask. It was because most

people, I suppose, have more names than one: and Charles was the first that came into my head.'

It will be seen that Janet told a little fib again, but she said it in a hurry, and did not mean it, or at least this was how she afterwards explained it to herself.

'Then it was only what people call a curious coincidence,' said Mrs. Harwood, with a smile.

CHAPTER VI.

THE night of the ball arrived at last. It was a long time of coming to the impatience of Dolff and Julia: and even to Gussy, who was not impatient, who would rather have held it off a little when the day at last came, and to whom so many things were involved in the hours which would be but amusement to the rest. Nobody suspected what was going on under Gussy's tranquil looks. She was one of those people whom many think to be incapable of feeling at all. She had a force of resolution not to expose herself, not to let anybody know what she endured, which was equal to almost any trial. There are many women who possess this power, but it is

most frequently exercised to shield and cover the delinquencies of others. Gussy's reticence was only for herself; but strength of any kind is respectable; and if anyone had known the fever that was in her breast, the chance upon which the fortune of her life seemed to turn, and the absolute tranquillity with which, to all appearance, she prepared for the evening's pleasure, no doubt she would have earned the admiration of some and the respect of others.

But our best qualities, as well as our worst, remain for the most part blank to those who surround us, and nobody suspected either the trouble in which Miss Harwood was, or the empire she exercised over her own soul. Janet, perhaps, was the only member of the party who was in the least degree cognisant of it, but even Janet was chiefly aware, with a feeling of provoked sympathy, that Gussy, as she generally did, had dressed herself unbecomingly on an occasion on which the little, quick-witted governess divined she would have wished to look her best. Gussy was not clever in the matter

of dress. She arrayed herself in the lightest of tints and materials—she who was herself so colourless, who wanted something solid and distinct 'to throw her up.'

Janet had done her duty in this respect by the other young woman, who could scarcely now be called her friend, so conscious were both of a mist that had come between them. It was one of Janet's good qualities that she had no jealous feeling, but that unfeigned pleasure in dress which made her so anxious to see everybody else becomingly attired, that she was impatient of failure. She had given many hints and suggestions as to Miss Harwood's dress on this particular occasion, but they had not been attended to. And Gussy had enveloped herself in something that was not quite white nor yet any other colour, with the persistency common to persons who are without any real instinct in the matter; and, instead of looking her best, looked more colourless than usual.

Janet could scarcely restrain a cry of impa-

tience when they all met in the drawing-room, which had been cleared for dancing. If Gussy had but worn her own black gown, what a difference it would have made! But Gussy was altogether unconscious of that, as all the others were unconscious of the way in which her heart was beating under her *fade* and foolish dress.

Janet, for her part, had received her programme from Dolff, with his own neat little 'A. H.' written on a great many lines; but she was too wise to permit the son of the house to make himself and her remarkable. Janet had a great terror of what the opportunities of the evening might lead to, very different from that sentiment which moved Gussy. She managed to escape, if not with some other partner, then alone, anywhere, even going so far as to make a rush upstairs till some of the dances bespoken by Dolff were over. She was determined not to lay herself open to any comments in that respect, or to expose herself to the chances of what Dolff might say in the excitement of the evening. But she had no such terror of Meredith, who,

after he had done his duty in various directions, was so polite as to ask the governess for a dance. Nor was she alarmed by the eagerness with which he plunged into conversation, leading her away, when half the dance was over, to a quiet corner.

'I am sure you are tired,' he said; 'you have been dancing all the evening, and so have I. Come and let us talk a little. I never have a chance of half-a-dozen words with you, Miss Summerhayes.'

'That cannot matter much,' said Janet, 'for I don't suppose we have anything very particular to say to each other, Mr. Meredith.'

'You must, of course, speak for yourself; but you cannot for me, and I have a hundred things I want to say to you. We have never had a good talk but once, and that was the day I walked with you from the circulating library, when you were quite afraid to be seen with me.'

'Not in the least afraid to be seen with anyone,' said Janet; 'but it did not seem suitable

somehow. And as we are talking of that, Mr. Meredith, I don't think it's very suitable——'

Here Janet thought better of what she was going to say, and stopped short.

'What does not seem suitable? Tell me, I implore you! How can I regulate my conduct according to your wishes, which is my highest ambition, if you will not tell me what to do?'

'I have nothing to do with your conduct, Mr. Meredith. I don't understand why you should wish to sneer at me——'

'I—sneer! but you know you don't mean that. I sometimes try to secure your sympathy, I allow, when I'm at a particularly hard place. They say that the lookers-on see most of the game, and I soon saw in your eyes, if you'll forgive me, that you——'

'I don't see any game,' cried Janet, with indignation, 'and if you are playing one you ought to be ashamed of yourself; and, at all events, I will not be in your confidence!'

'Hush!' he said, 'don't be so fiery. If you get up and leave me you will make everybody

ask why, and we don't want to raise any talk, do we? Look there, Miss Summerhayes—for I must talk of something—look at that man Vicars. What a hang-dog face he has! Like a man that is up to some mischief, don't you think?'

'I don't like Vicars,' said Janet, hastily; 'he would like to be insolent, if he dared.'

'Insolent, the beast! You have only to give Dolff a hint,' said Meredith, with a laugh, 'and he'll soon put a stop to that. I should like, all the same, to know a little what's Vicars's mission in this house. Oh, I know he's an old servant, and all that. I have my little curiosities, Miss Summerhayes; haven't you? There are some things I should like to know.'

'I thought you must know everything,' said Janet; 'you are such a very old friend.'

Now Janet was bursting with desire to communicate to somebody her own wonderings and the things she had seen, or had imagined herself to see. She was held back by many things—by regard for the law which forbids you to talk to strangers of things you have observed in the

house in which you live: and also by a principle of honour, which is but feeble in such matters in most bosoms, and by a lingering sense of loyalty towards Gussy, whose property this man was—and by a general prejudice against making mischief. But, on the other hand, she was impelled to speak by her own curiosity and conviction that there was something to find out, and eagerness to communicate her discoveries. And then Meredith was not a stranger; and if there was anything to find out he had a right to know it; and, of course, as Gussy's husband he would know everything. Janet's heart began to beat with excitement. Should she tell him? She wanted so much to do it that she scarcely knew how to keep in the words.

'I am an old friend,' said Meredith. 'I have known them all my life; therefore I have a kind of right, don't you think, to want to know? And I am one of the very few men who come familiarly about the house, so if there was any way in which that fellow Vicars was taking them in, or playing upon them, I am just the person who

ought to be told, for I could take steps to put them on their guard.'

It was on this argument, which seemed so unanswerable, and especially applicable if Meredith became, as Janet assured herself was inevitable, the son of the house, that at last she spoke. After all, it did not seem as if she had very much to tell. She confided to him her suspicions that Vicars had somebody shut up in the wing whom no one knew about, and that she herself had seen—she was certain she had seen—a face pressed against the window-panes, visible between the branches of the ivy; and how, just below the same window, there had been the other day that little shower of scraps of paper, which looked as if they had been thrown out.

Meredith listened with the greatest eagerness. He leaned his elbow on his knee, and his head in his hand, looking up into her face, and shielding her thus from observation in her dark corner, so that even Gussy, passing by at a little distance on the arm of her partner, could not

make out who the lady was to whom he was talking, though the sight increased almost beyond bearing the agitation in her mind Meredith's eyes on Janet's face, so near, and the manner in which he surrounded her, shutting off the world, confused her and gave her a vague sort of guilt; but, after all, how could she have helped it? She could not have refused to dance with him. She could not refuse to sit down to talk, to sit out the Lancers which was then being played, and which Gussy was going in dutifully with her partner to dance. Any other girl whom he had asked would have done that, and how could Janet refuse? But there was no doubt that she felt a pang as Gussy, in her pale dress which did not become her, and with a look in her eyes dimly divined by this little interloper, passed into the bright room beyond to perform her duty dance.

Janet went on with her revelations after this episode. She had seen Vicars crossing the hall with a heavy tray covered with dainties very late one night, after everybody was in bed. She

had seen the door in the hall, which was said to lead to the wing which was believed to be permanently shut up, open to him——

At these words Meredith started up. They were quite alone in their corner—nobody was about. The dance was going on gaily—the ball-room crowded, a little hedge of men standing round the door.

'Everything is quiet,' he said, hastily; 'let us go and see.'

'Go and see—what?'

He drew her arm within his, with a smile upon her, which dazzled Janet and made her cast down her eyes. She was so startled that she was scarcely aware that he kept her hand in his as he led her along.

'We have five minutes,' he said, 'and there is nobody here. Let's go and see.' It seemed half a schoolboy frolic, half a righteous mission. He hurried her into the hall, which was deserted, enveloping her so in his shadow that Janet felt as if she had no longer any will of her own. 'Which is it?' he asked, bending

over her so that she felt his breath on her neck.

They spoke in whispers, and crowded together on their clandestine enterprise so that they seemed but one figure. She put out her hand, trembling, and touched the door.

Janet's heart had been beating loudly before. It jumped up now as if it would choke her when she felt the door move slightly under her hand. When Meredith added quickly the pressure of his fingers it swung open. He drew her in, scarcely conscious of what she was doing. 'Oh-h!' Janet breathed a low cry of excitement upon his shoulder. Whatever the discovery might be there was now no escape. He silenced her, pressing her against him. They were in a dark, narrow passage, which ended in thick curtains closely drawn, and was lighted by the feeblest spark of light.

'We must follow it on now,' he said, in her ear. 'Not a word—not a word.'

Inside the curtains was a door which opened outward, and admitted to a steep, straight staircase. Everything was dark, muffled, breathless.

They groped their way up this, and found before them another closed door at the top, which yielded also to pressure, moving noiselessly. Within this were curtains again, in which they both stumbled, unable at first to open or put them aside. But the circumstances were desperate, and somehow they made their way through. They found themselves then in a room lighted only by the window, which was the very window, covered with ivy, at which Janet had seen that old man's face. But the room was void and dark. They stood for a moment looking round, but, though they could see next to nothing, it was certain there was nobody there.

By this time Meredith's excitement had so grown that he forgot Janet. At least he dropped her arm involuntarily, and leaving her trembling, scarcely able to support herself, made a long step forward to where his keen eye had found out a crevice, through which came a faint ray of light. Once more he held back a curtain and pushed a door; then with a sudden, quick

movement, held out his hand to Janet. Her eyes by this time had become accustomed to the gloom, and she perceived that he called her. He caught her in his arm as she stole forward, and placed her before him. Their breaths came quick in the same suppressed cadence. Both were far too much excited for speech, even had they dared to speak.

This was what Janet saw. A room comfortably furnished, largely curtained, dark, heavy stuff, so far as she could see in her instantaneous glance, covering the walls, a fire burning cheerfully, a small, shaded light by the side of a large sofa, on which lay a man fast asleep—so fast asleep that the very air seemed slumbering over him. She fell back upon her companion with what, had she dared to utter it, would have been a cry. The pale old face, long and tragical, the crown of white hair, the long white beard, half hid by the great red coverlet which enveloped him, were the same which she had seen at the window. It was, then, no fancy, no trick of reflection. Janet for a moment, in her agita-

tion, was unconscious of all the circumstances round her. She gasped dumbly, paralysed, yet thrilling with wonder, terror, and dismay.

Meredith's face touched hers as he whispered 'Come away.' He almost carried her through the ante-room, the dark staircase, the faintly-lighted passage, lingering at the door for a moment to see that all was quiet. They came out into the hall, anxious but safe. The crowd was still about the door of the dancing-room, but the music bore witness that the dance was just at its conclusion. Meredith hurried Janet back to the sheltered corner which they had left for this quest.

'One moment: I must speak to you for one moment more,' he whispered behind a bush of evergreens, which concealed them entirely. 'You don't know how important this is—Janet have you got those papers——'

'The copy-book?'

'I don't believe it was a copy-book. Try to give them to me quietly the next time I am here, or send them—that would be the safest—

United Universities Club. Dearest, I can't say half I want to say to you to-night.'

'To me there is nothing to say,' said Janet, drawing away from him. 'I have forgotten myself in the excitement—but don't think, Mr. Meredith——'

'Yes, I will think,' he said. 'Don't warn me off, for you can't do it. I have thought of you since the first moment I saw you. Is it my fault if they take things into their heads, Janet?'

'I will not have you call me Janet,' she said, with angry vehemence.

'But I must. I never call you anything else —to myself—darling! We'll meet again before long, and be able to say everything to each other.'

He let her go suddenly, and in a moment had joined the crowd of the lookers-on, who had been awaiting the end of the Lancers, and now were scattering to permit the exit of the more dutiful couples who had been performing that now somewhat despised dance.

Janet seized the opportunity to fly upstairs to

the shelter of her own room, which she reached breathless and agitated. She could scarcely realise what had passed in this strange evening so full of excitement. Meredith's presumption—was it presumption? his unpardonable freedom of speech—but was it unpardonable? the confidences into which he had hurried her; the extraordinary discovery they had made together; the way in which he had assumed her consent and acquiescence, taking possession of her as if she belonged to him. Janet tried to be angry; she said to herself that it was detestable, unpardonable; that never more would she speak to him again; that, if *that* were true, then his behaviour to Gussy was villainous; and if it were false? Her breath came hard; her veins swelled as if they would burst. How dared he speak to her—look at her—hold her so? Janet saw herself in her glass, with eyes blazing, lips quivering, nostrils dilating, and wondered at herself. She could see that she had never looked like that before—never so brilliant, so much excited, or taken out of herself. Oh! how did he dare—he who was

as good as engaged to Gussy Harwood? It was *that* she thought of—not of the mysterious secret tenant of the wing. That strange habitation with its tenant had died out of her mind. She found herself thinking only of Charley—of whom? Good heavens! what had she to do with his name—of Mr. Meredith and his impertinence and presumption. He had told her to tell Dolff (with a laugh) of Vicars' impertinence; but what was that of Vicars to his? He had taken possession of her against her will. He had made her a traitor to the people whose bread she was eating. He had made her the instrument of humiliation to Gussy. Oh! would he go now and whisper to Gussy, and laugh with her at Dolff and the governess?

Janet clenched her hands and bit her lip till it almost bled. Was this what he would do? Tell Gussy perhaps that the governess was a silly little thing, and believed everything that was said to her—or was it Gussy that he would slight and scorn, after so long holding her in suspense? Janet felt that she abhorred Charley.

Oh! to think that his name should come to her lips without any intention, when she had nothing to do with it! and he had called her by hers—the insolent, the scoundrel, the deceiver! Janet wrought herself up into a passion, and raved at him within herself like a little fury: and then she suddenly changed her mood, and fell a-crying, soaking up the tears that would come with her handkerchief lest they should make her eyes red, and saying to herself 'Poor Charley!' from the bottom of her heart.

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE, all was going on merrily below, dance succeeding dance. The music was good, the floor was good. 'Dolff's men' had fully made up the number of partners necessary, and left a few over to support the doorway lest it should fall. Dolff himself, in the midst of the gay crowd which had been collected to give him pleasure, wandered about distractedly, seeking Janet, but unable to find her, and teasing Gussy, who had certainly enough to worry her without his constant questions, by demands where Janet was.

Gussy had plenty of her own affairs on hand. The hours were passing—those hours which she had felt to be so full of fate—and nothing was

happening; and her heart was sore with unfulfilled expectations. To think that while her mind was thus torn asunder, while she was almost unconsciously, but with the keenest anxiety, watching for one figure in the crowd, yet carrying on the necessary conversations, listening to whatever nonsense might be said to her, laughing at the smallest jokes, presenting generally the aspect to all around her of a disengaged and cheerful spirit, while suffering an endless torture of suspense—to think that then Dolff should assail her with his questions:

'Where is Miss Summerhayes?' 'Have you seen Miss Summerhayes? This is our dance. Where has she disappeared to? What has become of her?' Gussy, have you seen Miss Summerhayes?'

Gussy tried to push off her brother's inquiries with trifling answers, but finally found that this last straw of provocation was more than she could bear.

'I am not Janet's keeper,' she said, with angry impatience. 'You had better attend to

your guests, Dolff, and let Miss Summerhayes look after herself.'

'By Jove!' said Dolff, who was almost as exasperated as she, 'I knew you were selfish, Gussy, but never so bad as that.'

They glared at each other for a moment, both at the end of their patience, distracted, abandoned, left to themselves. It was a kind of relief thus to snarl at each other, to let out their offence and trouble, persuading themselves each that the intolerableness of the other was the cause. But Gussy's case was by far the harder of the two. Janet had given Dolff no right to resent her absence—but the other—the other! It did poor Gussy good for a moment to be able to be angry with Dolff.

When Meredith came to her for the third dance she had given him, the two first of which he had danced conscientiously all through without a word that could not be breathed in the course of the twistings and whirling, Gussy declared she was too tired to dance any more.

'Then let us sit it out together,' he said; 'there is a nice corner I know where we may be as private as if we were all alone, yet see everybody—if you wish to see everybody. I think it must have been arranged expressly for you and me, there are two such comfortable chairs.'

'You have put that corner to use before,' said Gussy.

'Several times,' he answered, promptly; 'one must do something with one's partner if, for example, she doesn't dance well, or there is any other drawback. I have been conducting myself more or less like the son of the house to-night. You may think me presumptuous to say so, but I think, after Dolff, I have almost the best right to look after your guests, Gussy, and see that it goes off well. Do you allow my claim?'

In that dark corner which he had occupied a little before with Janet it was not possible to see the warm blush, like a fresh tide of life, which came over Gussy's face; but something

of that warm, sweet flood of consciousness could be made out in the melting of her voice.

'Oh, yes,' she said, with a happy tremor, 'you have known us longer than anyone here—almost all your life.'

'All our lives,' said Meredith, with a little emphasis on the pronoun. 'I can't remember the time when we didn't know each other, can you, Gussy? There is nothing else can come so near as that. And I have been taking it upon me to entertain your guests as if they were my own.'

'Thank you very much for that, Charley.'

'Oh no, you need not thank me. You will do as much or more for me when the time comes—when I shall have guests of my own. But I am not well enough off to think of that yet. A little patience and then my turn will come.'

'I thought,' said Gussy, 'you were telling mamma the other night——'

'Oh, that I have made a beginning. Yes, I have made a beginning; and you may be sure it will not be my fault if it does not go on: a year

perhaps, or so, and I shall feel that I am justified—ah, Gussy, I wish that time was come.'

'You must not insist on too much,' said Gussy, softly; 'to begin is the great matter.'

'So it is; but I must have the means to get a nice house and everything suitable before—— When it comes to having guests, you know, there must be something to give them, and—better things even than that. Ah, me! waiting is slow work.' Gussy echoed the sigh from the bottom of her heart. 'But I hope there's a good time coming,' continued Meredith, with a smile, putting his hand upon Gussy's, and giving it a warm pressure.

He looked many things which he did not say, and poor Gussy sat in a sort of trance of mortified happiness, feeling herself put back, checked, as if it were she who was over-eager and impatient, yet so assured of his tenderness, so moved by the highmindedness of his determination to have everything worthy of her before he should ask her to share his fate, that her heart melted within her in answering tenderness and consent.

No, she would never, could never doubt him more. His hand laid upon her hand was not enough for the response she was so ready to give: but he knew and trusted her, as she felt she ought always to have known and trusted him. And there was a moment's silence, to Gussy more eloquent than any words; a sort of noiseless betrothal, binding them to each other till the time for full disclosure and explanation should come. He stooped down at last and kissed her hand as if his feelings were getting too much for him, and then broke into remarks upon the dancers, who were once more streaming out into the cooler space at the end of the waltz. He called her attention to two or three, and made her laugh. She felt no longer any difficulty in being amused.

'But I am afraid I must go soon,' she said; 'I am engaged for the next dance.'

'Sit close,' said Meredith, 'and the man will never find you. Dolff's men are all as blind as bats. They know nobody, and they go prowling round trying to recognise some girl they

have only seen for a moment. There is one who has begun his round already, peering at everybody. I hope he is not your man?'

'Perhaps he is,' said Gussy, drawing further back; 'I don't know him any more than he knows me.'

'Then you had far better stop with one who does know you, and—something more,' said Meredith. 'There! he has passed and you are safe. Ah, so here is old Vicars again! Where does he always appear from, whenever you want him, that old man?'

'He appears—from where he lives, Charley. You know mamma lets him have the coachman's room in the wing.'

'That wing has always seemed a most mysterious place to me. How do you get into it? Do you strike upon a trap-door, and does he start up through it like a jack-in-the-box?'

'Nonsense,' said Gussy. 'There is a door at the back, as I am sure you must have seen.'

Her tone was quite simple and unembarrassed, and Meredith for a moment was silent. He went on again, however, immediately.

'There must be some nice rooms up there. I can't think why you never use them. Almost enough for a young *ménage*. For Dolff and his wife, for instance, if he was to make a match with Miss Summerhayes, or even——'

'Charley, I wish you would not always make fun of those two. There is no chance whatever of Dolff making a match with Miss Summerhayes. My mother would be furious; and it is really unkind to Janet, who, I am sure, has not the least idea——'

'Well, my dear Gussy, well, I'll say nothing more; but if Dolff is the person that has the idea, so much the safer is it to come about. You know your mother never denied him anything. And the wing looks as if it could put up a pair of people famously. It is a great pity to leave it without use.'

'Mamma does make some use of it,' said Gussy; 'but,' she added, after a pause, 'there is not so much room as you think.'

'I know what use I should put it to if it were mine. I suppose Mrs. Harwood keeps the

lumber in it. I should clear away all that ivy, and open the windows, and turn out the rubbish, and then—— Ah, well, I must put away all these dreams for the next year.'

Gussy sat with one hand still in his, with her heart full of happiness, yet conscious of something wanting. She was melted beyond expression by his tone, and by all that he said or inferred but did not say. She was not even aware at the moment of what it was that was wanting. The ache was calmed. She was subdued and charmed away into an enchanted land. To have less than perfect faith in him would have been an offence against every tradition of her heart, and yet——

Meanwhile, Dolff was rushing everywhere, winding his way among all the groups, seeking Janet.

'Mother, have you seen Miss Summerhayes? Where is Miss Summerhayes? The next is our dance' (it was the second or third which he had thus described), 'and I can't find her anywhere. Ju, where is Miss Summerhayes?'

'She must have run up to her room. Perhaps she tore her dress. Perhaps she is mending up somebody else's gown. Perhaps she was tired.'

These were the explanations that were rained upon him, till Dolff became desperate. He seized Julia by the arm, and conducted her perforce to the foot of the stairs. Julia was enjoying herself very much, dancing every dance, and determining in her own mind that no force should get her to bed before everything was over. She was very indignant, and struggled as Dolff rushed her through the room without the least regard for her opinion.

'Go and fetch Miss Summerhayes. Tell her it's our dance, and I'm waiting. Go and fetch Miss Summerhayes, Ju.'

'But it's my dance as well as yours,' said Julia. 'I'm going to dance with one of your men—the man with the red hair. Oh, it's a shame! If Janet went away it must have been because she was tired. I won't go! Oh! I won't go!'

But there were some points on which Julia was constrained to yield. Dolff was very good-natured, but there were moments when nothing was to be done with him. She was finally compelled to obey, and flew like an arrow from the bow upstairs and to the locked door of Janet's room, against which she threw herself in her impatience.

'Janet, you're to come directly,' cried Julia. 'Dolff says it's his dance. You're to come directly, or else I shall lose mine, for I daren't go back without you, and my partner will get some one else. Janet, Janet, come away!'

After a minute the door opened, and Janet came out. She was wiping away the tears from her eyelashes, but, notwithstanding these tears, she looked so resplendent that Julia was dazzled.

'What have you been doing to yourself? Crying generally makes one's nose red, but you look as if you were all made of diamonds,' said the girl. 'Come along, come along. I shall

lose my dance, and it will be all because of you.'

Dolff was standing impatient at the foot of the stairs.

'Oh, here you are at last, Miss Summerhayes,' he cried. He held out his arm for her hand, and led her away hurriedly. 'You have almost spoilt my night for me,' he cried; 'where have you been? I did not get up a dance, and rummage up men, and all that, for you to hide yourself upstairs.'

'But I did not want you either to give a dance or to rummage up men,' said Janet, with a laugh.

'I know you don't care,' he said. 'It is nothing to you that it's all as dull as ditchwater to me when you are away: and now we must dance when I wanted to talk. I have a hundred thousand things to say, and I quite calculated upon to-night for that: for I can't talk to you at all most days. Let's dance and get it over, and then we can go away somewhere and talk.'

But Janet did not want to be talked to by Dolff. She would not let him off a single round, but danced till the very last bar. And poor Dolff got out of breath easily, and could not talk while he was dancing. He did not dance very well. He was not very fond of it, he allowed, on ordinary occasions, and he was most anxious to break off now. When at last the waltz was over, he hurried her off to find a corner somewhere—one of those which he had himself arranged so carefully for the accommodation of stray pairs of wanderers, and in which he had imagined himself pouring out his heart to Janet. But, to his wrath and dismay, Dolff found that everyone was filled. He made a hurried round, holding Janet's hand tightly within his arm, to keep her from slipping away. But wherever Dolff had placed a couple of chairs consecrated to himself and the lady of his affections, there were a frivolous pair established before him—the gentleman lolling with his legs crossed, the lady sitting prim beside him—the most uninteresting, the most prosaic of couples.

Dolff set his teeth when he came to the end and found no place.

'Will you come and have some tea?' he said, dolefully, 'or an ice, or something? As every nook is filled, it must be quiet there. Oh, Miss Summerhayes, this is not what I hoped: I have been looking forward to it so long, and there is not a spot where you can sit down.'

'Really, I don't want at all to sit down,' said Janet; 'let us walk about. We can talk just as well as if we were sitting down. And I am not tired.'

'No, it is not all the same,' said Dolff. 'We can talk, I suppose; but not about what I wanted, Miss Summerhayes—about the ladies in white and the ladies in blue, perhaps, and who is flirting and who is not, and the man with the red hair, and all that. That is what ladies talk about between the dances; but that's not my style, Miss Summerhayes.'

'Is it not?' said Janet, 'it seems very innocent talk.'

'Innocent enough—meaning nothing,' said

Dolff, with scorn; 'like what we talk about in the evenings, when we're all together, and you scarcely say anything at all. I hoped we might have had a little real conversation to-night.'

'I am very sorry,' said Janet. 'I fear it was my fault, but I forgot. I am very fond of dancing. Who is that lady that looked at you so significantly, Mr. Harwood?'

'Oh,' said Dolff, with a groan, 'I am booked to her for the next dance. And there are those infernal fellows—I beg your pardon, Miss Summerhayes—beginning to tune up!'

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARLEY MEREDITH walked home from St. John's Wood to his chambers, which were in one of the streets about Berkeley Square, between two and three o'clock in the morning. It was in the week between Christmas and the New Year, when the fashionable parts of London were very quiet, but the other parts—the domestic quarters, so to speak, where people live all the year round—more lively than usual. Yet it is needless to say that he had on the whole a quiet walk; and it was a long one—a capital opportunity for thinking, which is an exercise that often goes on best when it is accompanied by physical movement, and the sensation of the fresh air in one's face.

Meredith had spent an exciting night. Had it been nothing but the two interviews above recorded, he would not have been without something to think of, and the consideration of the fertile crop of embarrassments and conflicting questions which no doubt would spring from them might have occupied him not unprofitably for an hour or two. He had gone further in one way than he had ever done before, having deliberately deceived Gussy and given her to understand that within a definite period he would present himself as an avowed suitor for—nay, claimant of her hand. In the passing thought he gave to this subject he said to himself that it was silly to have indicated a definite time. Yet, as nobody could prophesy what a year might bring forth, there was perhaps but little harm, and a hundred things might happen in the meantime to blow all that nonsense away. And he had also committed himself in respect to Janet, for whom he felt a real inclination as much resembling love as anything he knew of. Yes, if circumstances

permitted, if it should turn out to be anything but the last folly to a man in his position, he felt that he should like to carry off that little girl, to marry her, and pet her, and be amused by her quick understanding and her piquant looks. She was not too rigid about duty and so forth, though she took upon her that little schoolmistress's manner and reproved him for his levity.

It was perhaps not quite the most appropriate thing she could have done to betray the secrets of the house, and help him to the means of satisfying a long-smouldering curiosity; but it was very clever of her to find out, and very engaging as well as serviceable to choose him for the confidant of her discoveries. Poor little thing! He felt that henceforward his attentions to Gussy, which it would now less than ever suit him to break off, would plant thorns in the bosom of the governess, which was a pity, for she was a nice little thing, far more tempting than—— But these thoughts were all disposed of before Mr. Charles Meredith got to the end

of the street; or at least before he got to the boundaries of St. John's Wood: and a much more important matter filled the foreground of his thoughts.

To enter into a history of the Harwood family at this period of our story would be too great a tax upon the reader, and it may be enough to say that this most respectable family had not been altogether so spotless as was supposed by the respectable inhabitants of St. John's Wood. There was a break in the tradition, and that a very recent and important one. The husband of Mrs. Harwood and father of her children had been one of those bold speculators who often ruin whole communities. When a number of bubbles burst which he had been instrumental in blowing about the world it had been necessary for Mr. Adolphus Harwood to disappear; and he had done so, leaving but one feeling of pity for his wife and young children, and for his father—an old man, who was said to be bowed down to the dust by his son's iniquities.

After a while, though the interval was one of

several years, information was received that he had died in Spain, and imperceptibly things mended for the family. His father being dead, Dolff became without any trouble the legitimate heir of the little entailed property upon which his grandfather lived, and the money matters of the house in general were cleared up, though I cannot explain how, having small knowledge of such subjects. It was found that Mrs. Harwood was not so badly off as had been supposed. She had some money of her own, which it was said formed the greater part of her living, and there were other resources of which nobody knew any particulars except, it is to be hoped, her man of business. She had at once rejected any quixotic notion of giving up what she had for herself and her children to satisfy the creditors of her husband. It would not have been enough to give them a pittance all round, and in the meantime she and her son and the girls would be added to the army of the destitute without doing anybody good. Some people think differently on such matters, but Mrs. Harwood had

never wavered in her determination, and in general her conduct was at least not disapproved by her friends, who thought her an excellent woman of business and as full of integrity and steadiness as her husband had been the reverse.

These things had happened when the children were very young, and they were now forgotten, save in the tenacious memories of a few who had suffered through the failure of Mr. Adolphus Harwood, and who did not fail to bear a certain grudge against his family. It had all taken place at a distance, in Liverpool, where his business was, and where failures and ruin are commonplace matters such as occur every day; and their home where old Mr. Harwood lived was in North Wales, far away from any communication with St. John's Wood.

Mrs. Harwood had never lived in that house, which had been let from the period of her father-in-law's death, and was not known much in the neighbourhood. She had been nearly fifteen years in St. John's Wood, where she had soon become known as a liberal supporter of the

parish charities and an acquisition to the neighbourhood in every sense of the word; and where nobody inquired into the family history of an agreeable widow, very well off, and with nice children. Now the description of the household was changed—nice young people with an agreeable mother was how they now presented themselves to the knowledge of the world: and any little episodes that had happened in Liverpool or in the wilds of North Wales were totally unknown.

Meredith, however, was an exception to this ignorance. He was a Welshman. He had known them all his life, and he knew everything about them. It had been at first unpleasant to Mrs. Harwood to acknowledge his claims, for she preferred to ignore altogether their previous circumstances. But, seeing that it was impossible to shake him off, she had taken the part of making the best of him and speaking freely to him of relations and connections like a woman who had nothing to conceal. Meredith had friends who were well off, if he was not, for

the present, very well off himself; and when it became apparent that there was a mutual inclination between him and Gussy, Mrs. Harwood was glad of it, partly because his father had been one of the sufferers by her husband's failure, and might thus be partially recouped for his losses, and partly because Meredith's mouth would thus be effectually stopped, and no revelations need be apprehended from him—though, as she sensibly remarked, 'What does any scandal matter after fifteen years?'

Meredith's motives were perhaps more difficult to read. They had indeed been easy enough at first, for he had really liked Gussy, and had felt her to be as good a match as he could aspire to. Latterly, however, several circumstances had struck him as strange in the house with which he was so familiar. They had been scarcely of note enough to call for any consideration singly; but put together they had awakened a suspiciousness not unnatural in a mind trained to the complexities of the law.

Had he been ignorant of the history of the Harwoods; had he been altogether without the tradition of animosity which lingers in the mind of a man who has a hereditary injury in his thoughts, it is probable he would not have remarked these little incidents. The chief of them was Vicars, whose countenance seemed one of evil omen to the young man. He had come by degrees to the belief that there was something in the house to be found out.

Nothing, however, had prepared him for Janet's extraordinary revelations and for the discovery more extraordinary still which he had himself made. It was this which he turned over in his mind, viewing it from every side, considering it in every possible light, as he walked briskly along the long line of silent streets. It seemed a thing almost incredible that an unsuspecting family could have a man hidden in their house with such elaborate precautions, shut up in rooms which were given out to be uninhabitable, yet surrounded with comforts, kept from all air and vision yet manifestly cared

for—a mystery in the midst of the commonest matter-of-fact details of life.

The face which he had seen, though but for a moment, communicated no idea to Meredith's mind. It was not like anyone whom he had ever seen before. The long white hair, the long pallid countenance, was more like those of a hermit in the desert than of a dweller in an ordinary English house.

The eagerness with which the young man had followed up the mystery had fallen somewhat blank when he got to the climax and saw the cause of all. The thread which he had seemed to hold in his hand broke off short. He had not known or been able to imagine to what it might lead, yet had associated it somehow with the story of the family, and expected it to throw some light upon that. But the light he had been hoping for seemed suddenly to go out as he gazed through the curtains at this strange old man. Who was he? What connection could he have with the family in whose house he was hidden?

Was it Vicars who was responsible—Vicars, who was the representative of mystery in the house —the old servant who was no longer a servant? Could this be some private undertaking of his own of which not even Mrs. Harwood was aware?

But when Meredith thought of the curtains, the softly-moving noiseless spring doors, all left, no doubt, that Vicars at a moment's warning might rush back to his patient, or his prisoner, or his victim—which was it? he was again stopped suddenly as by a blank wall of impossibility. Vicars could not have fitted up the rooms with all those elaborate precautions. He could not without Mrs. Harwood's knowledge have arranged everything for secrecy and at the same time for comfort in that way. Was it then some one whom Mrs. Harwood was hiding? But whom? But whom?

Gussy and Janet and all the embarrassments connected with them died away from Meredith's mind as this problem presented itself to his intelligence. Who was it? That curious cur-

tained room—it suddenly flashed upon his mind that it might be a padded room prepared for a lunatic: and this seemed for a moment to throw an illusive light upon the problem, but only for a moment: for he could not think that Mrs. Harwood would permit Vicars to harbour a lunatic in her house, in the near neighbourhood of her children; and who could it be whom she could shut up like that in lawless disregard of all rules? Nobody. There was not a madman in the family that he had ever heard of.

This last idea, however, seized upon Meredith with greater force as he considered. He remembered the cry which he himself had heard more than once, and which had been put aside with careless explanations as something which was to be heard from time to time from a neighbouring house, or from the streets, or a shriek from the railway, or the effect of the wind when it blew in certain directions. He remembered even to have asked, 'Is there any private asylum near?' and how it had been

suggested by some one that there was somebody out of his mind next door. He had said that in that case he hoped the people next door were aware that it was unlawful to keep a maniac capable of uttering cries like that in an unauthorised house.

This forgotten conversation suddenly surged up before him as if it had been laid up in his memory for future use. Was the man mad? Was it Vicars who had him in charge, backed up by his mistress, injudiciously kind, or was it she who was the prime mover and Vicars only the instrument? He puzzled about this insolvable question, turning it a long time over and over in his brain, until at last he came back to the fact that even were this matter solved to his full satisfaction it would leave him as much in the dark as before. For who was the man? This, after all, was the only thing that it was of any importance to know.

Meredith made a long excursion as he walked along into all the connections of the Harwood family of whom he had ever heard. He was

something of a genealogist, and he had the excellent memory of a country-bred individual for all the cousins, and brothers-in-law, and connections generally of people near home. No; he could think of nobody related to the family on either side who had been mad or who had disappeared or failed to be accounted for. There was nobody. It could not be a mere connection, a far-off friend, who was thus cared for. It must be some one whose life was of importance, for whom secrecy was necessary; whose madness was either to be concealed under a pretence of absence, or who was so near in love that to retain his custody the law was transgressed and defied.

But there was no such person, none. Everybody that had to do with the Harwoods was respectable, known, above suspicion, except the scoundrel of a husband who had died so many years ago. Could it be that the widow, already in middle age when her husband died, had loved some other man, and perhaps secretly married, or at least taken him into her

house when attacked by the dreadful malady?

Meredith was in a very silent bit of the way when he came to this hypothesis, and its effect upon him was such that he stopped short and laughed aloud. Mrs. Harwood, the most irreproachable of women and mothers, more than middle-aged, never moving out of her wheeled chair! That she should have a postscriptal romance—a love-affair in her fifties: and that the man should go mad—of love probably—and be guarded thus as the apple of her eye! She seemed to rise before him in all her comfortable ease and motherliness—poor lady! not able to walk—to rebuke the wild imagination. He laughed, but then all at once became grave again: for that same easy-minded woman, the respectable mother, the elderly mistress of so correct a household, must be in the mystery one way or another. She it must be who had settled and arranged the whole elaborate business. It could not be Vicars, who was a manservant in no way above the level of his class. He could not have done it; could not have the

means to do it, or the knowledge. The mistress of the house must be involved. Her purse and her brain must be in it, whoever the mysterious patient or prisoner was. Who was the man? Beyond that question Meredith, with all his acuteness, could not go.

What a strange sight it was, looking in at him through the curtains! Meredith said to himself that the man must have been drugged to lie in such a deep stupor of sleep. Something must have been given to him to keep him quiet, to make it possible to fill a house in which such an inmate was, with music and the sound of the dancers' feet and the hum of a lively crowd. And the incredible rashness, temerity, of doing so—of carrying on all the gaieties of life in a house occupied by such a spectre, on the other side of the wall only from the unconscious merrymakers! It was like a woman to do that, with a regardlessness of all consequences, a want of natural logic which belonged only to women: for everybody surely must see that one time or other such a thing must be found out.

Nothing in the whole matter was so certain as that—that one time or other it was bound to be found out. It was like a woman to do it: but even a woman, one would have thought, possessing such a secret would shut her house up and keep society at least at arm's length. But no; on the contrary, all sorts of pleasant things went on in the house. It was open to all the friends of the young people, who visited it, stayed in it, came there as freely as to the most commonplace of houses. And all the time that man shut up in the wing! Any one of them might have pushed open the door at some careless moment as Janet and he had done, and found his or her way upstairs. Any one of them might have seen the spectre, so notable as he was in appearance; not a face to forget. And what then?

But Mrs. Harwood, with the incredible inconsequence of a woman, had ignored all that. No doubt Vicars, to spare himself trouble, had got into a way of leaving the door unfastened, the spring uncaught, to save himself trouble. And

they thought they never would be found out. They gave dinners and dances and asked all sorts of people to come and pass within sound of the maniac. They might drug him, but they could not drug the spectators, who, one time or other, as sure as Nemesis, must have found out —as Charley had done.

But who was the man?

CHAPTER IX.

JANET had been so quickly summoned downstairs after her strange adventure that she had no leisure to think it over, until, about the time when Mr. Meredith set out on his walk, she escaped upstairs. Meredith had been the very last to go away, he had stayed for the little family supper which the house-party had made after the guests were gone. He was evidently regarded, in short, entirely as one of the family, and in that capacity claimed Mrs. Harwood's applause for his exertions in making everything 'go off.'

'I have danced with all the plainest women,' he said, 'and taken at least three dowagers

in to supper. I ought to be very much petted now to make up.'

Mrs. Harwood looked from him to Gussy uncertain what to reply. But Gussy did not meet her mother's eyes, as she most certainly would have done had there been anything to tell.

'Oh, yes, you have been of great use,' she said, 'I don't know what we should have done without you. But I don't believe in such magnanimity as that. And you ought to be more civil about the dowagers when you are talking to me.'

'You are not a dowager—you are the head of the house,' Meredith said, bending over her affectionately to say good-night.

It was not possible that Janet could be otherwise than on the watch, considering her own share of his attentions during the evening. He had cast a laughing glance at her when he spoke of the plain women, and when he turned to leave the house he shot another look of leave-taking, tender yet laughing too, over the head

of Julia, who was still at supper, consuming as many forbidden dainties as was possible in the short space of time that remained. Meredith put his hand on Julia's shoulder, which she flung off with a rapid twist, and said good-night to Janet with his eyes, so that nobody could see; and then he turned round with a laugh, complaining that all his civilities to Ju were without effect. Gussy, who was pleased by this supposed attempt to conciliate her young sister, accompanied him with Dolff to the door. And Janet could not but wonder what kind of farewell would take place there, with something between mirth and misery in her heart.

Oh, he was not true. It was certain that he was not true: but we do not somehow condemn the man who cheats another on our account, as we denounce him when he deceives us on account of another. The two things are different. He should not perhaps have pretended to be affectionate to Julia in order to be at liberty to look love at Janet; but the expedient prompted Janet to laugh. There is always something

that tempts the lookers-on to laugh in a lover's wiles. And the person who is preferred is apt to pardon and take such deceits lightly. How could he otherwise have found it possible to give her that parting look? And Julia's wrench of her shoulder made Janet laugh in spite of herself. How ridiculous of the girl to suppose that it was for her he did that!

And, to tell the truth, Janet could not think of the leading incident of the night for the shadow of these other things which pushed in front as if they were more important. What he had said to her—what he had looked, which was more than what he had said, the touch of his hand, the curious union that had been formed between them by their mutual discovery, that discovery which was owing to Janet, and which her observations had alone made possible—all these things were in her mind rather than the discovery itself. When she tried to think of it she found herself thinking of him, and going over and over his words and his looks, and every particular of that so confidential and

lover-like talk which had taken place under the shadow of the evergreens. What would Gussy have said if she had seen them sitting there? What would she have thought if she had heard them?

It gave Janet a keen prick of pleasure, of gratification, and trouble to think that the governess should be placed so much above the young lady of the house. Janet did not know what would come of it, or if anything would come of it, or if she were to blame or not. But, in the meantime, she could not help enjoying the triumph. It was not Gussy he cared about, who was so much better off, but her, little Janet the governess. She forgave him his falseness—was not everything to be forgiven to a sudden love springing up in a man's heart when hitherto he had been giving himself up to consideration of what was best to be done in the way of a respectable marriage? She could not get these incidents out of her mind.

When she tried to think of the other matter, the thing which Meredith was studying so in-

tently on his way home, her mind eluded that subject and came back and back to the other, the more interesting, the subject which made her youthful heart beat. She had been much excited once by her own discoveries, by the face at the window, and indeed by the scraps of paper, until she had discovered as she thought that they were only from a copy-book; and it was inconceivable how little she cared now for this far more important discovery. But then there were things more important, events more exciting to Janet's little self, which came in the way. Her heart had suddenly been roused within her, a new life had opened before her. It was not noble, nor did it come with that elevating and purifying effect which a first love so often exercises, making all beautiful and excellent things congenial to the awakening spirit in the first fervour of that new emotion.

Janet felt guilty, she had a breathless sense of something secret, forbidden, in her excitement and happiness. The best she could feel was the mischievous clandestine pleasure of a

child in baulking some little rival, and triumphing over some one who had been elevated above her. She did not dare to think of Gussy, save in a ludicrous sense, as being so silly as to be taken in. Oh, how silly she was not to see that his looks, his secret inclinations, were not for her, that ever since Janet appeared upon the scene it was towards her that his thoughts had turned! She thought of Gussy only in this way, scorning her for being deceived; and there was nothing softening, ameliorating, or ennobling in Janet's *vita nuova*. It was made up of clandestine communications, secret looks, communings in dark corners. There had been only one of these, and yet she felt as if it had been going on for years. And she did not know what would come of it, or if anything could come of it. He had stepped into a lover's place without, in so many words, telling her that he loved her; without that proposal of marriage which is the inevitable formula of love to an English girl. He had said nothing about all that. Janet did not know what he intended, or

if he intended anything; but this only made her heart beat all the more.

Thus two young women in that seemingly tranquil house retired to their rooms with hearts high-beating, moved to their inmost depths by Charley Meredith, who was not in the least worthy of the agitation of either, not even of Janet's half-guilty agitated excitement which she thought love, and certainly not of the emotion which made Gussy Harwood hide her face in her hands, in humiliation and misery which all the sweetness of their recent interview could not overcome. It was sweet: and his implied assurance of the cause that kept him silent, and certainty of a definite term to the suspense, had flooded her being with happiness for the moment; but by the time she had gained the privacy of her own room, and the excitement was over, Gussy's heart once more had sunk into the depths. To wait in this humiliating way till he should signify his pleasure, to be dependent upon him for something like life itself, to attend like a handmaiden on his leisure

and his choice of a time and manner of signifying his will—all this filled Gussy with humiliation and shame, still more deeply felt in that her consciousness was pervaded by it, and she felt, even while she revolted, that her happiness was in his hands, and that she could not escape. He was not a man of great qualities, there was nothing in him to make him worthy of being the arbiter of a life. And yet, so he was.

Janet went to bed, but she found that, with all these fumes of excitement hanging about her, she could not sleep. If she dozed for a few minutes she was again with Meredith, walking along wonderful dark passages, peering through half-opened doors, seeing dreadful visions—sometimes of coffins and dead people, sometimes of threatening faces looking out upon her

In the end Janet jumped out of bed again and lighted a candle. She had suddenly thought she heard some one touch the handle of her door, and a sudden vision—the face of the old man with his white beard seemed to spring out of the darkness before her. After all,

there were but a few doors between them, doors which were sometimes left unsecured. What if, waking like herself in the middle of the night, the prisoner should find a practicable way as she had done, and come out and pass through her door as she had done through his? The impression of some one standing beside her bed was so strong upon her in the dark, that Janet made but one spring to the opposite side, and trembling, managed, though with difficulty, to strike a match.

The light relieved her from that sickening spasm of terror. There was nobody there—of course she knew there could be nobody there: but it was impossible to think of going to sleep again, thrice impossible to return to the darkness and once more imagine stealthy steps about the room and the pallid face bending over her. She put on a dressing-gown, and, taking out the scraps of paper, began with more leisure and real pains to put them together. Now that she knew it was not Dolff's name that was written at the bottom of the page, the sense of

mystery returned to her mind. It seemed impossible that his father's copy-books should be still in being, or that it could be of any importance who saw them.

Janet shivered with cold, but it was better than lying trembling in the dark, thinking that the old man of the wing was walking about the room. And she had promised to send the bits of paper to Meredith. She put them all together, piecing them as well as she could. Sometimes she could only join a triangular or oblong scrap to a square one. Sometimes there was an absolute break which in no way could be filled out. She succeeded in making out something like this:

'I can't get——I want to get out. I can't get out. I can't g—get out: could pay—could p——can't get——can't get—out, out, out——Money, plenty money. Could pay, could p——but can't, can't, can't get out.'

It was mere gibberish, Janet thought. She knew no meaning in it. After she had worked for an hour at it, she had almost thrown it away

again, feeling that it was mere nonsense; whether written by the prisoner, whether, as was more likely, some childish repetitions out of a copybook, she could not tell; but at all events nonsense, throwing no light upon anything, doing no one any good. She fixed the scraps on a sheet of paper, however, as well as she could piece them together, and especially the sprawling, childish signature 'Adol——Char—es Har—w——.'

She was very cold, very tired, and sleepy by the time this task was done. She would put it in an envelope since *he* had asked her to do so. It would make him none the wiser, still it should be done, because he had desired it. She forgot altogether the central incident of the night as she went back to bed with little, cold feet, shivering and sleepy. The foolishness of the words she had been so carefully picking out and pasting together somehow emancipated her from her terror, they were so silly and without meaning. She did not believe, after all, they could have any connection with the mystery in the

wing. But as she thought of the address, and that she must take it herself to the post lest anyone should see it and think it a communication of a different kind, a thrill ran through her, and she could not help thinking of perhaps a time to come when there might be other communications that would not be so colourless. Janet's heart felt the lifting tide of a secret happiness. She fell into a delicious drowsiness, in which all his words and looks and movements came back upon her in a maze of pleasant confusion: and then, with the privilege of her age, she fell fast asleep.

Janet posted her letter next day, glad to be rid of it; for she could not, all the morning, get over the terror in her mind lest she should pull the letter out of her pocket with her pocket-handkerchief, or somehow expose it to be looked at, and so call forth the comment which she felt already ringing in her ears, as if anyone she met in the street might come up and call it out to her:

'Oh, are you in correspondence with Charley

Meredith?' 'What have you to say to Charley Meredith?'

She thought she could see Gussy's look if that dreadful contingency should come to pass. It would not be she that would make that exclamation—wonder would be the sentiment in her face, wonder and a sort of mild haughtiness which Miss Harwood knew how to put on. She would take no notice. But she would never forget; she would go on wondering, perhaps divining at last: proudly and entirely ignoring that strange incident—but she would not forget it. Henceforward her eyes would have another aspect towards Janet, and even perhaps towards her lover.

Janet breathed more freely when it was safely out of her pocket and in the post-office box. Nobody could see it now; she was safe, at least for the time. It is needless to say that she added not a word, explanatory or otherwise, to that curious piece of paper. She wrote the address with the greatest care in her neatest hand. She was so girlish as to think that her

pretty handwriting, the fresh glossy envelope which she selected so carefully, rejecting one which had a small speck upon it, and which was a little brown at one corner—would go to his heart, and that he would remark those signs of her care to please him. Poor little Janet! She was not a girl of lofty sentiments, nor a very loyal soul; but she was very young, and had a world of foolish expectation still in her inexperienced heart.

Thus her former terror about the mystery which she had discovered so close to her was quieted in her mind almost entirely by the coming in of something more powerful. Sometimes a vague thrill of terror would pass through her when she looked at the door so hermetically closed, the door which had once trembled and given way under her slight fingers. In the middle of the night she sometimes woke with a start, thinking she heard some one at her door, afraid to open her eyes lest she should see the whiteness in her room of the white beard and pallid face.

She took to locking her door from that time, a practice for which she was much scoffed at by Julia, who discovered it at once and wished to know, satirically, what she was afraid of? Was it robbers, and did Janet think they would come up all the way to the second floor for her, instead of going at once to the pantry for the plate? Janet could not make an answer to this assault, but she continued to lock her door and to look carefully round her room every night to make sure that no one was there.

This, however, was the only effect that the vision in the wing had upon her. Another matter, far closer and more urgent, was introduced into her thoughts. There were now two people whose whole attention was bent on the sounds outside in the still evenings when they sat over their needlework, listening intently for a step, for the sound of the bell. To meet him and Gussy within the same four walls, to see his eyes turn to her, and know that Miss Harwood looked on, this was far more difficult than any mystery for Janet to bear.

CHAPTER X.

GUSSY HARWOOD awoke next morning with a sense of exhilaration in her mind, as if, during the night, some burden had rolled off her shoulders. Had any burden been rolled off? The first sensation in the morning of pain or pleasure is not always a true one, but there is none so poignant or which leaves so much impression on the mind.

A year—she said to herself—what was a year? If it were two years, what would it matter so long as all doubts were removed and she was assured that as she thought of him so he thought of her? How much better would it have been, in that point of view, if he had opened his heart to her at once!—not waiting for business or

wealth or the means of setting up a house which he could ask her to share. All these were secondary matters. The thing she desired to know was his heart and what was in it. If he really loved her, as she sometimes believed he did, yet sometimes doubted, how happy it would be to watch the growth of the practice, the coming of the time when prudence and good-sense would permit them to set up a new household together!

Gussy did not desire in the least to forestall that moment, to reject the guidance of prudence. Far from that. Her own actions were always regulated by that rule. All that she wanted was the full understanding, the power to believe that she knew his heart as he knew hers. But she said to herself, with a sigh,

'Men do not understand this. They think it not honourable to engage a woman before they are able to carry their engagement out, not knowing, not guessing, how very different is the woman's view—how that what she wants is the understanding, the link between heart

and heart, the privilege of sharing their thoughts and being bound to them.'

She sighed, and there was impatience and weariness in her sigh. How was it that they would not understand—that he would not understand? She would wait for him for years if it were necessary, so long as there was no doubt left upon the mutual sentiment, so long as the bond was made which he thought it more honourable not to make till it could be quickly fulfilled.

And this feeling went on growing stronger every hour of the day. The first exhilaration departed, and the weariness came back. A year! And who could tell that in a year there might not be some new drawback, some further suspense necessary. If men would but understand that it is not to be married that the woman wants, but to know the lover's heart, to be assured of his love!

When Molière made his *Précieuses* contemn the vulgar haste with which their suitors would have jumped to the last accomplished fact of

marriage, he had (perhaps) touched a secret of the feminine heart which few men divine.

Gussy, who was not poetical, still less *précieuse*, who was indeed a very matter-of-fact and most sensible person, would have been like the foolish Cathon and Madelon, quite pleased with the *pays du tendre*, so long as her lover had led her with a faithful hand into that enchanted country. She did not insist upon the new establishment, the immediate conclusion. She only wanted him to say frankly half-a-dozen words, and so to bind them together for ever. It was half an injury to her that he should feel it necessary to wait for such a practical reason. Did he think that her love was a less thing than her word, and that so long as she had not audibly pledged that, she was free? Did he think himself free because he had not said to her, 'Be my wife'?

These questions flitted through Gussy's mind, drifting across the sky like clouds, throughout the day. She shook her head at the vanity and shortsightedness of the thought. She free,

when she loved him! Would a mere promise bind her more than the devotion of her whole being? And then there came a cold shiver over Gussy's heart. Did he think perhaps that *he* was free so long as he had made no promise —that all the silent fascination which bound them together and the link that had been growing for years, and which he had woven by so many tender words and looks and fond regards, was nothing, so long as no pledge had been given or received?

Gussy would not allow herself to think this. She shook her head over the defects in men, the absence of a finer feeling, the want of that intuition which everybody said women possessed in a higher degree. He could not see that there was a more delicate honour in avowal than in silence. It was strange, but she was obliged to conclude that this was how men felt, and that they did not understand.

Gussy was also a little cast down, ashamed, almost humbled, by the thought that he was in no such doubt of her sentiments as she was

of his. But, then, she asked herself—for such a problem awakens metaphysical tendencies in the most simple mind—whether perhaps her doubt of him was not as much the weakness of the woman's point of view as his reticence was of the man's? Perhaps it had never entered into his mind that she could doubt him after all that had come and gone. Perhaps he felt the bond between them to be so assured and true that no declaration could make it stronger. Perhaps, just as he did not understand her, she did not understand him, and exemplified the woman's deficiency just as he exemplified the man's. This thought sufficed to clear Gussy's brow for the whole afternoon.

She told her mother, who was very eager for news, and had also expected much from the dance, that Charley had been talking about his profession, and that he was now really getting on, and felt, he believed, the ball at his feet.

'He thinks that in another year or so he will be able to think of a house of his own,' said Gussy.

'Oh!' said Mrs. Harwood, with somewhat blank looks, 'in a year or so!'

'Yes, mamma; did you expect him to jump to the heights of his profession in a moment? A silk gown in six months and the woolsack perhaps in——'

Gussy broke off with a laugh. She had replied to her mother with a look equally blank, incapable of understanding (as it seemed) what could be looked for more.

'I am not so silly as that,' said the mother. 'I know it is very slow work getting on at the Bar. Still, I thought——'

'What did you think?' asked Gussy, with a certain scorn in the corners of her mouth.

'My dear, if you take that tone I shall say nothing more. I had thought nothing that was not quite reasonable, whatever you may think; but I shall say no more about it. You young people have your own ways of managing matters. I don't think much of them, but that, I suppose, is because I am old-fashioned and can't understand anything so superfine as your

modes of action. You are a great deal too superior for me.'

'I notice,' said Gussy, 'that whenever people are arguing, and don't know what to say, they call those who think differently superfine and superior. It is as good an argument as another, I suppose.'

Thus Gussy punished her mother for putting into words the troubled intuition of her own heart. It was enough, however, to put a stop to the discussion, which was what she desired most. Mrs. Harwood was so much moved that, wanting an outlet somewhere, she was driven to confiding in Janet, who came down to the drawing-room earlier than usual. Gussy had gone out somewhere to tea.

'I don't seem to understand the simplest questions now-a-days,' she said, fretfully; 'they all think me so old-fashioned that I am not worth considering. Do you think it an honourable thing, Janet, or right, or wise for a man to flutter for years about a girl, always coming after her, never letting her alone, so that every-

body has remarked it, and yet never saying a word that could compromise him, though he has quite compromised her? Do you think there is any sense in which that could be called right?'

'No,' said Janet, in a very low tone, smitten by sudden compunction.

She had her back to Mrs. Harwood, pouring out the tea.

'What do you say? Oh, I suppose you are just like the rest, and don't see any harm in it. But I assure you I do. If anyone haunted you like that, my dear, under my roof, I should certainly think it my duty to interfere.'

'Oh, I hope not, Mrs. Harwood; isn't that surely the very worst thing that can be done—to interfere——'

'Interfere!' said Mrs. Harwood, indignantly; 'I should soon interfere. I should not let anything like that go on, I promise you. The worst is,' she went on, with a troubled countenance, 'that with one's own——'

She stopped here, finding further revelation,

perhaps, injudicious; but apparently the mere suggestion of interference in one case showed the possibility of doing so in another. She had taken the cup of tea from Janet's hand, who sat down opposite her, in a way which was very familiar and home-like, and Mrs. Harwood's mouth was opened. After a pause she began, with a little laugh,

'My son is not of that kind. I wonder, by the way, what has become of him that he is not in for tea? He is rather the other way. He goes a great deal too fast. If ever he thinks he is in love he will blurt out everything at once, and perhaps find himself bound for life to some one whom he has only known for a few days.'

'That is even more dangerous than the other way,' said Janet, with exceeding demureness, in the half light.

'Worse for the man, but not for the woman, who gets everything she wants. The other is a great deal better for the man, who holds off until he is quite sure——'

'One would think, then, that you rather approve of that last way, though I thought you had condemned it; but perhaps it is only for your son you would like it, and not for other people——'

'I don't approve it at all,' cried Mrs. Harwood, hotly. 'A girl's best years may be wasted like that—always waiting and waiting—and perhaps some other cut her out in the end. You can't think I should approve of that, my dear. I only say that Dolff, poor boy, is all the other way, and will most likely fling himself at the head of the first girl he fancies, which would be a pity for the girl too, for Dolff will not be very well off. He has got his grandfather's little property in Wales, which is entailed on him, but he has in reality nothing more: though perhaps people might think otherwise, seeing him always treated as if he were the master of the house.'

Janet made no answer for a minute or two, and then, with a not unnatural instinct of combativeness, it occurred to her to carry the war into the enemy's country.

She asked: 'Have you been very long in this house, Mrs. Harwood?' in her most child-like voice.

'Eh? Oh! in this house? We came about fifteen years ago, when Julia was a baby,' she answered, briefly.

'You must have done a great deal to it to make it so pretty. And have you really never used the wing?'

'The wing?'

Mrs. Harwood, in the first impulse of astonishment, raised her eyes and stared at Janet, but said no more.

'It looks,' said Janet, 'as if it must be such a nice, well-shaped room—or perhaps there is more than one room? Many people would be so glad to have that little additional space.'

'You seem to know a great deal about it,' said Mrs. Harwood, 'though I don't quite know how, for it has been shut up for years, and none of the servants even have ever been in. It is full of old furniture from my home in Wales—and other lumber.'

'To be sure,' said Janet, 'a nice lumber-room where you can put everything is of great use.'

'Yes, it is of great use; and, as it happens, it would be of no particular use in any other way; for we have as many rooms as we want, and two or three for visitors—which is as much as anybody could desire in London. Of course it is a different thing in a country house. How is it that you have formed such a very clear idea of the wing, Janet? Many people never find it out.'

'I suppose,' said Janet, 'because I have been walking so much in the garden lately, and one goes all the round of the house, and one speculates——'

'On what, I should like to know?' cried Mrs. Harwood, sitting bolt upright in her chair.

'Oh, nothing; only on the shape of the house, and what a nice corner it seems, and so much sun. Perhaps I was so bold as to think it would make a nice school-room,' said Janet, with a little laugh, 'and so shut off from the rest of the house.'

'Oh, if that is all!' said Mrs. Harwood. She resumed, after a moment, 'I would not advise it for that use. Of course I don't myself believe in anything of the kind, but there are curious stories about it, about things that have been heard—and seen too, I believe. The last people who lived here were very queer people. I can't tell you all that was said of them. The door of communication used to be open, but the servants in a body begged that it might be shut up. You have noticed, perhaps, that it is quite done away with.'

'Is it built up?' asked Janet, with great innocence.

'Built up? oh, no, that's a strong step to take. After us there might come somebody who would want to use it, and building up is a strong step. But it's almost the same—it is fastened up very effectually, so that no one can either come or go—not even,' said Mrs. Harwood, with an abrupt laugh, 'a ghost.'

'But Vicars,' said Janet, pursuing the investigation, 'can go out and in, I suppose?'

'Vicars?' cried Mrs. Harwood. 'What do you suppose he has to do with it? Oh, I know now. You have heard that he lives on the ground-floor. So he does; but his rooms open from outside, as you may have seen. You must keep your eyes very well about you, Janet, to have found out all that.'

'No,' said Janet; 'I only can't help seeing things—that is, some things. And, to tell the truth, I have heard once or twice a curious noise which has frightened me very much. And I never had heard any of the stories, so it was all the more strange.'

Mrs. Harwood looked at her for a few moments with a fixed look; veiling her face, however, by means of the cup of tea which she had raised to her lips. Then she relapsed again into a laugh.

'You must not take such foolish fancies into your head, my dear. *I* don't believe in anything of the kind. You may be sure there is some quite simple explanation of it—the wind in a chimney, or some other trick of acoustics, as

they call it. You are far too sensible to believe in ghosts or mysterious noises. There is Dolff, I think, at the door.'

'I hope the tea is strong enough for him. He likes it strong,' said Janet.

'Oh, I am sure it will do very well. Janet! be careful how you mention such a thing to Dolff. He is very imaginative and impressionable. I don't want his mind to be disturbed about the house. Pay a little attention to me, my dear; I am quite in earnest in what I say.'

'I shall certainly pay attention to whatever you tell me, Mrs. Harwood.'

'I know you will. I know you will! Not another word about it, as he is just coming in—nor to anyone, if you please, my dear. The servants get hold of such things, and make a story out of them, however small the incident may be; and there is a continual fuss, with their frights and their imaginations. You may mention it to Gussy if you like, but to no one else. Well, Dolff, we were just wondering what kept you so late for tea. Gussy and Ju have gone

out to a tea-party, but I always calculate upon you to hand me my piece of cake.'

'You have got Miss Summerhayes, mother,' said Dolff, as if that was all that anyone could require.

CHAPTER XI.

JANET withdrew as quickly as she could from the drawing-room when she had given Dolff the tea which he now took so regularly, and which his family considered such a sign of mental and moral reformation. There was indeed no chance of being left alone with him, which was the thing of all others she most wished to avoid, for Mrs. Harwood could not go away, and was always present when she had once been wheeled into the room; but Janet knew that Dolff would ask her to come to the piano, and take advantage of the withdrawal there to say things to her which made it very difficult to keep him at arm's length as she wished. She turned away while

he was talking to his mother, stealing out of the room, knowing that her absence would be felt by both, but longing to escape, feeling the agitation and excitement more than she could bear. And there could be no doubt that to-night that agitation would be stronger than ever, for Meredith was sure to come to talk over the dance, as was almost necessary considering his intimacy in the house; and her heart beat wildly when she thought of meeting him again in the presence of them all, Gussy and Dolff, and the mother whose secret they had discovered. All of the three were more or less wronged in that secret alliance which had been formed between Meredith and Janet; an alliance, was it, or a conspiracy? The girl shrank into herself for a moment when she thought of this, and of the unsuspecting family who knew nothing of it, and would receive Meredith with such warm kindness, and was so good to herself. She shrank—but then forgot everything else in the consciousness that she should meet him to-night—that once more they would be in the same room, and that

with his eyes at least he would say to her many wonderful agitating things.

Perhaps this secrecy, and the absorbing excitement there was in meeting him under the eyes of those who were so deceived, who were so little aware of what was going on beneath, held Janet's interest more than anything else. A conspiracy has always a strange fascination in it, and to carry on secret communications in the face of every scrutiny, and balk suspicion, and baffle watchfulness, has, especially to the very young, a piquancy which legitimate intercourse often does not have. Janet could not escape the sense of guilt, but the interest, the dramatic combinations that would be gone through in the evening, her own position as the heroine of the situation, a place which Gussy thought was hers, but which was not hers, was too strong, or Janet's conscience too weak to conquer. Everything yielded to the thought of what he would say. How he would manage all the conflicting elements, whether he would be able to say a word to her to tell her if he had received her

letter. It was far more engrossing, far more absorbing than any play.

And it may be imagined what a party it was that sat awaiting Meredith in the bright room where Mrs. Harwood sat, with the dimmer one beyond, where all the light centred in the white keys of the piano. Gussy was full of an expectation, not quite serene indeed, but calmer than might have been supposed: for, now that she knew all immediate change to be impossible, she had schooled herself to think that what had been said about a year was in itself a sort of decision upon which, since better could not be, her position for the future might be founded. She awaited his coming, accordingly, with more composure than usual, with a sort of secret assurance, as almost her betrothed—kept from being so only by that exaggerated sense of honour which made her impatient sometimes, yet was nevertheless, in its way, in the mistaken way of men, a high quality. To be able to think highly of the man she loves, although she may think him mistaken, or even wrong—to

believe that he is wrong in what is, according to his lights, a chivalrous and high-minded way, is always delightful to a woman. She had reasoned herself into this view of the matter, and she sat accordingly in what poor Gussy thought was her most becoming dress, with a countenance full of light and a heart full of trembling comfort, awaiting her lover.

Dolff was a little sulky; he was disappointed and troubled that Janet had run away from him after tea, just when they might have had, he said to himself, a quiet hour, undisturbed by anyone, either for music or talk. Now that fellow Meredith would come and take possession of the piano, and make an exhibition of himself and his singing all night—keeping everybody else out in the cold. Dolff thought it was not fair. He ought to be the first to be considered in the house; not a fellow who had not even the pluck to speak out, who was dangling on for ever without coming to anything. That would never be Dolff's case. Difficulty in making up his mind was not a fault of his. He knew what

he wanted, and, by Jove, he would have it, too, whatever his mother might say. They would want him to marry somebody with money, he knew; but there was only one woman in the world whom he would ever marry, and what did it matter to him whether they gave their consent or not?

Thus he mused, sitting as near as he could to Janet, talking to her about the music. Talking about music threw dust in the eyes of his mother and sister, and stopped any interference on their part—and *she* understood well enough what he meant. She was so quick—at the first word, almost before you were aware yourself, she knew what you meant. She was the most wonderful creature that had ever been born; there was none like her, none.

I wonder if Mrs. Harwood, sitting by the side of the fire, had any idea of what was going on in the minds of the young people who surrounded her, and who were ready to start, at a word from her, to do anything she wanted. They all thought she had not. Gussy believed

that her mother, save for the momentary surprise she had expressed, was entirely satisfied with Meredith, and calmly considered him as one of the family. Dolff thought that his rising passion for Janet would burst upon his mother as a great discovery, calling forth her wrath and (ineffectual) resistance when he should announce it to her. And Janet? Janet was the only one who was not so sure. She was quicker in perception than either of them; and there were looks in Mrs. Harwood's eyes sometimes which did not consist with the quiescence of her *rôle* as the mere good-natured mother of a family, living only to humour her children. Besides, Janet was aware of the secret in this genial woman's life. She knew that there must have been something deeper, something more tragical in it than anybody suspected.

Mrs. Harwood, motionless in her chair, taking every accident with such perfect good-humour, smoothing everybody down, no doubt observing everything, was the one in the party of whom Janet was afraid. But her children were so

well accustomed to her, so dutifully, habitually disregardful of her, taking her for granted, as children do, that they made little account of her watchfulness and knowledge. 'Mamma takes no notice,' they said and thought.

'I wish you'd just try over this thing with me, Miss Summerhayes. I want to have it perfect,' said Dolff.

'Oh, please do give us a little respite, Dolff—we know all your songs by heart.'

'I did not ask you,' said Dolff, with fraternal rudeness. 'So do I know all your songs by heart—and Meredith's—and I don't think much of them. Besides, this is none of my old songs,' he said, with a little shyness. 'It's one Miss Summerhayes looked up for me, and I know you'll like it, mother—something old and nice—not classical, which is not in my way——'

'I should think not, indeed,' said Gussy, with scorn.

'Or the other, which I used to like: but I don't care for them now. Miss Summerhayes—oh,' he continued, rudely, 'here's that fellow;

I suppose we shall have to give it up for to-night?'

'There is no reason why you should give up, Dolff. You speak as if Charley—who has far more sense—would ever interfere with you.'

'Oh, I know!' said Dolff, digging his hands into his pockets. He brought the song he had intended to sing to Janet, and standing behind the chair showed her how he had marked it in consonance with her teachings. 'You said this was to be very *piano*,' said Dolff, 'it's not how the stupid printers have done it, but I am sure you know best.'

This appeal to her, though she felt it almost intolerable, carried Janet through the moment of Meredith's entrance. Gussy rose to meet him, going forward a step involuntarily with the instinctive air of being the person most concerned. He shook hands with Janet as with the rest, pressing her hand as she hoped he did not press the others, till she had nearly cried out, and giving her a look under his eyebrows, which she felt to mean that he had received her communica-

tion. And then he sat down, and Dolff retreated, giving up to the superior influence. Meredith brought in with him a changed atmosphere altogether. The humdrum family routine, with all its little subdued oppositions and disagreements, but dull surface of unity, quickened into interest. He divided his smiling looks, his little flattering bantering speeches, among all.

'Well,' he said, 'let's talk of last night. I suppose that's still uppermost in all our minds. I hope that you are all quite convinced that it was the greatest possible success.'

'You know,' said Gussy, 'we are not very sanguine people in this family. We are always seized with secret doubts afterwards whether all our friends were not making believe to enjoy themselves.'

'I cannot say that is my frame of mind,' said her mother; 'yes, I thought it went off very well. Everybody looked pleased; they ate a very good supper, and there was no getting them out of the house. I don't at all think they were making believe.'

'Ah, mamma, but you're not quite a Harwood, as I often tell you.'

'You are the best judge, Mrs. Harwood,' said Meredith, 'for you look on and see the game. We are all so much engaged in thinking of our own parts that we never take in the whole.'

'I see, perhaps, more than I am supposed to see; but I don't pretend to be omniscient, Charley, as you give me credit for.'

'With an eye for everything,' he said, laughing —'for our vagaries, all and sundry, and for the supper, and for Vicars and who knows how many private matters besides.'

'Vicars,' said Gussy; 'he is the least of mamma's cares, I should think. He is the most invaluable person for such a party as we had last night. He is the best servant I ever saw, though one might think, as he does so little household work, that he would get out of the way. But he doesn't. He never forgets anything——'

'Oh, that's a great deal to say,' said Meredith, again with a laugh. 'I think I've seen occasions on which he has been caught out.'

Mrs. Harwood took no notice of this, though her attention quickened.

'Vicars,' she said, tranquilly, 'is a very old servant; but I think you may give me some credit, for I superintended everything last night.'

Meredith gave Janet a look. Did anybody see it, could anyone notice it, but herself? The secret that they both knew seemed to burn between them like a link of fire.

'Everything,' he said, 'is a big word.'

The laugh with which he accompanied this seemed to Janet full of suggestion, and as if he intended his hearers to understand that there was something beneath; but this was probably only her excited consciousness, for he began at once to plunge into details of how Miss Robinson danced all the evening with Mr. Green, and the hard ado he himself had to prevent two rival mothers from coming to blows.

'For I hope you all saw how I devoted myself to supper and the old ladies,' he said.

'You did not dance very much, I perceived,' said Gussy.

'No; and chiefly with the plain people, the people who had no partners.' He sent a laughing glance towards Janet. 'Indeed, I think I may give myself credit for having quite fulfilled my *rôle* of the next friend—the next after the son of the house.'

'Dolff does not understand his duties in that way,' said Mrs. Harwood. 'He dances with all the prettiest people, and never goes near the dowagers; but Charley, I think, is taking too much credit to himself.'

'You seem to me,' said Dolff, returning from the outer room still with his hands in his pockets, 'to be making a great deal of talk about nothing. I didn't see that it required such dreadful exertions to make the dance go off. It went off of itself, as dances usually do, so far as I can see.'

'Dolff settles the matter like a Daniel come to judgment. Well, I can only say for myself that last night is one that I shall remember all my life. For finding out more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in anyone's philosophy, commend me to a dance.'

'Finding out?' said Gussy, with a look of surprise.

'Oh, yes; the hearts are uncovered like the houlders, and all the corners of the house open. Don't you agree with me, Miss Summerhayes?'

Janet felt a thrill of terror come over her. What did he mean? Was he going to disclose their discovery, to demand explanations?

'I don't think,' she said, faltering, 'that I—wanted to find out anything. It was a very nice dance.'

'That's what I say,' said Dolff. 'I don't understand metaphysics. But it was not quite such a nice dance as I hoped,' he said once more, stooping over Janet's chair.

It is probable that this last little speech was not intended to be heard, but there was a pause at this moment, and as a matter of fact it was audible enough. Mrs. Harwood and Gussy both looked towards the speaker, whose boyish face was a little flushed as he looked down upon the governess. It diverted their attention from the fact that there was something strange, not quite

comprehensible, in what Meredith had said. They were not susceptible about the discoveries that could be made in their house; perhaps, Gussy thought, though his language was a little strange, that all he said was directed to herself, to impress upon her the communications of last night, and to make it more and more evident to her that, little as had been said then, he considered the evening a turning-point in his life. She was very willing to adopt this view. It flattered all her feelings, and confirmed her wishes. He was wrong, oh, very wrong, in that point of honour of his; but he was very anxious that, notwithstanding the visionary necessity that sealed his lips, she should fully understand him. And she threw herself into the discussion and led him on to the gossip of which he was a master, and which amused Mrs. Harwood. They took all the ladies and their toilettes to pieces, and Meredith had various stories, funny and otherwise, to tell of the men.

In society of every kind the characters of the absent are often torn to pieces with no

particular motive, or one which is half good, to divert the minds of the audience from more important things. The friends of the Harwoods suffered in this way, because the situation had become, nobody knew how, somewhat strained, and the conversation, no one could understand wherefore, uncomfortably significant—and this holocaust was offered up with the usual advantageous results.

CHAPTER XII.

IT was certainly impossible that any communication could take place in words between Janet and Meredith on the evening above recorded. He squeezed her hand significantly indeed, and looked volumes at her from under his eyebrows—but looks, though they may express volumes of tenderness and sentiment, are not much to be relied upon as regards facts, and explanations cannot be given in them nor appointments made. Janet was accordingly more tantalised and excited than satisfied by these glances; and she found that when Meredith drew Gussy as usual to the piano, and the ordinary duet began, it was with feelings con-

siderably changed that she regarded this pair, who the last time they performed together she had watched with a half-comic, satirical sense that the woman was much more deeply moved than the man, and a mischievous half pleasure in perceiving how he played with her.

But now Janet was conscious of other feelings; not all the confidential glances he could bestow upon her could keep her from feeling a keen pang as she watched the two together, the close approach of his head to hers, the caressing gesture with which he would bend over Gussy. She had smiled at all that before with a kittenish amusement, half guilty yet undisturbed by any pain, thinking if Gussy only knew what her lover's looks said to the looker-on! But now Janet had ceased to be a looker-on. She was one of the players in the drama, the one secretly preferred, to whom all those sweetnesses were due. She felt a silent pang rise in her instead of the amusement. She was very angry, not sorry, for Gussy, the deluded, and angry beyond words with him. How did

he dare to do it? What was his motive? If it was she, Janet, whom he loved, what was the use of keeping up this pretence and flattering Gussy with the vain imagination that she was the object of his thoughts?

It was a great change to have been made in a single night, and it altered Janet's views of many things. She had no longer the feeling of superiority which her spectator position gave her, and from which she had despised Gussy for her easy subjugation and delusion, as well as pitied her. Now Gussy had become her enemy, stealing what belonged to her, since she could talk to him freely, go away with him into the background, where they were comparatively alone, and could say what they pleased to each other.

Thus the evening was full of torture to Janet. She began to pay the penalty. She could not endure Dolff, who came to her perpetually with some little remark or reference, and whom she repulsed with an impatience which took him entirely by surprise; nor Julia,

whose retirement from the scene necessitated also the withdrawal of the governess. Julia was very tired after the dissipations of the previous night. She yawned 'her head off,' as Dolff eloquently said; her eyes would not keep open.

'You had better go to bed, Ju,' said her mother; 'you were up so late last night.'

Julia, after the inevitable resistance which every child, even of fifteen, and however sleepy, offers to that suggestion, rose at last to obey it.

'Are you coming, Janet?' she said; 'you must be tired too.'

Janet rose after a struggle with herself. She had the greatest mind to rebel, to break the bondage of custom, to ask whether she might not stay. But what was the use? only to have another look perhaps, or squeeze of the hand, as he went away, more exasperating than consolatory. As she followed Julia out of the room she gave a glance at the pair and saw that Meredith was stooping over Gussy's chair, saying something in her ear, at which she, leaning

back almost upon his shoulder, smiled with her face half turned towards the door. Was he carrying it so far, false and cruel as he was, as to make a jest at Janet's expense after all that had happened? Janet felt herself stung to the heart. She ran upstairs with a burning sensation in her breast, as if a knife had gone through her, and flung herself upon her bed in a paroxysm of anger and misery. To make confidences to her on the subject of Gussy was one thing—it made her laugh, though no doubt it was bad of him (yet humorous) to do it, but to make confidences to Gussy about her—this idea fired Janet with anguish and rage beyond words.

It was the custom in the Harwood family, as in many other virtuous houses, that the letters should be placed by the side of the plates at breakfast, each member of the family finding his or her correspondence when he or she appeared—a custom which has its inconveniences if any individual of the family has anything to conceal. It had never occurred to Janet before

to receive any letter which had not the Clover postmark, or at least came from some one in that old home; and it was an object of curiosity to Julia to see a litter of letters lying by the governess's plate.

'Oh, what a lot of letters Janet has to-day,' she said.

Dolff, who sat on Janet's side of the table, cast an involuntary look at them as he passed. She was herself a little late that morning, not yet downstairs, and it gave the foolish boy pleasure even to read her name. But as he glanced a look of consternation came upon Dolff's face. He uttered a suppressed exclamation, and looked again, then flushed crimson, an effect which was not so pretty on his boyish bearded face as it is on a girl's.

'What is the matter, Dolff?'

'What a cad I am! I am looking at Miss Summerhayes' letters,' he said.

'I daresay,' said Gussy, 'you won't do much harm. She has no letters but from the vicarage and her old friends where she came from.'

Dolff did not say anything more, but he was very watchful till Janet appeared, which she did immediately after, with many apologies. He saw her, too, look at the address on the envelope that was uppermost with a start, and then she put her letters hastily away in her pocket.

'You know we all read our letters, Janet,' said Gussy, 'and stand on no ceremony.'

'I know, thanks; but it does not matter. My Clover news will keep: it is much diluted generally, and I am so late this morning. I cannot think what has made me so late.'

Dolff was very silent at that morning meal. He scarcely spoke to anyone. He had none of the remarks to make which he was generally so anxious to expend upon Miss Summerhayes. If anybody had been specially interested in Dolff it would have been seen that he watched every movement Janet made—not as he usually did, but with a suspicious, anxious inspection. But his sisters were indifferent, and Janet herself too much excited to pay any attention to him. She

did not know that he had seen her letter. When she saw it, she cast a quick glance at the other side of the table to see if by any chance Julia or Gussy had noted a handwriting which must have been familiar. But they were both entirely unconscious, at their ease; and she never thought of Dolff. It was unlikely that a man should have looked at her letters, but one of the girls might have done it with that more lively curiosity which girls have about little things. Julia might have done it 'for fun'; but Janet did not think of Dolff. She was, therefore, quite at ease so far as they were concerned, though the letter burned her pocket, demanding to be read. As soon as she had an excuse to rise from the table she did so, still unaware of the spectator, full of heavy thoughts, who said to himself, 'Now she is going to read it. She will not trust herself to read it before any of us.' He did not know that there was any special reason why Meredith should write to Janet. Had it been Julia who had seen it she would have said so, and Janet would doubt-

less have found an explanation. But Dolff said nothing. A letter in Meredith's hand—Meredith, who was, or should be, his sister's pledged and affianced lover—who could have nothing to do with Janet that was not clandestine and guilty. Dolff's colourless countenance—with its light hair and light moustache, a face which was more foolish than comic, a half-innocent, half-jovial countenance—was stern as that of a judge. What had she to do with Meredith? What did she know of him, save as Gussy's lover? Was she so far ignorant of honour and virtue that she should allow another woman's lover to write to her? and what to Janet could Meredith have to say?

It was at once less, and more guilty than Dolff imagined—for it was touching the papers she had sent him that Meredith wrote—but the manner of the writing was not exactly that of a business communication. Meredith wrote as follows:—

'MY DEAREST—

'Do you know you have set me on

the right track, as I believe, by your mad scraps of paper? They are mad, but there's method in them. I am coming to your house to-night, but I shan't dare, you know, to speak to you. Come to the library, where we have met before, at about four o'clock. You can make an excuse to change books or match worsted or something —any pretext you like, but come. It will be dark, and I can walk with you part of the way home. There is no telling what may come out of those papers of yours—freedom, I think, in the first place, and the power to decide upon my own life. Come, my little Janet, my sweet little girl, at four, to your devoted—C.'

While Janet read this her heart beat and thumped upon her bosom, and took away her breath. He had no right to write to her like that. It was abominable of him, a great liberty—'My dearest!' She was not his dearest, she was only an acquaintance whom he had known about two months. And to bid her come 'where they had met before,' as if she had been in the habit of meeting him before—

as if it had not been merely an accidental or chance meeting. Janet was very angry, and shed hot and bitter tears. But yet to be called his dearest, though it was false, was somehow sweet. 'His little Janet!' She was not his little Janet; he had nothing to do with her. How dared he?—how dared he?

Janet went with scarlet cheeks to the school-room, when she heard Julia moving about there; and with her soul as much disturbed as her face. How difficult it is to attend to verbs and spelling when your heart is rent between two things—the good which you can barely see, and are doubtful of, and which is so painful; and the evil, which has everything to recommend it except that it is evil. Janet tried to put that conflict aside while she attended to Julia's lessons, thinking all the time how trifling was the one in consideration of the other, what loss of time to worry concerning the way in which she spelt disappointed. It was just as miserable a word if you spelt it one way or the other; diss-apointed does not look so well, but

Julia knew no difference. Poor little girl! it is perhaps as vain writing down the tale of Janet's little troubles, while the narrator perhaps has a heart filled with things that hurt and wound a great deal more. But Julia could not fail to remark those scarlet cheeks.

'Why are you so red?' she said; 'you look as if you had been scorching your cheeks, as mamma says I do, reading over the fire.'

'It is nothing,' said Janet; 'have you got out all the books?'

'And your eyes look as if you had been crying,' said Julia.

How the lessons were got through it would have been difficult for Janet to tell. As it happened, in the afternoon things arranged themselves for her in the most wonderful way so as to leave her free. Julia went out with Gussy to another tea-party, which was a thing she detested, and an old friend of Mrs. Harwood's came to call. The old lady liked to be left alone with her visitor when it was an old friend, so that Janet had perfect command of her time.

It seemed done on purpose, she thought, by some spirit opposed to good resolutions, for she had thought that she could not, must not go. She would not, it was treachery to her present home, it was undignified on her own part, obeying a call which was really a careless command, which was given as if it would be beyond her power to resist it. She would not go!

But then came the other side of the question. It might, he had said, be very important to him to get the clue, and he had found it. He would wait for her, and be terribly disappointed when she did not come. He might have some other important question to ask her, something in which she could give him real help. The woman who deliberates is lost. After a great deal of self-discussion, Janet put on her hat hastily, as if by stealth, and went out. It was half dark already, though it was not four o'clock. It occurred to her vaguely that it was a happiness she could scarcely have anticipated not to have Dolff on her hands, who was almost always waiting for the opportunity of

falling upon her. But she had scarcely seen Dolff all day.

If ever man spent a miserable day it was Dolff upon this occasion, when all his faculties were roused to watch the girl whom he had thought so perfect. Poor boy, his mind was full of the most dolorous conflict. He was angry, jealous, wretched, longing to go down on his knees to ask her what the letter meant, to implore her to tell him that it was all right and there was no harm in it, yet not daring to betray that he knew anything at all, or that he had any suspicions, and all the time declaring to himself that he was a brute to suspect her that could do no wrong. If she was wronging anyone it was not him, to whom she had never given any hearing, but Gussy. And Dolff's mind waxed fierce at the thought of the other, the man who was Gussy's lover, yet had dared to write to Janet. Sometimes it gleamed upon him that there might be nothing wrong in Meredith's letter to Janet, that it might be some question, something of no importance:

but it was very hard for him to believe that there was nothing in it, and the desire in Dolff's heart was to take the fellow by the throat, to knock him down, to kick him, to annihilate him. It was his fault. If Janet was in the wrong, it was he that had beguiled her and led her away.

'Let me but get my hands on the fellow!' Dolff said.

He kept up a very rigorous watch all day, and when in the afternoon he saw Janet steal forth alone, Dolff followed in the growing darkness, determined to see where she went. He kept her in sight along the line of garden walls to the little shop, such an innocent, feminine shop, and his heart was relieved at the sight of it. Surely there could be no harm there!

Dolff thought at first of following her in, his heart swelling with sudden relief. He would go in and ask leave to walk home with her, and forget all his evil thoughts. But as he passed the pretty shop-window, with all its Christmas cards laid out, and paused to look in for the pleasure of seeing her trim little figure with the

big boa, looking, as he thought, like no one else he had ever seen before, distinguishable anywhere at any distance, something else struck his eye—a black coat, an uncovered head, a greeting, even the sound of the voices coming to him, recognisable, though he did not hear what they said. It was to arrange a meeting that the letter had come. Dolff's heart swelled as if it would burst from his breast; the veins in his temple began to beat. The traitor! The false wretch—false to Gussy, false to everybody, disgracing and betraying the house in which he had been received!

Dolff's passion ran in his veins like wine. He was drunk with the impulse of vengeance that came upon him. If he could but seize the fellow by the throat, dash out his brains against the stones, he thought he would be happy. He could not have spoken; he could scarcely breathe. Poor Gussy betrayed! And this—this little deceiver—— He stopped himself with a gasp in his throat. It could not be her fault—it was the villain's fault—the intolerable wretch who deserved no

mercy. *She* was his victim, too. Dolff stood with eyes of fire gazing at them through the trumpery little veil of painted papers, the Christmas cards and pictures that were stuck all over the window, taking hold of himself, so to speak, with both hands to keep his fury down. After all, it occurred to him, almost with a sense of disappointment, this might, it was possible, be a chance meeting. He must do nothing rashly. He must not strike till he knew. He stood and watched the conversation; how he smiled and advanced, and Janet looked up shyly with at first reluctant looks, withdrawing a little. No, she was unwilling, she drew back. God bless her! She did not, indeed, look up at all at first, only after a time, when he had flattered and cajoled her, the villain. No, she had not meant it, poor darling, he had been lying in wait for her. It was not she, not she, that was to blame!

Dolff followed every movement with blazing eyes; he pulled up the collar of his coat, and held his hat down over his brows, that they might

not by any chance see and recognise him. Now they were coming out together. He turned half away with his shoulder to the pair, but his ears drinking in every sound, and Meredith did not seem afraid of being heard.

'You were a little angel to come,' he said, as he came down the steps. 'I half-fancied you would take fright.'

It was a settled thing; an arranged meeting. Dolff was almost glad, though with a sense of anguish in his heart. He had his arm thrown out to strike, when with the impulse of rage and jealousy which prefers to feed its flame, to hear a little more of the depravity it means to punish, he restrained himself once more and followed. How it was they did not hear him following almost in their footsteps close behind them he could never tell. They were entirely absorbed in each other. Meredith took that hand which Dolff scarcely dared to touch, and drew it familiarly within his arm.

'It is dark, nobody will see us,' said the well-known voice. 'Just for this once.'

What did he mean by his 'just for this once,' the shameless villain? If it was for once, should it not be for ever? Dolff strode on behind close as their shadow; it was quite dark, and the few lamps in St. John's Wood gave a very moderate light. They did not see him, they were too much absorbed in each other. But he could no longer make out what they said. Meredith was discoursing upon something which Janet did not seem to understand any more than Dolff did: but when he stooped down over her, holding the hand which was upon his arm in his, and said, 'My little Janet,' both Janet and Dolff, with his supernatural hearing, understood very well. Thus they came in their temerity, trusting to the darkness and to the loneliness of the deserted, silent streets, close to Mrs. Harwood's door.

CHAPTER XIII.

DOLFF blotted himself out against the wall, under the tree which bent over the wall of his own garden, and threw a rugged shadow on the pavement. He was invisible in the gloom of the wintry night. They went up in their boldness almost to the very door, and stood there whispering, yet starting at every noise. Dolff could scarcely hear Janet's hesitating little voice, but he drank in every sound of Meredith's.

'No, no; there will be nobody out at this hour. Don't be afraid. Ah! there might be Dolff. No; Dolff's waiting for you to come in to teach him his new song, Janet. Little darling! to train a lout like that. Well, you'll keep your

eyes open, and if you hear or see anything further, report to me at once. It's very important. What do you say? Don't be in such a fright, dearest; nobody will see us.'

Then there came a murmur from Janet, too low to be heard.

'Yes, there you're right. There might be Vicars, the everlasting Vicars, whose occupation will be gone, and who will have to return to be a butler, like the others. Oh, no, I've no pity for Vicars. I daresay it was he who put his mistress up to it. Mind you keep a good look-out. You don't know how important it may be for me. Yes, I know I must go. It will be droll after this, won't it, to meet solemnly, as if we had not seen each other for ages, and didn't care if we never met again? Eh? To be sure, I'm going to dinner, and you are never seen on those occasions. Poor little Janet, eating her morsel up in the nursery, like a naughty child, and knowing there's some one downstairs. Never mind, I shall only think of you the more.'

'And make fun of me with her?' said Janet, in a sharper, more audible tone.

'With Gussy, bless her! No, she never lets me make fun. She don't understand it. You needn't be jealous, little one, though I avow it's droll enough, the position altogether: to keep her in good humour—and then you, you little spitfire.'

Janet was not audible, but in the movement of her figure, the twist of her shoulders, the poise of her head, there was a question and remonstrance as clear as words.

'Why do I do it? Oh, it's all very complicated, very difficult to understand. I couldn't explain unless I had time. Unfair! no; there's nothing unfair, don't you know, in love or in war. Don't be afraid; she's of the careless kind, it will do her no harm. I ought not? Well, perhaps not, strictly speaking. But when does one do everything one ought? This is not right—perhaps not; but it's all the more sweet, eh, little one? And as for Gussy!' he laughed, that triumphant laugh which, even to

Janet's bewildered ears, was not without offence, 'for Gussy——' with a gurgle of mirth in the words.

Janet could never understand how that horrible moment went, nor how it all happened. Something seemed suddenly to hurtle through the air, a dark, swift, rapid thing, like a thunderbolt. She had scarcely felt the sensation of being pushed away when she was conscious of Meredith lying at her feet, his white face upturned to the faint light, and of that dark thing over him seizing him, dashing his head against the pavement. Janet uttered a cry, but it was not her cry that brought flying feet along the road in both directions, and evoked a little tumult round the insensible figure. She mingled with it instinctively; she could not tell why, keeping silent, partly that she was struck dumb with terror, partly with an instinct of self-preservation, which seized her in this strange, sudden, awful emergency. When the door was opened—and her senses were so acute that she saw it was Vicars who had rushed to

see what the commotion was—she managed to steal in unseen, to fly upstairs, and shelter herself in her room. What did it matter where she went? He had been killed before her eyes, with the laugh on his lips. Killed—struck dead at a blow! And she had seen it done, and knew who had done it, and was all mixed up and involved in the horrible, horrible catastrophe. It may seem cruel that this was Janet's first thought, But she was so young. She had done her share of all this wrong so carelessly, with no particular meaning, thinking not much harm.

'Not much harm,' she said to herself, piteously.

No harm, no harm—only to amuse herself; and lo! it had come to murder, to sudden, swift fate. She was all one throb from head to foot, of horror and panic and wild excitement. Had anyone seen her? Would she be mixed up in it? Would she have to stand forward and avow it all before the world in the light of day? Oh, what could Janet do? Where could she fly? How escape the dreadful revelation, the

story which would be spread over all the world, the horrible fact of being mixed up in a murder? For the second time, when he seized Meredith by the shoulders, and dashed his head against the stones, she had recognised Dolff's face, distorted, almost beyond recognition, by passion. What could be more dreadful than to be the witness of it all, the only one who could tell—mixed up in it as no one else in the world could be?

By-and-by she heard sounds of men tramping, and a great commotion below. They were bringing him in here—him—it—the body. Janet's head went round, she was on the verge of fainting, but called back her senses by a supreme effort, saying to herself that if she were found fainting she would be betrayed, and that nothing but her own self-possession and courage could now save her. She dipped her head into a basin of water, put off her outdoor things, even her shoes, on which there were signs of her walk, and stole out to the gallery to look over the banisters. She was pale, and there

was horror in her face, but that was no more than the circumstances called forth.

He was lying on a couch which had been wheeled into the hall, and round him there was a little crowd, a doctor, who seemed to have sprung out of the earth, as everybody did, and who stood over the prostrate figure examining it. What was the use? Janet could scarcely keep herself from crying out, when she had seen him killed. Killed! Oh, what was the use? Gussy, very pale, but with all her wits about her, stood at the foot of the sofa. There was a policeman in the hall, and an eager crowd filling up the doorway with a ring of staring heads. And there he lay killed, killed! And Janet, horror-stricken, speechless, mixed up in it! the only witness of what had been done. That dreadful instinct of self-preservation presently impelled her to further steps; that and the anxiety she felt to know everything, to know especially how far it was known that she was mixed up in it.

'What is it? what is it?' she whispered to

Gussy, feeling herself by Miss Harwood's side ; 'is it an accident?'

'We can't tell what it is ; it is Mr. Meredith,' said Gussy, in a low, stern tone.

Janet uttered a cry—what more natural?—and, stealing one glance at the white upturned face, hid her own in her hands. It was only what an inexperienced girl would naturally do brought suddenly into such a presence. Nobody noticed her or thought of her. In the dark she had escaped entirely unseen.

Then there stole a little balm into her despairing soul. The doctor, after a hurried examination, turned round to say that the man was still alive, and begged that a well-known surgeon in the neighbourhood should be immediately sent for. Gussy, who was very pale but perfectly calm, and complete mistress of the situation, herself superintended the removal of the couch into the dining-room, which was spacious and well aired, and had everything removed which was out of place.

The table was already spread for the dinner

at which Meredith was to have been one of the chief guests and Dolff to have occupied the place of master of the house. Fortunately Gussy did not as yet know the double misery involved. It was dreadful enough to have this calamity fall so suddenly without warning upon the domestic happiness and calm. The dinner-table, with all its pretty arrangements of flowers and shining crystal and plate, was such a mockery of the sudden, unexplained, incomprehensible catastrophe, that this touch of the familiar and commonplace almost broke down Gussy's composure. She dismantled it noiselessly with her own hands, assisted eagerly, as she remembered afterwards with compunction and gratitude, by Janet, who clung closely to her like her shadow, following where she went with an anxious endeavour to be of use, which went to Gussy's heart. They removed the incongruous ornaments in less time than half-a-dozen housemaids would have done, and pushed the table aside.

When the surgeon arrived, Janet was ready to be sent on any errand, and did everything

with noiseless rapidity, looking not at the figure on the sofa, which she seemed incapable of regarding, but at Gussy for her orders. She was like an obedient, docile slave. When the ladies were sent out of the room she still clung to Miss Harwood like her shadow, moving only when she moved. In the hall the policeman still held his place, with several of the people who had surged in after him and who were giving their several accounts of the transaction.

'I see it all,' said one. 'I was on the other side of the road, and I see it all. There was a woman with the poor gentleman. I can't tell you what kind of a woman; not much good, I shouldn't think—or perhaps she was a-begging. There wasn't light enough to see. And all in a moment some one made a spring upon him. I don't know where he came from, officer. I see him dash on the gentleman as if he had fallen out of the sky. And down he went like a nine-pin, and afore I could get across the road the other lifts him up again and downs with his head upon the ground.'

Gussy was standing by, listening intently, and Janet behind, half-hidden in her shadow, listening too, with such wild yet paralysing sensation, wondering would he know her if he saw her—this man who had seen it all—shrinking behind her protectress faint and sick with the unreality, the fact and falsehood mingled in which her feet were caught.

Gussy's voice so close to her even made her start, 'Have they got the man? Is he known?'

The witness turned to her with an instinctive transfer of his attention.

'He just disappeared, mum, as he came. Afore I could come up to them he was gone.'

'I saw a man running round the corner,' said another, 'but I took no notice, for I didn't know then what was up.'

'I'll tell you what, miss,' said another, 'the fellow's in your garden if he's anywhere. I see some one dart in when your man-servant came out. I'll take my oath he did.'

'In our garden! Has there been any search? Have you done anything to secure the man?

Can anyone identify him? What are you standing there for,' cried Gussy, 'doing nothing, if that wretch is within reach? Policeman——'

'I'm a-looking after the murdered man, miss,' said the policeman. 'I did sound my rattle, and there's two of my mates about. I shouldn't say but it might be a good chance to search the garden, unless they've got him outside.'

'Go then, go, for heaven's sake, and do it,' cried Gussy. 'He may have escaped by this time. Mr. Meredith's friends will give a reward. I myself—' she suddenly faltered and grew pale, leaning back upon Janet for support. 'Go, go,' she cried, faintly, 'go and find the murderer.'

Janet had to put her arms round her to support her. Oh, what things were beating in the breast that afforded that support. The murderer! was not she too the murderer? she, whom no one would recognise, who would never be punished, save by the consciousness which would be her inheritance for ever. Horror and trouble, and the dreadful fear of betraying herself, of being mixed up in it, kept Janet upright as if in

a frame of iron. The murderer! Oh, heaven! if they should find him, and if he should point her out and let all the world know how deeply she was mixed up in it! She supported Gussy, yet clung to her, looking with eyes of anguish at the policeman who got out his lantern and prepared to go.

'I think Mr. Harwood is in the garden,' she said, 'he was—walking there—a little while ago.'

'Dolff!' said Gussy, recovering herself; then she added, 'I hear my brother is in the garden; he will help you. Oh, do not lose any more time; go! go!'

Was it to save Dolff that Janet said this, or to betray him. Oh, not to betray him certainly, for that would be to betray herself. It seemed to her that the sight of him would kill her; yet could she but warn him by a word—only a word! If he had the presence of mind to be calm, to make that rabble understand that he was the son of the house.

Her heart sank within her as they trooped out into the dark garden; the policeman with

his lantern, a few of the boldest of the men following him, the rest hanging about in the front of the house talking over this wonderful adventure, which was so terrible, an unthinking, unoffending man struck down in a moment; but a godsend to all the idle loiterers who spring out of the earth whenever such an excitement is to be had.

The hall was cleared of all the intruders that pushed into it; the servants who had been hanging about retired; Gussy went into the drawing-room to carry the dreadful news to her mother: and Janet, who could not rest, to whom some outlet for her overwhelming excitement was necessary, went out into the porch, and, raising her voice, told the spectators to go away.

'Don't you see that the noise you make will do harm?' she cried. 'It may hurt the—the poor gentleman who is—so ill. It will warn the—the man who did it if he should be here. Oh, go away, go away, for God's sake. What do you want here? Go away! oh, go away!'

She went out in her excitement, moving them towards the garden door, which still stood open, haunted by some mere lookers-on, to whom the news had been carried by the extraordinary rapidity of rumour, which would call forth a crowd in the midst of a desert. Though she was so slight and young, so little able to influence them, yet they yielded before her, moving out, indistinguishable in the darkness, obeying the natural right of a member of the household to clear its precincts, though with a little grumbling and remonstrance.

'We want to get hold on the murderer.' 'We want to see as he doesn't escape.' 'He's far enough off by this,' cried a sceptic. 'The police get hold on a fellow like that! not as I ever heard tell on.'

'Oh, go away, go away,' cried Janet, following them to the door.

She pushed it close after them, shutting it with a sharp snap, comforted a little to have got rid of so many at least; but not, it seemed of all. As she turned back some one caught

her by the arm. All Janet's composure, her courage, her over-mastering resolution not to betray herself, could not withstand this new shock. She gave a cry. It seemed to her in her dreadful agitation as if the next thing would be that some one would thunder, 'You are the woman who was with him' in her ear.

It seemed almost tame to her that the tragic whisper she heard, hoarse and miserable, emphasised by another crushing pressure of her arm, was 'Is he dead? Is he dead?' and no more.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE is nothing in the world that so suddenly sobers wild excitement and passion as to carry out its practical suggestions. A blow brings down the pulses of wrath as nothing else can do. It is a dangerous remedy, but it is a sure one.

Dolff was like a devil incarnate as he swooped down upon his victim and beat his head against the stones. The moment he had done it—the moment he had done it, he became a horrified, miserable, remorseful boy, miserable beyond any words to describe. As soon as he heard that dull thud on the pavement, and saw the white face turn unconscious in a blank

which he never doubted to be that of death, his own being came back to him. His passion ended like the blowing out of a candle. What had he done? What had he done? Instinctively he sprang back under the shadow of the tree and the wall; but he had no thought of escape, or of anything but the dreadful thing he had done. After a minute, when other people crowded round the prostrate figure, he stole among the crowd and entered with them, pushing like the rest through the narrow doorway, as if he, too, were a spectator, to know all that happened. After the first awful sobering and coming to himself, there came over him a passion of eagerness and curiosity—a desire to know which for the moment made him feel himself a spectator, too. He even asked the other lads who crowded in along with him what it was, what had happened, and heard half-a-dozen versions of his own deed as he shouldered his way on to get a place near the door, with a strange feeling of being cut off from the house and all in it, of being but a wretched spectator

and inquirer, though with that misery in his veins like molten fire. What was to hinder him pushing his way among them, going in boldly, he whom nobody could suspect, the son of the house, to see what was the matter? But Dolff could not do it. Janet had been stronger of mind than he. She had managed to disengage herself at once from the tumult, to steal in while attention was diverted from her, to escape in the darkness and confusion. And so might he have done: but he was incapable of thinking of himself or his own safety, though instinct made him herd among the intruders, concealing himself in the crowd. What he wanted to see was what had happened, whether it was real, and the man killed, or if it were only, as he almost hoped, a dreadful dream. He heard it said that the gentleman was not dead, but it conveyed no impression to his mind, and he pushed forward, peering over the shoulders of the others who crowded and gazed at the unknown interior, with a horrible sense of familiarity yet distance. There was the couch

wheeled out of the library, the couch on which he had himself lounged so often; there was Gussy, clasping her hands together as if to keep herself up, standing as pale as death by the foot of the couch; there was—heaven! was it Janet standing behind, half concealing herself in the other's shadow? It was not Janet then, he said in his dull brain—not Janet that was the cause of it all, only some horrible delusion to tempt him to his fate. There had been nothing wrong except in him. He it was alone who had been to blame. She could not have been there at all, since she was here, horrified, full of pity, helping, when he had killed. Oh, God! what had he done? He had killed a man in some horrible mistake. Perhaps it was not Meredith at all; if it was, it was his friend, Gussy's betrothed, the friend of the family. He had killed him—for what, for what? For nothing. His rage had died off like fever. He was quite calm now, like one fallen from some horrible height, shaking with the shock, and as miserable as if all the miseries of earth

had gathered on his head. It did not seem to him unnatural that he should stand there among the crowd, struggling to get a glimpse of what was going on in his own home, within his mother's open door.

He did not, however, follow the others when Janet drove him away. Though it had filled him with consternation to see her there, and the dull, dreadful thought that there had been no provocation, nothing but delusion and mistake—it was yet with a kind of stupid fury and repugnance that he saw her taking upon her to send away the crowd, to act as if the house was hers. He hung behind in the dark, and seized her arm with a wild feeling that he would like to crush her too to make her feel, though apparently she had done no wrong. But these gave way to the other anxiety, the deeper interest. After all there was but one thing that it was, or would be, now or ever, of the slightest importance to know—was he dead?

Janet gave no direct answer to his question. She said quickly,

'Come in now, take your place, and nobody will ever suspect. It is all in your own hands.'

He did not understand what she meant. Suspect? What did it matter. There was only one thing of consequence—was he dead?

'No,' said Janet. 'No, no, no; do you understand? Go in, and say you were in the garden. Oh, do you hear me? The men are coming round again. Come in, and look as if—as if you were yourself.'

As if he were himself! He did not understand. He was not himself. He did not know who he was. He had nothing to do in that house. He stood and stared blankly at her, not knowing what she meant. But Janet was as keen as he was dull. A passion of energy, of life, and purpose was in her. His hand had dropped from her arm, but she seized him with both hers, and dragged him into the house. She flew at him as if she meant to assault him, putting down the collar of his coat, pulling off his cap, thrusting a hat into his hand—a few hours since how those touches, this familiarity would

have moved them both. She did it all now like a nurse dressing a child, while he stood stupid, not resisting.

'Say you have just come in, and ask what has happened. For God's sake don't mix them all up in it, and kill your mother. Nobody will ever suspect—ah!' Janet saw through the open door the advancing gleam of the policeman's lantern. She left him with a little shake to rouse him to energy, and ran forward to meet the constable. 'Have you found the man? Have you found anyone? Oh, here is Mr. Harwood, just come in; you can speak to him. He doesn't know what's happened. I was trying to tell him. Come in,' she said, 'policeman; but don't let all those people come in. Come in and talk to Mr. Harwood; but shut the door.'

The policeman came in heavily, putting down his lantern on the floor.

'We've found nothing, miss, and I didn't expect as we should. It was my mate's business to see as no one escaped while I saw after the gentleman; but he's got clear off, as they

always do, along of men not minding their own business. Evening, sir. It's a dreadful business, this is, to happen just at a gentleman's door, and a friend of the family, as they tell me.'

'I have just come in,' said Dolff, saying his lesson stupidly. And then he added the only question that had any interest for him: 'He's not dead?'

'Not at present,' said the policeman; 'but the doctors say as they can't tell what an hour or two may bring forth.' He spoke hopefully, as of a favourable turn the case might take. 'It's a deal of trouble for you, sir, and the ladies, to have such a thing as this happen, as I was a-saying, at your very door.'

'It was very well, though,' said Janet, 'for the poor gentleman to be so near a friend's house.'

Janet felt that the safety of this house, which she had perhaps betrayed otherwise, but in which her own safety now lay, demanded all her exertions. Despair had given her force.

She was beginning to recover her colour in the stimulation of this dreadful emergency.

'That's one way of looking at it, miss,' said the policeman. 'My mates they are busy a-hearing all the nonsense that them fellows can tell them. I don't believe they knows anything about it, for my part. I'll just wait here, sir, if I may, with your leave, till I hears the doctor's last report.'

'Mr. Harwood is just going in, and he'll bring it to you,' said Janet.

She dared not say any more, but she pointed towards the dining-room door with an imperative movement. It was fortunate for Dolff that, at this moment, his sister appeared. She came quickly into the hall, with an exclamation of satisfaction.

'Oh, Dolff, you are here! I am thankful you are here. Have they got the man? I have told them there will be a reward——'

Dolff could say nothing to his sister. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. He repeated as he had done before, with a dull reiteration,

'Is he dead? He is not dead?'

'Oh, no, no, no, God be praised! That's the chief thing, isn't it?'

Gussy went up to her brother and twined her arm within his, and, leaning upon his shoulder, cried a little, with faint sobs. She was not a demonstrative person, and the movement took him entirely by surprise. He stood with his hands in his pockets, dully supporting her, saying nothing, his mouth open and jaw dropped. There was no power of tragic expression in Dolff's common-place countenance; but there was a dumb sort of quiescent misery in it. He was capable of nothing, not even of a word to shield himself. But then there was no one there who suspected him—only Janet, who knew, and whose interest it was to protect him—to silence all possibility of suspicion. She stood looking on, conscious of the respectful sympathy of the policeman with the brother and sister, and feeling a new and fierce impulse of hatred rising in her heart towards the young man whom she was exerting herself so strenuously to save.

In the midst of these efforts there came into her mind so strong an impulse to denounce him that Janet was afraid of herself. Even while she was scheming how best to divert all suspicion the voice seemed to struggle up in her almost audibly—'Take him! take him. That is the man!' How could she be sure that she would not yield to it at some moment when the sight of him had driven her frantic with indignation and impatience? That Gussy should seek his sympathy; that everybody should look to Dolff to direct the search; that the very constable—and all the time he was the man—he was the man!

A spasmodic shiver ran through Janet; she could hardly keep silent, and yet her mind was busy inventing devices to protect him. She stood there longing to fly from them all—to be alone, and able to relax her self-bondage. But Janet felt that she dared not go away. He might betray himself—or worse, and more likely still—he might betray her. He might tell Gussy what share she had in the matter. It

was what men did—to punish a woman, regardless what trouble might fall upon themselves. She stood with her hands firmly clasped, like a sentinel on guard.

This dreadful evening, however, came to an end, as all evenings do. The crowd was made to pass on, to leave the house in quiet, though there were still an unusual number of passengers and people loitering about till far on in the night, notwithstanding the policeman who was on duty near to keep them unmolested. And within all became quiet, except in so far as dangerous illness in a house disturbs its habitual repose. A nurse had been installed in the room in which Meredith lay, and Gussy came and went throughout the night, holding occasional whispered conferences in the hall with the doctor, who remained too.

The patient still lay insensible, entirely unconscious of what had happened to him, with that utterly mournful and pathetic look which a face that is unconscious takes. He had concussion of the brain, as well as external injuries

of a serious description, but it was as yet impossible to pronounce whether he would die, or if he might yet recover. Two of the servants were up in case anything might be wanted during the night, a quite unnecessary precaution—one of the results of the great and unusual excitement which had convulsed the house—but except these women, who appeared now and then at the end of the passage which led to the kitchen, very sleepy and with an air of conscious self-sacrifice on their faces, no one else was suffered to be about. Janet had asked to stay to be of use, but had been dismissed by Miss Harwood—not unkindly.

'It's not that I am not grateful, Janet. You stood by me this evening in a way which I shall not forget; but you're too young,' said Gussy, with a sigh, 'to sit up, unless it was a case in which your heart was concerned.'

This speech of his sister's for the first time roused Dolff a little. He had been sitting all the evening with a stupefied air, saying nothing, calling forth much sympathy and admira-

tion from his mother, who whispered to Janet how tender-hearted he was, how much he felt it. But Gussy's words roused him. He glanced at Janet, as Janet had glanced at him with the same impulse, to say, 'She's the cause of it all,' as she had felt to say, 'That is the man.'

Their eyes met, and they both read what was in the other's looks; a certain fear, yet defiance, awoke between them. They were in each other's power. Janet had Dolff's life in her hands, and he had her reputation in his. They were both liable to all the risks of a sudden impulse, to let the truth slip in a moment of provocation.

Janet watched the hardening and darkening of the face which had once expressed only devotion and admiration, with a sinking of her heart. He was more dangerous to her than she was to him. It was evident that to see his sister's trust in her was more than he could bear. After this, however, they withdrew into their rooms with their different burdens. Dolff sat smoking and dozing in his, not knowing what he was to

do, or how to meet the morrow. He was still stupid with misery, unable to use his faculties, or to think for himself, as, poor fellow, he was but little used to do at any time. He could not think, but only sit miserable, feeling the night to be a century long, yet without any desire for the morning. As for sleep, it was impossible, and yet, though it was so impossible, he slept the greater part of the night.

As for Janet, there was no rest at all for her; the shock of the terrible events which she had witnessed, which she knew she was the cause of, had affected her nerves, and more than she was aware of: but she had been obliged to thrust it aside from her, to control herself with a hand of iron, to act with an independence and energy which she did not know she possessed, which she had never had occasion to employ before. How could she have had occasion to display them? could such a horrible emergency ever occur twice, could it be possible that ever again she should be placed in such a situation? Even now, when alone and free from all im-

mediate alarm, it was a continual struggle to keep from giving vent to hysterical sounds, crying, or screaming aloud; or convulsive sobbing which runs into horrible pretence of laughter.

She was not a girl who had ever been humiliated by any such mastery of her nerves over her will and mind. But a hundred frantic impulses seized her during this terrible night. Sometimes she felt as if she must precipitate herself from the window and escape for ever and ever into the darkness; sometimes she felt disposed to tear everything about her, even herself, in wild rage and excitement. Sometimes she walked about—walked, run, flew, from one end of her room to another—unable to calm herself down. And in calmer intervals she stole out of her room and stood looking over the banisters, seeing Gussy come out of the room where she was keeping watch, holding whispered conferences with the doctor at the door, passing in for a moment to the other room where the patient lay, from which the white-capped nurse, with her large apron creating a high

light in the partial darkness would come out to get something that was wanted.

All these noiseless movements of the watchers Janet looked upon from above as if they were the incidents of a dream. It was all going on before her in dumb show—an awful little dream, significant in its silence. And the strange thing was that she felt no interest in the patient round whose unseen bed these watchers were coming and going. All the facts stood out before her. The horrors of the attempt, the touch as she thought of sudden death, the panic of all that might follow, the dreadful fear of being mixed up in it and exposed in her *rôle* of traitor to all the world, to the people at Clover who were fond of her—but any other sentiment was wholly wanting.

She had brought all this upon herself and Meredith and Dolff, through something which she had supposed to be love. It was all love, jealousy, double dealing, the stratagems and deceits which are supposed to be legitimate in love as in war. And yet it did not occur to

Janet to care whether Meredith lived or died. The others thought that the chief thing, but she did not. What she would have liked most would have been that he should disappear out of her consciousness altogether, and never be more seen or heard of. She was almost impatient of the watchers and of all the anxiety there was about him, as if it mattered what became of him! She had felt as if she could almost strike at Dolff in her impatience when, instead of attending to the precautions she prescribed to him to save his own life, he asked, 'Is he dead?' For herself, if an earthquake could have taken him away, buried him in the earth, so that his very name should be extinguished, that was what Janet would have liked: but——

CHAPTER XV.

A WEEK flew over the house in St. John's Wood like a dream. Yet nothing could be more erroneous than to say that it flew: the days went on feet of lead, not on wings—every hour was as long as a day. The room which had been devoted to Meredith became the centre of the house. The nurse, with her white cap and white apron, was now a recognised member of the family. She came and went when the doctor was with the patient, or when Gussy took her place, cheerful, though she had not very much that was encouraging to say. She told everybody who asked that the poor gentleman was very much the same, but her own

opinion was that he was going on well. How he could be going on well while he remained unconscious she could not indeed say.

Gussy spent a great deal of her time by that melancholy sick-bed. There is no such melancholy sick-bed. The breathing form from which the soul seems to have departed is a terrible sight to have before one's eyes day by day.

Gussy had not the use and wont of nursing, and Meredith lying thus helpless before her, rapt from the world and all its ways, with pathetic eyes that saw nothing, acquired the new power of utter and saddest helplessness over the woman who loved him. She would have taken the nurse's place permanently had she been permitted. She was never weary, or would never, at least, acknowledge it, but she grew thinner and paler, disinclined to say anything, sitting silent at the meals over which she still dutifully presided, and doing everything she had been in the habit of doing with a sort of solemnity, as if that sick bed, death bed

—which was it?—had made the rest of the world unreal to her.

Dolff had become silent, too. He came to no resolution, did nothing; fell back into a sort of sullen use and wont. But all the gaiety which he had brought to the house in the days of the music-hall songs, all the attempts to please which had gratified his family during the time when Janet was the light of his eyes, had departed. He no longer spoke to Janet or cared for her society, though he would sit and gaze at her sometimes with the strange, stern expression which was altogether unlike Dolff.

That this change should have been caused by Mr. Meredith's accident was very bewildering to Mrs. Harwood, who, to tell the truth, soon became very weary of Meredith's accident, and longed for his recovery chiefly as a means of getting him away. She did not for a moment believe that it was the effect of this which had changed Dolff. She believed that there must have been some quarrel with Janet—a premature proposal, perhaps, which the governess had

rejected. A pretty thing indeed, Mrs. Harwood could not but reflect angrily, that a little governess should reject *her* son! but yet no doubt the best thing that could have happened. This she felt was what it must have been, and she was glad of it, on the whole, though angry with Janet for having treated Dolff as she wished him to be treated. She would have been much more angry had Janet accepted his boyish proposal. As it was, all would no doubt turn out for the best; but she resented her boy's changed looks, and could not but feel a grudge against Janet for causing them.

To tell the truth, in the blank of that anxious week, when everybody was absorbed in Meredith's condition, and the house was exceedingly dull and the days very long, Janet would not have objected to resume her friendly relations with Dolff. Her mind had got over the horror of the position, and somebody to talk to would have been pleasant to her. But Dolff was not disposed to listen to the voice of the charmer. He gazed

at her for long times together without saying a word, but it was the stare of anger he directed upon her, and not that of love.

In the meantime the police were coming and going about the house, bringing reports which Dolff had been deputed to hear and examine. Gussy herself for a day or two had insisted upon doing this herself, but presently, as she became more and more engrossed in the sick-room, it became impracticable. She had offered a reward for the ruffian who had so desperately assaulted her lover, and the list of men who had been taken up in succession, examined, and dismissed as having no evidence against them, seemed endless; though no one would seem to have been more likely than another. Dolff was made after a great struggle to take this duty upon him, and stolidly heard the stories which were brought to him, making no remark. Scarcely a day passed in which a detective did not appear with the account of a failure; all of which Dolff listened to in a grave, dazed manner, as if he but partially understood.

As it happened, however, there were some who admired this manner as judicial; and even Gussy in her trouble approved with a smile her brother's action for her, and said in her grave, but gentle voice that it was a good thing he was showing himself so well adapted for his future profession.

The sight of these officials arriving almost daily gave Janet always a pang. She was never sure that things might not some day become intolerable to Dolff—that he might not cast off this dreadful bondage that was eating into his soul, and startle everybody by saying that the man was found, that he was here ready to give himself up, and that it was Janet that was the cause. Thus she was never at rest—she had no certainty of him, no confidence. It seemed to her that the question stood always open, that there was no telling when it might burst forth as fresh as at first, and become a story which would be edifying to all the world.

Dolff, however, had no intention of this kind, nor had he any fear. He knew she would not

betray him, and he did not care whether she did so or not. He went on dully, as it was his nature to do, taking no initiative. He was not one who would ever have taken the grave step of giving himself up: but had anyone said to him, 'Thou art the man'—had anyone asked him, 'Did you do it?' he would not have denied it. And perhaps to be found out was the least miserable thing which could have happened to this unfortunate boy.

They were all sitting in the drawing-room dully enough, after the first week was over. Julia, perhaps, was happiest, who was left quite to herself, and who lay on the rug all the evening with a succession of novels, with her selection of which nobody attempted to interfere. She got them from the library herself, neither her mother nor anyone else attempting to control her. Mrs. Harwood, too, with a piece of white fleecy knitting on her knees, perhaps, was not more dull than usual. She regretted much not to hear Dolff's cheerful voice; but then, of course, singing was impossible, and he

had never been a great talker; and if there had been an unfortunate explanation between him and Janet it was all very comprehensible, poor boy. No doubt he would get over it. Young men always did get over these things; but the good mother began to turn over in her mind the desirability of getting rid of Janet—not in any hasty way, of course, but quietly, during the next term, so that Dolff might not be made uncomfortable again by the too close vicinity of the girl who had been so silly as to refuse him. She thought this over while Janet wound her wool for her, and while she called the girl 'My dear,' and was quite affectionate to her; but these are things which occur continually in domestic life. Dolff was seated at a little distance, with a book open before him; but he did not make any pretence at reading. His eyes were often intent upon Janet from behind the page, and she was conscious of the look, but asked herself why? for there was no love now in Dolff's sullen eyes.

This silent party, enlivened chiefly by Mrs.

Harwood's occasional advices or directions to Janet about the winding of the wool, had been passing the evening together, as they often did, with scarcely a change of attitude; and when the door opened suddenly they all looked up with expectation, hoping at least for a break in the monotony somehow. It was Gussy who stood in the doorway, her eyes shining with moisture and joy, and a little flush of colour on her face.

'Oh,' she said, 'he has spoken, he has come to himself!' She came round quickly to Mrs. Harwood, and, throwing her arms round her mother, sank down upon her knees by the side of the chair. 'Oh, mamma,' she said, 'he has come to himself: all in a moment, when we were looking for nothing but another miserable night.' She knelt there, facing them all with that sudden revelation of happiness in her face. 'He knew me,' she said. 'I went and kissed him, I was so happy. I thought it might help him to wake up and throw the stupor off—but chiefly be-

cause I could not help it, because I was so happy.'

'My darling!' said Mrs. Harwood, taking her into her arms.

Dolff and Janet, who were the spectators of this scene, unconsciously and involuntarily looked at each other, as poor Gussy made her confession. Their eyes had never willingly met before, but something, neither could tell what, compelled them to this involuntary, more than involuntary, unwilling confidence. They looked at each other, the sharers of a secret which neither dared reveal. Janet's pale face was suddenly suffused with burning colour—and Dolff looked at her with a dull flame in his eyes. The thought flashed through both their minds with one impulse.

Poor Gussy, betraying herself in the rapture of her gladness over her false lover's recovery, had not the faintest conception of this dark secret: but to hear of that sacred kiss of joy aroused something of the old fury in Dolff's mind. He could not bear that

Gussy should disclose her weakness, and in presence of the other, the woman for whom this man had nearly died. To sit composedly in the same room, as if they knew no better, to hear these innocent words, to see the full faith of the deceived but happy woman, who had thus her betrothed given back to her from the gates of death, was to Dolff unbearable. He sprang up from his seat, casting a look at Janet of rage and reproach unspeakable, and hurried to the door.

'Oh, Dolff!' said Gussy, springing up and hurrying after him, 'you must not, you must not! The nurse says we cannot be too careful; to look at him even might be too much—even I must not go back to-night.'

'I was not going near—the fellow,' said Dolff, sullenly.

'Oh, I know what your impulse was! Dear Dolff, you have been so kind, so sympathetic, never saying anything. And perhaps you thought I didn't see it: but I have been very grateful to you—very grateful, all the time.

Now I can speak,' Gussy cried. 'Oh, what a time it has been! I was beginning to despair. It looks like a year since that dreadful night. Oh, thank you all, you have been so good to me—Janet, too. And now at last I dare to hope. But you must not go near him, nobody must go.' Gussy loosed her hands from her brother's arm, and sat down on the chair he had left. 'I can have the pleasure of a cry now,' she said, smiling pathetically upon them all.

'We're not crying people in the family, are we, mamma? but it is a great relief when you have been down to the very gates of the grave and come back.'

'I hope now you will let them bring you something to eat,' said Mrs. Harwood; 'you have not had a proper meal for a week. Tell Priscilla to bring a tray, Ju, and some champagne. She must have a little support before the reaction sets in. I know what it is,' said the mother, shaking her head; 'now that her mind is solaced she will find out that she is as weak as water. And, my dear, you'll not be able to nurse him

when nursing will be a real pleasure, when you will see him come round every day—if you don't take care.'

'Oh, whatever you please, mamma,' said Gussy, in the docility of her happiness. She added, 'Tell Dolff not to go. He must not—not for any reason—be disturbed to-night.'

'I going—to disturb him? I wouldn't—not for a fortune; but I can't stand this any longer. Gussy crying, and all the rest—I am going away.'

'Not out?' said his mother, anxiously. To think there should never be a good thing without the ugly shadow of a trouble after it! He had quarrelled with Janet, and now there was nothing to keep him indoors, to make home agreeable to him. 'It is quite late, my dear,' she said. 'I was just going to bed. Don't, oh! don't go out to-night.'

'Don't, Dolff: somebody might be wanted to run for the doctor.'

'Did I say that I was going out? I am going to my room. I am going to do some work.

Everything here is swallowed up in Meredith, I know; no one thinks of my comfort. But, after all, I'm something more than a man kept on the premises to run for a doctor. I am going to my room to do some work. Good-night.'

'Good-night, dear boy,' said his mother, holding out her hand to him. 'Yes, go and do a little work—that's always good for you. Don't take him at his word, Gussy. He is as glad as any of us; but that's a boy's way.'

'I know, mamma,' said Gussy, with a serene smile. She beamed upon her sullen brother as if his very ill-humour were something to thank him for. 'They will never let one see what they feel,' she said.

Had she but known! Dolff went to his room with a surging of blood to his head and trouble to his heart. It was partly relief—for no doubt to be free of the horror of bloodguiltiness was much: and his heart was unspeakably lightened by the thought that Meredith had recovered, that his own hasty fury, the boiling rage into which he had been driven, was not to have fatal

consequences. There was to be no stigma on his soul. He need not now spend all his life with blood upon his head, never knowing when he might be found out and hunted down.

But this very relief opened the doors of his mind to the sentiments which had been repressed under the influence of that horror and fear. That Gussy should believe in the man whom he had heard and seen so false—so false! who had jeered and laughed at her devotion and talked of her to another woman, another traitor! that she should hang over his bed and kiss him when he came back to himself! Dolff ground his teeth and muttered an oath of fury. The last thing in the fellow's consciousness must be that lingering talk with Janet, holding her hands, making love to her—and the next would be Gussy's kiss! Dolff felt that he could not bear it—the villain, the rascal, the cad!

And now he would be courted and petted back to life, he would be surrounded continually by the tenderest care and attention, he would be caressed, and flattered, and consoled, while he,

Dolff, was desired to be in the house solely that he might, if necessary, run for the doctor! It was too much. Dolff set his teeth, and the thought flashed through his mind that if he had such a deceiver in his hands, nobody near! But if it had not been for the relief of knowing that he had failed that time he would not have dared to think such a thought now.

CHAPTER XVI.

JANET was not moved either by Gussy's rapture or Dolff's rage. To say that she was not relieved would be untrue, for it was, no doubt, a great relief to know that she was not in any way responsible for a man's death. But beyond this her strongest feeling was annoyance, a painful sense that she was not quit of the consequences, that he was still there to be reckoned with, more near than ever, under the same roof. Would he be changed as she was by the catastrophe which had nearly cut off his life? or would he, returning to life from his unconsciousness, and probably knowing much less about it than any of those round him, take up everything from the

moment the thread had dropped from his hands and expect her to do the same?

Janet had got a tremendous lesson, such a lesson as not one foolish girl in a million is ever exposed to: and all her lighter feelings—the mischievous pleasure of taking another woman's lover from her, which is so often merely a piece of fun to an unthinking girl; the excitement of being made love to; the fascination of contact with the first man who had ventured to seize upon her attention, to take her interest for granted, to draw her, as it were, into the current of his own being—all these sensations had died in the horror with which that sudden murderous assault had filled her, and the double horror of being mixed up in it, held up before the world as the cause, with a stigma upon her for ever. Janet had liked to amuse herself all her life, and it was irresistible to triumph over the composed and self-confident Gussy, to take her lover from her, and watch sarcastically behind backs the self-exposure of the victim, and laugh internally, though never without a half shame,

at the 'silliness,' which wounded Julia's sharp perception, in her sister. Julia saw it as well as Janet, though she did not know the cause. And she had liked the bold love-making, the wicked looks aside which had at once placed her on a platform above Gussy; those confidences which Meredith had begun to make to her from the first, and which had at once established a secret link between them. He had been the interest and amusement of the dull life which Janet had never had time to get tired of, so interesting was the drama he had played for her and made her play; and she had liked to be made love to in that bold, presumptuous way. There was something piquant in it, especially in contrast with the clumsy devotion of Dolff. It had carried her at last a little out of her own control, in the hurrying sensations of the night of the ball: and the touch of jealousy after, and the complication of the events of that night—of the discovery of the papers which she was compelled to send him, and the meeting she was compelled to grant him for the sake of clearing

up that mystery—had all added an impetus to the downward stream upon which Janet was going.

Had it not been interrupted so abruptly, it is probable that she might have been floated on beyond her own control, carried to depths beyond her anticipation, and become Meredith's slave and victim, if not his wife. But it had scarcely got beyond the stage of amusement to Janet when it was thus cut in a moment, the link which was twisting round her severed at a blow. And now how glad she would have been to be done with it, to hear of him no more, to wipe it entirely out of her life! It had occurred to her, indeed, that she might do that by leaving the Harwoods; but she was too young, although so independent and self-sustaining, to make up her mind easily to such a trenchant proceeding. She would have to explain to her friends at Clover why, after all her praises of the Harwoods, she left them so soon. She would have to take a great deal of trouble, probably to sacrifice much of her comfort—for Janet was

not so entirely inexperienced as not to know that few governesses were treated so well as she was. Therefore, she rejected the idea of going away, or rather, it but flew through her mind as a suggestion which was much too decided and important to be adopted on her own responsibility.

But to hear of Meredith's progress towards recovery troubled Janet extremely. It was like thrusting him upon her again, recommencing a business which she had been glad to believe concluded. She was annoyed and impatient—scornful of Gussy's rapture, indisposed to hear anything further of the matter. When she left the room with her pupil, leaving the mother and daughter going over and over the minutest details—of how the patient had opened his eyes; how he had looked around with a bewildered glance; how his face had lighted up at the sight of Gussy, etc., Janet was almost angry at the fuss they were making, and provoked beyond description by their delight and endless anticipations.

'After this he'll make progress every day,' Mrs. Harwood said.

'And oh, mamma, to think he is himself again —to think that he recognised me!' cried Gussy.

Oh, cried Janet to herself, if they but knew! She thought, like Dolff, of the last scene that had been present to his consciousness before that awakening, and Gussy's kiss; of how he had stood laughing, holding her hands, not letting her go, making fun of Gussy; and the next thing he was aware of—a dim sick-room, a nurse in a white cap, and Gussy, who kissed him in her joy! It was all Janet could do not to burst out with something contradictory, something that would express all the contrariety of her feelings. It was a good thing to get out of the room, to be out of temptation. She did not remark Julia's keen inspection of her in the vehemence of the perturbation in her own mind.

'Well,' said Julia, as they went upstairs; 'it's a good thing he is better, though I wish Gussy would not be always so silly about

him. Aren't you glad he is better, Janet?'

'Did you think,' said Janet, 'that I wished him to be worse?'

'Oh! I don't know. I used to think you liked Charley Meredith; but I'm almost sure you don't now.'

'One may not care for a man, and yet one may be glad he is better. I am sick,' cried Janet, unable to control herself, 'of hearing his name.'

'Oh, so am I!' cried Julia. 'Isn't it enough to make one ill? And now there will be more of it than ever. We shall all be wanted to rejoice over him. I wish he had gone to his own chambers to be killed, and not here.'

By this time they had reached the school-room, which was their common property, and where no one could interfere with their talk. Julia threw herself into a chair before the fire and pursued her inquiries.

'Did you ever think to yourself,' she said, 'Janet, how it was that Charley should have been assaulted like that?'

'Think!' said Janet, faltering. 'I don't know what good thinking would do.'

'That may be,' said Julia, 'but one can't help thinking, though it may do no good. I hate him so much myself that I understand it better than you can, who used to like him. It must have been some one who hated him—even more than me.'

'Don't talk so about a—a crime, Julia: and don't say me instead of I,' Janet cried, hoping to stop this embarrassing discussion.

'Oh, what does stupid grammar matter! My opinion is that it must have been something about a girl.'

'Julia!' cried the governess, taking refuge in the shock of conventional horror at such a suggestion from such a quarter.

'Oh, you know as well as I do what Charley was. I have heard even mamma say that he couldn't resist making himself agreeable, whoever it was. That's mamma's way of putting it. Why, he has made eyes even at me—Gussy's sister, and only fifteen, and hating him

as I do! It stands to reason that he did it to everybody else. And suppose there was some silly girl who thought it meant something, and somebody belonging to her who wouldn't put up with it? Oh, I've wished often I was a man and could knock him down!'

'When a man is lying so ill as he is, it is dreadful to talk of hating him.'

'Oh, but you can't help it, however dreadful it may be! and, besides, he's getting better. You don't like him yourself.'

'I never said so,' said Janet.

'But I know. And you did like him once. What has made you change your mind? Do you know—but I won't say it; you will be angry.'

'You had better say it—whatever you want to say.'

'Well, then, I think—you needn't blaze out upon me, for of course I may be quite silly—Janet, I think you know something about it. There! Oh, you may kill me if you like with your eyes, but that won't make any difference!

I think you've known something about it all the time.'

Janet's eyes gave forth a flash. If it had been Gussy who had made this charge instead of Julia, her mind was so excited and troubled that, in all likelihood, she would have burst forth with the secret which she had been so anxious hitherto to conceal. She stood looking at the girl, happy to feel that her blood did not rush to her cheeks as it had done already this evening. She said:

'I think you are mad, Julia, to ask me such a question.'

'Oh, I didn't ask any question. I said I thought—and so I do, and nothing you can say will change me. Shall I tell you what I think? I think you were out at the door or at the staircase window—where Gussy always goes to watch for people—and that you saw it, and saw who did it, and won't tell. I suppose it's from a good motive,' said Julia, 'to save somebody. I should do it myself, but that would be chiefly because I hate *him*, not to give him the satis-

faction. However, only wait till Charley Meredith gets well. Oh! trust him to find it all out. He'll not let anybody off. He'll have no mercy. Now, that's my opinion, Janet, if you like to know.'

'They are very bold opinions,' said Janet; 'scarcely what a girl should venture to express; but I was neither at the staircase-window nor at the door, and if all that you imagine besides is as true as what you say of me——'

Janet did not like to commit herself to an absolutely false statement, though she had no objection to deceive. She liked, when she could, to answer inconvenient questions *au pied de la lettre* in a way which might be true. Thus she was not at the door in Julia's sense of the word, but standing outside the door, perilously near it. She concluded with herself that, in saying she was not at the door, she was saying the exact and formal truth.

'Oh, I don't know!' said Julia; 'you may convince me as much as you like, but I'll be of the same opinion still. The only thing is, I just

warn you how it will be when Charley Meredith gets well. He won't forgive the man that did that. He won't forgive you if you're mixed up in it. Don't be mixed up in Charley Meredith's affairs, Janet. He'll get to the bottom of it as soon as he is well.'

'You are a Daniel come to judgment,' said Janet, with a laugh.

How strange a thing a laugh was from her at such a moment! For, though Julia was only a child, what she said was true enough. Meredith, when he got well, was not a man who would blunder about as the policeman did, hearing every story, not knowing how to separate the grain from the chaff. Even, he was a lawyer too, she reflected, with a gleam of terror. He would know how to put things together. Perhaps—this was possible, too—Dolff's face, white and distorted by passion, might have been revealed to him as he fell, as it was to Janet. He might remember as his faculties came back, and he would be able to follow it out.

Going back upon that evening, Janet began

to trace with horror the evidence that might be got together. There were the people at the library who saw them meet and speak to each other, and who might have seen them walk off together, thus identifying her at least. And Meredith himself would know that she must have witnessed the attack upon him. Her anxieties had been quieted by this long want of cessation from all progress. But now that he was getting well! Oh, Julia was right. He would let no one off; he would take full vengeance for his injuries. All the world would know how she was mixed up in it! She would have to appear, to be cross-examined, to tell all she knew, and explain how she was there, and it would be in all the newspapers.

This was what chiefly struck Janet with anguish and terror unspeakable. Everybody would know it! Her friends would look upon her darkly; the vicarage—even that kind house would close its doors. To be traitor to the people who had been so kind to her—to meet another woman's lover, the betrothed of the

daughter of the house! Who would have anything to say to a governess who had done that? And though she might tell the episode of the papers, and thus account for her communications with Meredith, who would believe her? Janet had an hour or two of extreme anguish turning this all over in her mind.

After this, however, she grew a little more composed. Perhaps Meredith would be kept back by the fact that he himself would be affected as much as she by any such revelation. Probably he would not, for his own sake, like it to be known that he had clandestine meetings with the governess. This was of all others the thing that would damn him, not only in St. John's Wood, but wherever there were families to which he might wish to recommend himself. If it all came out, Gussy would no doubt be lost to him (if he had ever cared for Gussy), and not only Gussy but every young lady in his own position, and the mother of every young lady. To have clandestine meetings with the governess—to make love behind backs to the governess!

Janet's heart calmed down in its tumultuous beating when this blessed thought came into her mind. No, he would not betray himself in that way. He might not care for betraying her, but he would not betray himself. He would not allow himself to be held up to the contempt of the world, put into all the papers, perhaps into *Punch*, with a shabby girl clinging to him in the dock.

Janet, who thought of everything in the sharply acute state of her perceptions, remembered too that, while the ladies would think it the blackest treachery to carry on a correspondence with the governess, the newspapers would take the other side, and would be chiefly indignant concerning the wrongs of the poor girl, blighted by her dependent position, whom this monster was endeavouring to beguile and lead astray. Ah, no! Meredith would not lay himself open to these critics. He would keep her out of it, since otherwise he himself would suffer. It calmed her entirely after a time to follow out this point of view.

But, oh! if he could but be spirited away to the other end of the world. Oh, if she could but be quit of him—but forget that she had ever seen him! Janet looked towards the room of the convalescent with a tremor. What would his feelings be? Would he expect to take up the thread where it had dropped? Would he go on telling her with his eyes what a fool Gussy was? how ridiculous was her confidence in herself! how much more he cared for herself, Janet, than for anybody else in the world! This, she thought, would be the most intolerable of all.

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER this fright, however, which was—so much is that poison to one which is another's antidote—so joyful for Gussy, everything relapsed into a still and apprehensive silence which to two in the house seemed full of fate. Better and better was the news that came from the sick-room. Morning after morning Gussy came to the breakfast-table pale but radiant with the bulletin. Better, and better, and better. He not only knew her, but had smiled and said a few words. He had a long and refreshing sleep. He was promoted to a little solid food. The doctor was satisfied,

nay, astonished, at the progress made. But all this took a long time.

There was a long interval of that dark and melancholy weather which gives winter its special horror in London—one day more dull and grey and dismal than the other, depressing in any circumstances, miserable when there is anxiety and suspense within. The new year had begun with the chills and snows and dreariness which so often accompany it. The only relief in the prospect was that Dolff ere many days had passed would have to return to Oxford. If it only might be that he could go without seeing the convalescent? He wished this himself in a half-and-half way sometimes, hoping that he might not be compelled to congratulate Meredith on his recovery, or indeed face him at all, though he was glad that he was getting well: yet sometimes also with a lurking desire to see him, to judge for himself how much he was changed, and if he had any consciousness of 'what had happened.' Dolff did not indicate to himself the tremendous moment of

his passion by any more clear description than this. Perhaps on the whole he wished more than he feared to see Meredith again. Then perhaps he would get out of his eyes the white face upon the pavement, with the faint lamplight upon it, which he had never been able to forget.

The day on which Meredith was first allowed to see the family was a Monday in the middle of January. His couch was wheeled into the drawing-room in the afternoon, Gussy proudly attending and announcing her patient. The daylight was beginning to wane, and to two at least of the party it was more easy to see him than it was for him to see them. Janet had withdrawn into the further part of the room, as was becoming in her position, and Dolff stood uneasily near the door, removing himself, without intention, in the mere excitement and uneasiness of this first meeting, from the light. Meredith was still very pale, and the change in his face, which had been florid red and white, was

striking. His black hair, and the beard which had grown during his illness, made his pallor still more apparent, but it was scarcely the paleness which gives refinement and spirituality to a face worn with suffering. He shook hands with them all, and turned his head, asking, 'Is that Miss Summerhayes?' in a way which compelled Janet to come forward, though so much against her will. He glanced up at her with something of his old look, a sort of smile in his eyes, the telegraph of old, which implied some secret understanding between them, and which once had so fluttered Janet's heart. But it only brought a sickening thrill now of alarm and repugnance. This was the only thing she noted specially in the first interview, a look which showed her that all was not over, that he was not ready yet to relinquish the amusement which she had given him (if that was how to describe it), and that, though he had been at death's door, and was so much altered in appearance, in himself he was not changed. Janet was too

young to know that to be at death's door is no sufficient reason for any change in that strange and perverse thing which is called the heart. She had been a little moved by the sight of him, so colourless and feeble, notwithstanding the change in her own feelings towards him. There is something piteous in the sight of a strong man, young, and in the flower of life, lying helpless upon a couch, ministered to like a child. It touched her heart, and something of the reverence for weakness, which is inherent in humanity, moved her as she came unwillingly, yet obediently to his side. But that side glance, the old confidential look, the smile which might have been called a leer by a more severe spectator, caught Janet in the midst of her momentary awe, and drove her back upon herself. She was not, as the reader knows, so lofty in her views, so generous in her motives, as would become a heroine; but she was startled and shocked by this, and thrown back into her original dismay and fear.

After this he saw the family every day. It became the habit of the house as he slowly recovered (and it was very slow progress) to have the couch rolled into the drawing-room every day, visitors shut out, and the whole efforts of the household, which were not very effectual in that department, devoted to the amusement of the patient. They were not very clever in the way of amusement. Mrs. Harwood talked to him, occasionally lighting upon an old story which had some interest for the invalid, and Gussy talked with no such reservoir of interest to fall back upon, generally dropping after a time into household details, which did not amuse him at all.

Janet, when she was not able to escape, sat demurely silent as far off as possible, her head bent over her work; and Dolff, who seemed to have been seized by a feverish desire to be present during these séances, as if something to his detriment might happen if he were absent, stood about, sometimes standing at one

window, sometimes at another, adjured by his mother and sister not to get into the light, uncomfortable and unnecessary everywhere. Meredith, as he got able to talk a little, took up again his old habit of somewhat contemptuous banter to Dolff. He begged to know if he had not been singing lately—if Miss Summerhayes had been cruel and ceased to play the accompaniments, which she was so clever at. It was evident that his mind was far from any painful associations in respect to Dolff. He declared that it would amuse him to hear one of the old songs.

'Not the new ones,' he said, with that exasperating smile, 'the refined ones, which Miss Summerhayes prefers. Sing me one of those, Dolff, that you brought from the Vic.'

'One of those! They're not fit for a drawing-room, Meredith; you know they're not.'

'We heard them in the drawing-room often enough, didn't we, Gussy! Come, humour me—everybody humours me—sing me—that one,

you know, with the chorus—' and the sick man hummed a bar or two of the most uproarious of those songs which had so startled the decorous family.

He laughed and flashed at Janet—who by some extraordinary trick of nature was aware now, when her back was turned to him, of those looks—a wicked glance. Nothing he could have asked would have been more painful, nothing could have shown more distinctly the mockery and malice of his intention. A man who had nearly died calling upon his almost murderer for a rollicking music-hall song! It was a ghastly request to the two performers, who looked at each other, or, rather, who looked each in the direction of where the other was, with a sort of helpless, mutual appeal.

'Why don't you do it, Dolff, when Charley asks you? What does it matter, if it's not very suitable, so long as it amuses him?'

Dolff muttered something about being out of practice, not having sung anything for weeks.

'No,' said Meredith, 'I know how everybody has denied themselves for me. Never mind; I shall like it just as much.'

'Can't you go and do it, Dolff?' cried Gussy, impatiently, 'when he tells you it will amuse him? It is not for you, to show off how well you can do it. I daresay it will amuse him more if you do it very badly. What does it matter if you are in practice or not?'

Once more Dolff murmured something to the effect that he did not like to be laughed at, with his head down between his shoulders and his chin on his breast.

'Good heavens!' cried Gussy, 'as if it mattered! I should have thought you would be glad to be laughed at, so long as it amused him.'

Dolff turned his head towards Janet in an appeal for help. She was as unwilling as he was, and felt the tragic ridicule of the proposal even more keenly, as well as the malice and cruel amusement in Meredith's eyes. She knew

that he was trying to catch her attention to make her the confidante of his meaning as usual; but Janet kept her eyes fixed upon her work, and would not see. At length, however, she rose up, and, putting away the needlework she was busy with, went to the piano. If it had to be done, it was better to do it without further remark. She had played the first bars of the accompaniment several times over before Dolff reluctantly followed her. It was almost the first time he had voluntarily addressed Janet in all those weeks. He said, sullenly, 'Does he want to drive me mad? Is that his revenge?' over her head.

Janet replied, playing softly,

'He knows nothing yet. He wants to make us both ridiculous, for no reason. Sing; I'll help you all I can.'

Dolff breathed a sigh that fluttered the music upon the piano.

'What pluck you have,' he said, with unwilling admiration.

He had sworn never to trust her again, never to have anything to do with her; but how hard it was when he stood by her thus, and felt the charm of her presence, the readiness and courage and support of her little alert soul.

'Sing,' she said, firmly, holding down the beginning notes to make a *bruyant*, noisy dash of sound and give him courage.

And Dolff sang—like a martyr—giving forth the uproarious, would-be fun of the words as if they were a psalm, stumbling over every second line, losing his place, forgetting what came next. The audience laughed behind them audibly, noisily, as indeed was right enough, and the effect intended by the song. But it was not at the song they laughed, but at the singer and his ludicrous gravity, and the embarrassment which was freely attributed to temper, both by his mother and sister.

Mrs. Harwood was a little offended at last by the laughter of the others, though it was

an absurd performance. A woman soon becomes weary of ridicule when called forth by a child of her own.

'You are very merry,' she said. 'I never heard you laugh so much before, Gussy, at your brother's performance.'

'It is very absurd, mamma.'

'It is very absurd, I know,' said Mrs. Harwood, with a little rising colour, 'and I think it was very self-denying of Dolff to consent to make himself ridiculous for Charley's amusement. You ought to be a little grateful to him instead of making fun of him. Many would not have done it,' said the mother, with a toss upward of her head.

'Mamma! why, he used to sing like that every evening when he came home first.'

'Don't you interfere, Ju. If he did, he has seen since that, as he said, it was not appropriate to a drawing-room: and I think it is very good of him, exceedingly self-denying and kind, to do it—when he is more

or less making a fool of himself—to amuse Charley.'

'Dear Mrs. Harwood,' said Meredith, from his sofa, 'I am getting selfish; you are all so good to me. And I am very much obliged to Dolff. I have not laughed so much since—I hope he doesn't mind. Thanks, Dolff; that's capital. You've sung it like—like the great—what do you call the man?—Barry himself. Let us have another, please.'

But Dolff hurried off as soon as he had uttered the last note, with a sense of humiliation which nothing else could have given him—humiliation, contempt of himself, misery which could not be gauged by any moral estimate. He felt as if all that he had ever done to Meredith was fully paid and atoned for by the exhibition he had thus been compelled to make: and that, if this were to go on, he would fly at the fellow's throat some day and this time make sure work of it.

His look, his laugh—which had never stopped

—which began before the performance began, which was not at his song but at him, roused every grim possibility in Dolff's nature. Was that to be his revenge, the coward? a revenge like a woman's, and yet more cruel. To make him ridiculous—to hold him up to derision. And Gussy, with her smile, backing up that fellow, who had bewitched her! Dolff suddenly bethought himself of all he knew, and of what the effect would be upon Gussy if he reported to her what he had seen and heard. This thought sobered him and calmed down the tumult in his veins. If Gussy knew—if she could be made aware that, as Meredith laughed at himself, Dolff, so had he laughed at her, and that to another woman—a woman the deceiver loved, or pretended to love.

Dolff was but a rough fellow, hot-tempered, wanting in delicacy of feeling—but when he thought of the effect of that enlightenment upon his sister he shrank within himself. No; it would be too much to let her know. It was

true, also, that he could not let her know without betraying his own dreadful secret, and ruining Janet. Why should he mind ruining Janet, who had cared so little either for the honour or truth of her friends! But he began to reflect, with a softening heart, that Janet had certainly stood by him. She had prevented him from giving himself up at first. She had held him up all along. She had not abandoned him even now, but supported him in that hideous song, though she hated it.

Poor Dolff! it was a sad thing for him to have stood so close to her at the piano, to have felt the spell again, though she had not so much as looked at him. No doubt it was her fault at the first, led astray by that fellow and his blandishments—but since, there was not a word to be said against her; she had stood by him, sustained him, kept him from committing himself—even in the horror of this song she had made it bearable by sharing the scorn, by covering him when he failed. Perhaps he had been

hard upon Janet! Oh, if that little fact, that short, all-important scrap of time could be but blown away, made to vanish and to be heard of no more! Oh, if he could but forget, and return to what he was before! Many a man has had the same thought before Dolff: a little scrap of time, a single day, an hour or two—and to think that should influence, darken, perhaps ruin, a whole life; and that no power on earth could do away with it—not that of all the kings and potentates that ever were! At all events, Dolff added to himself fiercely, in conclusion, if only that fellow were out of the house—if only it were not the first idea of everybody to nurse and tend and amuse him. Amuse him! and that he himself, of all others, should be made to exhibit and do tricks like a monkey for Charley Meredith's sake!

'Our songster has forsaken us,' said Meredith; 'but it was very good while it lasted. Dolff has a greal deal of expression, Mrs. Harwood. You may not like that sort of thing, which is

not exactly, as he said, adapted for drawing-rooms, but he does it very well; not quite so well as before Miss Summerhayes converted him, but still well enough. It seems to me, Gussy, as if the conversion was not going on——'

'Indeed, I don't at all know what you refer to,' said Mrs. Harwood; 'nor how my son wanted conversion, Charley—and by Miss Summerhayes.'

'I only meant musically,' said the patient, with a little air of languor. He added, 'I have laughed too much. It is a pleasant way of exhaustion, but it is exhaustion all the same.'

'I was afraid it would be too much for you,' cried the ever-anxious Gussy; 'you over-estimate your strength. Lay back your head, dear Charley, and perhaps you will get a little sleep.'

'I take great liberties with you all,' he said, 'but not so much as to go to sleep in your mother's drawing-room, Gussy.'

'Oh, my dear boy, don't think of that,' said

Mrs. Harwood, at once forgetting his offence before this exhibition of weakness.

'You are spoiling me,' he said, half closing his eyes. 'How am I ever to go out into the world again after all this coddling?'

'Ask Miss Summerhayes to play one of those nocturnes she plays so well: that will do as well as sleep,' said Gussy.

He put out his hand for hers, drawing it beneath the rug that covered him. Gussy's countenance beamed with a mild rapture as she sat close by the couch with her hand in his. It was pleasant to this luxurious person to hold in his—whoever the owner of it might be—a woman's hand.

And Janet sat and played—softly, entering into the dramatic situation notwithstanding the repugnance and revolt in her heart. She could not help entering into her *rôle*—soothing the invalid with soft music, rolling forth gently from the piano, in subdued notes, the spirit of a nocturne which was full of balmy night air and the soft influences of the stars—yet in herself

feeling all that was unlike to this, an impatience which she could scarcely restrain, a fierce dislike and resentment. He had made her share in Dolff's ridiculousness, and now he made her play him to sleep like a slave, like something that belonged to him and had no right to contravene his will. Her heart rebelled, though her fingers obeyed. Oh, if he could but be pushed away—banished somewhere out of her sphere, never to be seen again. His laugh was intolerable; his look more intolerable still. Some time or other, she felt, she would say to him, before them all, 'Don't look at me, don't take me into your confidence. I will not have your confidence.' She knew what he would do if she were driven to such a folly. He would open his eyes wide and appeal to Gussy to know what was the matter. 'Have I said anything to Miss Summerhayes that could convey that idea?' he would ask with the most guileless innocence. And Janet knew that there would be nothing to reply.

All this was while he had not remembered,

while the events of that night had not returned to his mind. But they would return, she felt sure, as he got stronger. He would remember everything—the share she had in it, and Dolff's face in his passion. Oh, dreadful thought! for then what would he do?

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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